

Happy New Year! It's good to see all of you. I first wanted to share something with you – I keep hearing in my heart and head that 2016 is going to be a year of hope. To be honest, I have no idea what that looks like for me and my family or even for you, but I cannot avoid this message as it has been repeated to me over and over again beginning with just before the new year and even to today. One component of that hope we all have is that God is here with us today, and I am very confident He is going to speak a word of His hope in each of you through this portion of Scripture.

Today's Lesson number is 14 – in the first 13 lessons we have gone through very quickly Paul's epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and the Thessalonians – plus a letter to Philemon. We've spent a lot of time emphasizing the doctrine of grace, and we're to find joy and victory in our faith despite our sufferings. We've seen some descriptions of what a faithful church looks like, and we've even covered the rapture. Last week, our reading and Jim's great lecture spoke to the need for us to conduct ourselves in a Christ-like manner. That's 8 letters in 13 weeks!

Beginning today, though, Carol wisely steps on the brakes of this fast-paced year to force us to spend, including this lesson, 6 lessons covering one of my favorite books in the Bible, the Epistle to the Hebrews. Anytime you begin a book or letter of the Bible, it is very important to get some context, or background information, on the letter. John Wycliffe, in his "Golden Rule of Interpretation" said it well when he said, "It shall greatly help to thee to understand Scripture if thou mark not only what is spoken or written, but of whom and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, and to what intent, under what circumstances, considering what goeth before and what followeth."

The Epistle to the Hebrews is unique to most of the New Testament letters in that it does not identify the author. In the early church, this Epistle was called, "Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews" because of the conviction he wrote it. Obviously, as time

passed, they took his name off the title as we see it today, but the majority of scholars still attribute Paul to be the author largely due to the similarities in writing style and the author's impressive grasp of the Old Testament. Other people have mentioned Barnabas, Silas, and Apollos as possible authors, but the truth is that it doesn't matter. The Bible tells us that all Scripture is "God-breathed", so the real author of the Bible is the Holy Spirit dictating, for the lack of better words, God's Word through at least 39 men over 1,500 years. When you consider this extraordinary truth and see the infallibility of Scripture, it is one of the great testimonies of God's authorship.

What is more important that we keep in mind as we go through this letter is who it was intended – the Hebrew Christians. On the day of Pentecost, the church was birthed, and it was launched almost entirely by converted Jews. It was only over time that the Gentiles began to make up the majority of the church. Because of the steep traditions of the Jewish religion, the Hebrew Christians were susceptible and falling back into these traditions such as the need to conform to the Law and temple sacrifices. The entire focus of the Epistle to the Hebrews is to demonstrate to the Hebrew Christians that with Jesus, Christianity was not a subset of Judaism but a progression into something greater and complete. I read somewhere that what the Epistle to the Romans was to the Gentiles, the Epistle to the Hebrews was to the converted Jewish Christians. This is a great part of the Bible, and what we're going to cover today is very exciting. So let's get started.

Chapter 1, verse 1 says, "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways". Right off the bat, the author plainly states that God has spoken to us many times and in various ways. One of the "take-aways" I hope you get from today's lesson is the awesomeness of God's Word. God spoke the heavens and earth into existence – that's how things were created – with the mere speaking of His Word. He simply said "Let there be...." and it became

exactly what He said it to be. Just sit and meditate a little bit on that truth alone. I'll get back to this point at the end of my lecture.

Moving onto verse 2 we read, "but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son". If you wanted to get to know me, I could first send you to the guys in my men's group and my other closest friends, and they would give you a description of me. I would then send you to my two sons, my daughter-in-law, and my grandchildren and you would get an expanded view of me. I would then send you to my wife, Vickie, who knows me, better than anyone on the planet, and you would no doubt get the broadest picture of whom I am. However, even with all this information, you would not get the complete picture of me for *one reason* – you had not yet heard from *me*. Assuming I'm honest, you are never going to get a more complete knowledge of who I am until you hear it from me. I am the superior source of information about myself. Does that make sense?

In this first one and a half verses, the writer is telling us that God has spoken to us – for the purpose of revealing Himself to us – through the prophets. God has also spoken to us through angels in Genesis and through His creation as mentioned in Romans. However, our picture of Who God is was never complete until He spoke to us through His Son – Jesus Christ. What is being said here is Jesus – His Words and His life – are superior to the prophets. The author is compelled to teach the Hebrew Christians that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and He is far superior than anything they previously trusted in. It is *only* in Him that we get, from our finite ability to comprehend the infinite, a complete picture of God. Jesus came to deliver the final message of God, and His revelation of God is superior to anything that the angels, the prophets, and even Moses spoke of – that is what we're going to cover in these three plus chapters.

