

Sent: Wednesday, September 21, 2016 8:52 PM
Subject: Last Nite's Kick-Off of our MOB Study of Hebrews

Last nite we kicked off our study of the book of Hebrews! So, the question: why are we gathering together as men of Immanuel to study the Bible? Because "All Scripture is inspired by God (or breathed out by God!) and is profitable for teaching (what to believe!), for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness--so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work!" (II Tim. 3:16-17--our first memory verse for this MOB study)

We were privileged to have Pastor Jesse Johnson give us an overview of the book of Hebrews. And we all, I believe, got a sense that Jesse really enjoyed doing this! In fact, he even said that Hebrews is one of his favorite books of the Bible to teach! He noted how Hebrews points to Jesus and makes all the pieces of the Old and New Testaments fit together! It actually fulfills the expectations of the Old Testament. The "incompleteness" of the Old Testament is now gone, he said! Obsolete!

Hebrews was written to Jewish believers (Hebrews) who are just beginning to experience persecution for their faith, probably during the 60's A.D. with Emperor Nero on the throne! And some of them were contemplating a return to Judaism, which they could still safely practice! (All this is part of the gospel according to Jesse!) And so the author's main theme, and the "big idea," is that these "believers" (including those who "profess" but may not "possess" salvation) need to "stand fast in their faith"! And persevere! And "run the race"! And "fix their eyes on Jesus"!

Pastor Jesse made a strong case that the author is indeed the Apostle Paul, contrary to the doubts expressed by Donald Hagner and others. (Hagner is the author of the supplementary text we are using in our study, which all in all is quite good, even according to Jesse!) It's interesting that, among other things, Jesse used the same verse (Heb. 2:3) to help make his case for Paul's authorship that Hagner uses as a proof text to deny it! Hagner maintains that the "salvation...confirmed to us by those who heard it" evidences that the author did not receive his revelation directly, which is contrary to the claims of Paul, in Galatians 1:11-12 and elsewhere! Jesse, on the other hand, sees Heb. 2:3 as a reference to his conversion experience (Acts 9) and recognition as an apostle, and thus supporting his belief that Paul is, in fact, the author! (I think this was the gist of the argument!)

The author (possibly the Apostle Paul) could not believe or accept the idea that Jewish believers would even think of going back to Judaism--back to the sacrificial system that could never permanently cover, or take away sin! After seeing how Jesus died on the cross, offering Himself up "once for all" to take away the "sins of the people"! It was, as Jesse depicted, like their forefathers wandering in the wilderness for almost 40 years, who after having seen all the miracles and experiencing the great deliverance from bondage in Egypt, instead remembered the "leeks and garlic," and wanted to go back! And so the author makes the case for Jesus! Jesus was God's supreme revelation to the world! He was, in fact, God's Son--the "heir of all things, through whom He made the world...the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, (Who) upholds all things by the word of His power...(Who) when He made purification of sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high!"

And as if this wasn't enough, the author then declares that Jesus was and is greater and better than all the people and things the Jews held in their highest esteem! Angels! Moses! Abraham! Melchizedek, who was greater than all the high priests to follow and to whom Abraham gave tithes! The promise of rest! A better covenant! A better sacrifice! A greater High Priest! So why would anyone want to go back and "neglect so great a salvation"? How could they "escape"?

Well, that's sort of a sampling of what we heard from Jesse!

Hagner sums up Hebrews this way: "Hebrews intends to set forth the incomparable superiority, and hence finality, of God's work in Jesus Christ. Christianity is thus absolute in character and universal in scope. It is nothing less than the fruition of God's intended purposes from the beginning and is indeed the fulfillment of what God spoke "through the prophets at many times and in various ways." This means that turning away from this teaching to any other is unthinkable. The answer to any such tendency is an understanding of the true significance of Jesus Christ and what He has accomplished, which is concisely what our author seeks to convey!"

I have a note from long ago (not sure of the source) in my old KJ's that says this: "The institution of Judaism and the old covenant was ineffective and inadequate because it was unable to deal permanently with sin! But God's new method of dealing with mankind--the new covenant written in Christ's own blood which He shed on the cross--makes full provision for the forgiveness of sin! Christ's death on the cross accomplishes what the old covenant could never do!"

Wiersbe, in typical fashion, writes: "Be confident! God is shaking things up so that you may learn to live by faith and not by sight!" Does this and other things we heard so far from Hebrews strike some cords in your life, as it does in mine?

All the above, I hope, provides a useful backdrop for what we'll be studying in more detail in the weeks and months to follow! Special thanks to Jesse, who set the tone--and created the excitement--for what's ahead! Next week we'll be looking at Hebrews 1:1-14, which Hagner titles: "The Most Important Thing God Ever Said!" And our memory verse(s) is Heb. 1:1-2. I can hardly wait!

Have a great week, men!

Lowell