

Key Focal Points for Preaching on Hebrews Today

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Abstract

This session focuses on four key pastoral charges that the author of Hebrews addresses to contemporary congregations. It emphasizes maintaining the top priority of God's spoken word over temporary earthly distractions and highlights the spiritual resources, security, and priestly dignity believers possess in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the source underscores the grace-response relationship, calling for active gratitude and mutual support within a communal, accountability-driven church family. These focal points are designed to equip preachers in guiding their congregations to run and complete the spiritual race with perseverance.

Outline

I. Introduction

- A. Purpose: Facets of the proclamation of Hebrews to current and past generations
- B. Source references: "Perseverance and Gratitude" and "Hebrews, Grace, and Gratitude" commentaries
- C. Core focus: Key pastoral charges ("keywords") to speak to modern congregations

II. Word 1: Do Not Lose Sight of Life's Top Priority

- A. Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God
 - 1. God spoke with brilliant clarity and fullness through Jesus
 - 2. Jesus promises deliverance from death and a glorious eternity
- B. The precedence of God's word in believers' lives
 - 1. Essential matters of life, death, eternal judgment, and deliverance
 - 2. Need to reinforce basic contours of the Christian worldview
- C. The contrast between temporary and eternal realms
 - 1. Earthly reality is temporary, destined to be shaken and removed
 - 2. Heavenly realm is a superior, eternal, and coming homeland
- D. Discipleship distractions in the temporary realm
 - 1. Slipping priorities and worldly distractions (materialism, high-status goods, career promotions)
 - 2. Severe trials: insults, abuse, economic deprivation, and persecution

- 3. Basic instability of global markets, politics, and human experience
- E. Living by faith in Hebrews
 - 1. Faith as daily decision-making guided by invisible and future realities
 - 2. Acting on the reliability of God's promises and striving to please Him

III. Word 2: Don't Lose Sight of What You Have in Christ

- A. The riches of the believer's inheritance
 - 1. A great high priest who crossed through the heavens
 - 2. An anchor for the soul and an altar
- B. Jesus as an ultimately reliable foundation for security and stability
 - 1. Constancy of Jesus Christ (yesterday, today, and forever) contrasted with earthly changeability
 - 2. Dio Chrysostom on the unreliability and lack of constancy in human relations
 - 3. Finding stability in a volatile world marked by economic fluctuation, terrorism, and natural disasters
- C. Access to divine help and resources
 - 1. Sustaining power during wilderness experiences and worldly hostility
 - 2. Inner resources (spiritual strength, assurance, comfort) and external resources (material aid, mutual encouragement)
 - 3. Prayer as a vital spiritual discipline and right of access to God
 - 4. Jesus' role as a sympathetic high priest who intercedes and stands ready to help
- D. Dignity and honor of a holy priestly calling
 - 1. Universal access to God's presence, overcoming old covenant limitations
 - 2. Erasing lines that separate ministry professionals from lay persons
 - 3. Dedicating the believer's whole life as holy for service, worship, and acts of love

IV. Word 3: Don't Lose Sight of What Is Due God

- A. Overcoming natural selfishness and sin
 - 1. Self-gratification and double-mindedness hamper spiritual progress
 - 2. Remedied by remembering what believers already have and what is due God
- B. The call to active gratitude (grace and response)
 - 1. Grace-response relationship as the hinge between theology and ethics
 - 2. Ethical choices as an expression of appreciation for God's favor
 - 3. Valuing the relationship enough to pay whatever price loyalty demands
- C. Gratitude directed toward love and service for neighbors
 - 1. God's grace sowed to bear vegetation for others (analogous to rain on land)
 - 2. Investing in one another through work and love shown to the saints
- D. Theological implications of grace and response
 - 1. Correcting misconceptions of "saved by faith versus works" and "cheap grace"
 - 2. True grace requires a corresponding grateful response in heart, speech, and action
 - 3. Seamless union of justification, sanctification, belief, and discipleship
 - 4. Heart made secure or firm by grace

V. Word 4: Don't Lose Sight of One Another

- A. The church as a community of support, encouragement, and accountability
 - 1. Believers as partners with Christ and each other in a heavenly calling
 - 2. Responsibility to watch out for distrust and falling short in the community
 - 3. Combatting the cultural lie that religion is a private matter
- B. Structured communal disciplines
 - 1. Historical precedent of John Wesley's class meetings
 - 2. Modern small groups, accountability groups, and hospitality ministries
 - 3. Encouraging reflection and sharing of testimonies of God's favor
- C. Mutual intervention and restoration
 - 1. Recognizing the beguiling nature of sin
 - 2. Need for sibling love to confront sin and recover spiritual vision
- D. Standing with persecuted and marginalized believers
 - 1. Supporting members targeted as deviants by society's court of opinion
 - 2. Raising awareness and supporting persecuted Christians globally
 - 3. Practical steps: learning about global plight, prayer, and mission support (e.g., individual missionary contact in Nigeria)
 - 4. Overcoming risk through the backing of a committed body of believers
- E. Running the race together
 - 1. Cooperating rather than competing with fellow believers
 - 2. Mutual support (lifting up the stumbling, carrying the injured) to ensure all finish well