As we go through the Bible, we find there is significance and specific meaning to numbers. One of the more notable numbers used throughout Scripture is the

number 7. What does this number symbolize in Scripture? (wait for an answer)

Completion. Let's keep this number in mind as we go through the balance of verse 2 and through verse 3 in the descriptions of God's Son. The first thing mentioned of Jesus is that he was appointed heir of all things. What are these "things"? They are the Kingdom of God, where Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Ephesians 1:11 tells us we are also Jesus' inheritance. When you hear of terms like "heir" or "inheritance", you think of money or something of value, right? We became Jesus' inheritance through our confession in what **He did for us on the Cross**. So... if inheritance is tied to the concept of value, what does that tell you about God's thoughts are about how valuable you are that He would sacrifice His Son to make you His heir?

The next thing we learn about Jesus is through Him also He made the universe. Jesus is the Creator. This may cause some confusion to some – who created the universe? The Father? The Son? The reality is all three members of the Godhead were involved in the creation. Jon Courson makes a good attempt to bring some light on this issue, "The Father was the Architect (Genesis 1:1), the Son was the Contractor (John 1:1), and the Holy Spirit was the Carpenter (Genesis 1:2). Creation occurred from the Father, by the Son, through the Holy Spirit."

In verse 3, we next learn, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory". This is speaking to the Shekinah glory of God that dwelt in the tabernacle and the temple. In Warren Wiersbe's commentary, he says, "Christ is to the Father what the rays of the sun are to the sun." Jesus radiates the glory of the Father. He told us He was the "Light of the World". Most scientists agree that the sun is dying – it will eventually give out. Well, the *real* Son and *His* Light lives forever. Amen?

We then learn in verse 3 that Jesus is the exact representation of his being. Do you remember when Philip asked Jesus to "show us the Father"? What was His reply? John 14:9 tells us, "*Don't you know me, Philip, ever after I have been among*

you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father”. He goes on to say in verse 10, “*Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?*” This is a clear statement of the truth that Jesus is God – He is not a representative of God – He is the exact representation of God.

Jesus also is sustaining all things by his powerful word. In deference to my fellow Star Wars geeks, it is not the “Force” that holds us together. Neither is it the “atomic glue” parts of the scientific community proclaim that holds the repelling protons within the nucleus of an atom. What does Colossians 1:17 tell us? “*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*” Jesus, the Word of God, holds everything together. By everything, I mean physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Doesn’t it make sense that if this is true, our level of understanding life will get stronger if we draw closer to and listen to the words of the One who holds all things together?

We then learn that He had provided purification for sins. I like the NKJV of this component of the verse better, “when He has by Himself purged our sins”. “By Himself” means two things: 1) it means ***through*** Himself – with His own body He purged my sins; and 2) He alone purged my sins. This second meaning is important to the Hebrew Christian because it was the High Priest alone that made a sacrifice for the sins of the Nation of Israel on the Day of Atonement. The author is clearly making reference to Jesus being the High Priest.

Finally, we read that Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” Why is Jesus sitting down? Is He tired? No – this visual is used to show that there was no more work necessary to accomplish His mission – to be the sole and complete source of our redemption. There’s nothing more that He needs to do to satisfy the necessary sacrifice for humanity’s sin. What does that mean to you and me – there’s nothing we can or need to do for our salvation because Jesus completed what was required. We simply need to believe.

So let's review this presentation of Jesus:

1. He was appointed heir of all things – the *Inheritor*
2. Through Him He made the universe – the *Creator*
3. The Son is the radiance of God's glory – the *Radiator*
4. He is the exact representation of his being – the *Representer*
5. He is sustaining all things by his powerful word – the *Sustainer*
6. He has by Himself purged our sins – the *Purifier*
7. He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven – the *Ruler*

There's that number 7 – these present the complete picture of Jesus – the reasons why Jesus is superior. Jesus is God. Brothers and sisters, if you don't remember anything else I say today, remember this essential truth – Jesus **IS** God. Any religion that denies this essential truth is a cult – it is a byproduct of Satan who has from our first introduction to him in the Garden of Eden been attempting to diminish the truth and voracity of God's Word. If someone approaches you with a presentation of their faith, you can immediately narrow the conversation with one simple question, “*Do you believe Jesus is God?*” If their answer is anything but a clear “*Yes*”, you politely end the conversation and move on or close the door. If you want to attempt to witness to these people, that is great, but please be rooted in Scripture – these people have been trained by master deceivers – they can be very effective at not only pleading their case but also, if you're not careful, cause you to start questioning what you believe.

Verse 4 tells us, “So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.” To the Jews, angels were a big deal. They took from Deuteronomy 33:2 that Moses was given the Law on Mount Sinai by God through angels. Acts 7:53 and Galatians 3:19 also mention the involvement of angels in the

giving of the Law. As a result, the Jews held angels in the highest regard. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews knew this, so He was compelled by the Holy Spirit to provide an argument that Jesus was superior to the angels.

Beginning in verse 5, we see a series of quotes from the Old Testament that lay out the argument of the superiority of Jesus over the angels. Interestingly, all but one of the quotes is from the Psalms. Psalms is often referred to as a “Hymn” book, but it’s better if we call it a “H-I-M” book. J. Vernon McGee goes to the point that there is more revealed about Jesus in the Psalms than is revealed in the Gospels. I don’t know about that, but He is clearly a dominant topic in the majority of the Psalms.

Verse 5 begins with “For to which of the angels did God ever say,” and then offers two quotes – the first is referencing Psalm 2:7 and the second is pulling from 2 Samuel 7:14 – they are both offering conversations between God the Father and God the Son. “You are my Son; today I have become your Father” and “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”. Other translations of Psalm 2:7 use the word “begotten” in place of “become”. We also see that same word in John 3:16. The Greek translation is “*monogenes*” which is derived from two words – “*monos*”, which means only, alone, and by themselves and “*ginomai*”, which means to cause to be or generate. So **by** God the Father Himself and **from** God the Father Himself came God the Son.

The Holy Trinity is extremely complicated - I would argue beyond our complete understanding. It is a component of Scripture that we must adopt as true in faith. As I said, the important point we understand regarding Jesus is that He is God. C.S. Lewis described the concept of begetting well – dogs beget dogs; cats beget cats; God begets God. The concept of begotten can be a bit confusing, but, as always, God provides us clarity to the identity of God the Son in John’s Gospel in the first two verses, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word

was God. He was with God in the beginning.” Jesus is the Word, so Jesus is God. Are you detecting a theme in this message????

Verse 6 says, “And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.” This is pulling from Psalm 97:7 – noting that the angels worship Jesus. In the images of the throne of heaven, we are given vivid and highly descriptive pictures of angels, and they are constantly worshiping God. The command in verse 6, therefore, must mean that Jesus is superior to the angels, and, therefore, they are to worship Him.

Verse 7 continues, “In speaking of the angels he says, “He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire.” This is referencing Psalm 104:4. Angels are servants of God. There are those who believe in guardian angels – I’m not so sure about this, but I don’t condemn anyone who believes in guardian angels. I take the position that if we’re given the Holy Spirit at our conversion as a down payment for our redemption, wouldn’t you rather trust in the Creator to watch over you than one of His creations? Who tended to Him after His temptation from the Devil? – The angels – because they are His servants. If you are a servant, then you are not greater than the One you are serving.

Verses 8 and 9 tell us, “But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” These are quotes from Psalm 45:6-7 – Psalm 45 is one of the great messianic psalms. God the Father calls the Son “God”. Can there be a greater validation of the Deity of Jesus? We also get a glimpse of the character of Jesus – the character of God, “You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.” Imagine living in a world where the leader loves righteousness and hates wickedness? What would the media have to report on?

The quotes continue in verses 10-12, “He also says, “In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.” The author is quoting from Psalm 102:25-27, and it clearly states that Jesus is the Creator. This section also validates God is eternal, and He remains the same. We need to remember this because we can become like ping pong balls with our faith, our obedience, our love, and everything else that factors into our identity as Christians. We’re all over the place, but God never changes. That means He is ALWAYS faithful, He is ALWAYS merciful, He is ALWAYS seeking to forgive, and He is ALWAYS good. Amen?

The quotes conclude with verse 13 – “To which of the angels did God ever say, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” This is from Psalm 110 – the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. Only to Jesus does God the Father say “sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Jesus is superior to the angels. Oh, and one last nugget about all these quotes about the Father’s position on the Son – guess how many quotes are offered? – 7! J. Vernon McGee wraps up this section well – “Christ is the Son; angels are servants. Christ is King; angels are subjects. Christ is the Creator; angels are creatures.”

One final comment on the topic of angels – Satan is an angel – he was originally called Lucifer, and he was in the highest of order of angels – up there with Michael and Gabriel before he got in his mind he could be like God. He is powerful – we should never underestimate his power; however, and even more so – we should NEVER overestimate his power. A good fight would be Michael or Gabriel tangling with Satan – I have no doubt Michael or Gabriel would ultimately win. But when comparing Satan to God – there is no fight because God is Satan’s creator. God can pick off Satan like we pick off a gnat. Remember that the next time you think you’re

getting harassed by Satan or one of his minions – remember you have God the Spirit dwelling in you and just invoke the name of Jesus and tell him to get lost. He must obey when God’s presence and name are invoked.

Moving on to chapter 2, we find the first of 6 danger signals listed in this Epistle regarding our faith. In verses 1-4, we are warned of the peril of drifting. When I think of drifting, I think of a raft on a river just going wherever the current takes it. At first, you might think that sounds pretty peaceful – you can just kick back, enjoy the scenery and let the current take you down the river. Well, what if I were to tell you that raft is floating down the Niagara River? Where does that take you? Now how does the idea of drifting sound?

The concept of drifting from our faith is typically not caused by a sudden incident that drives us to surrender everything we’ve come to believe and just abandon our ways of life – although that can happen. Typically, drifting from our faith happens in more subtle and gradual phases. It might begin with a changing of the pastor or your home Bible study breaking up. Your kids’ sporting events are now occurring at the time you would normally go to church, and you choose to go to the games. It doesn’t take much to start drifting, but, just like the raft on the Niagara River, if we drift for too long, it may be too late to save ourselves. Therefore, we need to be on our guard – we need to remain rooted in the Scriptures, so I congratulate each of you for your devotion to staying with this Bible study – it will help you from the perils of drifting.

Verse 3 poses an interesting question, “How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?” I don’t think even God has an answer to this one. In Acts 16, Paul and Silas are in prison. There’s a huge earthquake that opens the prison doors and breaks their chains – providing the path for the prisoners to escape. The jailer, sure that the prisoners have escaped, is ready to kill himself because he knows that’s what’s going to happen to him when his boss finds out the prisoners under his watch are gone. Paul tells him to stop and lets him know they’re all still there. The jailer stunned at this

asks Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved.” They replied with the only answer to be saved, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.”

What’s the answer to the question, “What must I do to be lost?” You know what the answer is? Nothing. We are all born lost, so until someone hears the Gospel message, they’re adrift. We all know people who are lost – the reason they are lost is they have chosen to do nothing with the Gospel. Our message to them must be not unlike the picture of the raft on the Niagara River – they’re drifting towards destruction – a decision to save themselves must be made soon. We can invoke what is said in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “Now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” We need to deliver this message in love, but we need to do it. They’re heading for the falls!

The rest of chapter 2 deals with the superiority of Christ to the angels in his humanity. That may seem like a strange statement in light of what verse 7 says, “You made them [mankind] a little lower than the angels.” How can Jesus be superior to the angels if, as a human, he is a little lower than the angels? Is God contradicting Himself? No – we jump ahead to verse 9, and the writer tells us Jesus was made lower than the angels for a little while. God the Son voluntarily submitted to degrading His being to that of His creation – to a man – long enough to execute the mission of satisfying the Father’s required atonement for our sin.

According to verse 9, Jesus was crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. The reason Jesus was made a little lower than the angels for awhile was so He could reveal the character of God. God doesn’t get glory for His condemnation and punishment. God gets glory for His goodness and His love – Jesus is due all the glory for He not only tasted death, but He conquered death. Death could not hold Him because He was glorified for His perfect sacrifice. We have a Savior Who knows our

sufferings – there’s nothing you or I are going through that Jesus can’t relate to and provide healing.

Verse 10 presents another potential challenge to our understanding of Jesus – “it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.” ‘Wait a minute’, you might say, ‘Isn’t God already perfect? Why would Jesus need to be made perfect?’ We must remember Jesus’ primary mission – to be the sacrifice for our sin. The wages of sin is death, therefore, the perfect sacrificial price to pay for someone else’s sin involves suffering and death. One of God’s traits is His perfection, and there is no suffering and death in perfection. Therefore, to be the perfect sacrifice for my sin and your sin, He had to be made perfect through suffering.

Verses 14 & 15 are powerful in terms of the superiority of Jesus in His humanity, “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” What was the first “fruit” of the fall in the Garden of Eden? – Fear. Immediately after their sin, Adam and Eve were suddenly afraid of God. The devil introduced sin and death into this world, and we have been a human race of fear ever since. Fear can literally make us slaves. Jesus, in His humanity, had to die and be resurrected in order to prove that there is something greater than fear – hope in God.

Verse 1 of Chapter 3 calls Jesus our apostle and high priest. J. Vernon McGee explains the significance of this combined assessment of Jesus – “An apostle, like a prophet, came from God to man with a message; he spoke for God to man. However, a high priest was going on the other side of the freeway in the opposite direction. He was going from man to God; he represented man before God.” Jesus is the conduit from God to man and then from man back to God. He is the ultimate two-lane road,

but He is the only road to God. This debunks the foolish saying that all roads lead to God. That simply isn't true.

We then get an argument that Jesus was superior to another core component of Jewish history and tradition – Moses. Verses 2 & 3 talk about Moses being faithful in God's house – something each of us I believe would love to hear said about ourselves. However, Jesus was greater than Moses because it was God's house – Jesus' house - that Moses was a faithful servant. Verse 5 tells us God is the builder of everything. Again, similar to the angels, the servant is never greater than the Master – or in this case – the Master Builder. We then get this reassuring statement in verse 6, “But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.” We are God's house, and Christ is faithful in His watch and care over us – just dwell on that for a little while and try not to say “Hallelujah”!

The rest of chapter 3 brings up the second of the 6 warnings in this Epistle – the peril of unbelief. What is the one sin that is unforgivable? Is it murder? Is it adultery? Is it homosexuality? No – it's none of those. There is only one unpardonable sin – the blaspheme of the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? The primary role of the Holy Spirit is to testify to the truth of Who Jesus is. Therefore, to blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to deny the truth of Who Jesus is. In other words, the unpardonable sin is to not believe.

The writer goes on to describe the history of the Jews and the exodus out of Egypt and God's responsiveness to their lack of belief. The writer then goes on to link unbelief with rest. One of the more vivid examples of the rest that can be found in God was in the story of Jesus and the disciples being on a boat on the Sea of Galilee. You know the story, a storm comes up, and the disciples are freaking out. They go to look for Jesus, and what is He doing? He's asleep! They wake Him up, He gets up,

commands the storm and seas to chill out, and then He looks at them and asks them one simple question, “Where is your faith?”

There is a direct correlation between the level of one’s faith and one’s ability to find rest. The more you can turn over the trials and tests in life to the more-than-capable hands of Jesus, the more rest you’re going to have in life. However, if you feel compelled to step in and try to solve your problems on your own – with the foolish assumption you are in control of anything – you’re going to experience a LOT of unrest. Carol said it well in a previous lecture on this reading, **“Rest is the end of wandering and restlessness and it promises a calmness and tranquility.”** The final verse of chapter 3 sums up the reason the Jews did not enter the promised land – it was because of their unbelief.

Heading into chapter 4, I’m going to highlight just a couple of verses. Verse 10 says, “For anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.” Remember again the audience the letter is addressed to – the Hebrew Christians. Their Jewish history is deeply rooted in gaining favor with God through obedience, or works. What the writer is saying in this verse that if we truly believe that what God did through Jesus on the Cross was the total and complete action to secure one’s salvation, we can find rest in Him that we can’t and don’t need to do anything on our own to obtain salvation. God, out of His grace did everything that was necessary. When you truly come to believe this, life gets much more enjoyable – and restful.

Verse 12 is our memory verse, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” It is also the segue to my closing. I spoke earlier about the awesomeness of God’s Word. There is nothing more powerful in life because it is a giver of life. Words can either give life or they can speak death. Gossip – negativity – criticism – all of these spoken out -

tear down, tear apart, and kill. Have you ever been convicted immediately after saying something that you know wasn't helpful but hurtful? You just wish you could pull those words back into your mouth? It's a terrible feeling isn't it?

When we read God's Word, it might cut us in areas where we need correction, but the cutting is meant for good – to cut something out like a surgeon, so healing can begin. The power of God's Word cannot be overestimated. Don't just read God's Word, speak it and live it. There's a rapidly decaying world out there that is desperate for even a sliver of truth and hope. If you can't think of anything to say to someone who is lost, speak a truth of Scripture that has meant something to you – and do it in love. God spoke the world into existence with His voice. Using His Word, we can speak hope into existence with people who don't have any. But first, we need to believe. Do you?