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Session 27 - Hebrews

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All right, let's jump into this deep dive on the book of Hebrews. I have to say, this lecture transcript you sent over is pretty fascinating. I mean, who knew biblical scholars had to worry about exams too? Yeah, it is a nice reminder that they're just regular people like us trying to grapple with these ancient texts.

It definitely humanizes things a bit. But deadlines aside, today we're tackling a pretty big question. Who actually wrote the book of Hebrews? Well, it's a tricky one for sure.

You see, unlike some of Paul's letters where he very clearly identifies himself, with Hebrews, it's like we're missing a signature. Ah, so it's like a literary mystery then. Exactly.

And the stakes are pretty high too, considering we're talking about scripture here. But there are clues, and over the centuries, scholars have come up with a bunch of different theories. Right.

The lecture mentioned quite a few names like Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, even Mary the mother of Jesus. But the professor seemed to favor one theory in particular, am I right? Yeah, he leans towards the idea that the author was most likely a second-generation Christian. Someone who learned about Jesus through those who knew him firsthand, but never actually met Jesus themselves.

Okay, I can see how that would fit. Especially given how much the author emphasizes Jesus's superiority to figures like Moses and the whole Levitical priesthood. That seems like a key point, wouldn't you say? It absolutely is.

Yeah. And it makes even more sense when you consider the audience the author was writing to. Which is another piece of the puzzle, right? Who are these Jewish Christians and what were they dealing with at that time? Well, imagine the situation.

These folks are Jewish converts to Christianity, which means they're caught between two worlds. Oh, I bet that created some tension. You can say that again.

They could be facing rejection from their families and friends, not to mention the whole shift from a religion rooted in physical rituals and traditions to one focused on an unseen God. That's a huge leap of faith, no doubt. So was this letter kind of like a hang-in-there message from the author? A little pep talk? It's even more urgent than that.

The professor suggests these Jewish Christians were really struggling to the point where they were actually considering going back to Judaism. Wow. The author must have been seriously concerned for them.

He's not just encouraging them. He's practically pleading with them to stick with their faith in Christ. Exactly.

And that comes through loud and clear in the way he structures his letter. It's this constant back and forth between explaining how incredible Jesus is and urging his readers to stay strong, to not give up on what they've found. It's like he's making his case, presenting all this evidence for why Jesus is the ultimate answer, and he keeps going back to the Old Testament to prove his point.

Oh, absolutely. He brings up angels, Moses, the sacrificial system, you name it. He's basically saying, look, you revere these things, but Jesus is greater than all of them.

I remember the professor highlighting this quote from Psalm 110, where David calls Messiah a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. Now that name, Melchizedek, I feel like I should know who that is, but I'm drawing a blank. Yeah, he's one of those figures who appears briefly in the Old Testament and then sort of vanishes, leaving us with more questions than answers.

He's this mysterious priest-king who Abraham encounters in Genesis. But why is he so important to the author of Hebrews? It sounds like he's using Melchizedek to solve a pretty significant dilemma. I mean, the Messiah was supposed to be a descendant of David, right? But priests were supposed to come from the line of Levi.

How could Jesus be both? That's exactly the problem. And it's one the author brilliantly tackles by bringing up Melchizedek. You see, because we know so little about Melchizedek's background or lineage, he represents a different kind of priesthood, one not tied to the Levitical line.

So by connecting Jesus to Melchizedek, the author breaks down those genealogical barriers and shows how Jesus can be both king and a high priest. That's incredibly clever, right? It's almost like he's saying, forget what you thought you knew. Here's a completely different way to understand the Messiah.

But wait, if he's basing all of this on the Old Testament, isn't he essentially saying the old ways are wrong or outdated? Not necessarily. The author isn't rejecting the Old Covenant outright. He's actually arguing that it was never meant to be the complete picture.

So it's more like an upgrade than a replacement, then. Exactly. He's saying the Old Covenant couldn't fully address the problem of sin.

It couldn't truly bridge the gap between humanity and God. But with Jesus and the New Covenant, that's exactly what happens. Ah, that makes a lot more sense.

So it's not about throwing out the old ways. It's about showing how Jesus fulfills them in a radical new way. And the author doesn't just assert this.

He backs it up by pointing to specific passages in the Old Testament, like in Jeremiah and Psalms, that hint at a new covenant to come. He's using their own scriptures to show them that Jesus isn't replacing their faith, but actually completing it. Brilliant.

One thing that really stood out to me in the lecture was how often the author mentions the tabernacle, not the temple in Jerusalem. Why do you think that is? That's a really insightful

observation. The professor actually suggested that the author's focus on the tabernacle might be a subtle way of connecting with his audience's current struggles.

Oh, I'm intrigued. How so? Well, think about it. The tabernacle was the portable sanctuary the Israelites used during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

Right, after they escaped slavery in Egypt. Exactly. And that time in the wilderness was full of hardship and uncertainty.

And temptation. Let's not forget how often they grumbled and doubted and even wanted to go back to Egypt. That's precisely.

And the author seems to be drawing a parallel between their experience and the situation these Jewish Christians are facing. They're also in a kind of wilderness, tempted to turn back to the familiar, even if it means abandoning their newfound faith. So he's not just explaining theology; he's telling a story, creating this powerful connection between their lives and this key moment in Israel's history.

Exactly. And it goes even deeper than that. Remember, the tabernacle was the place where God's presence dwelt among the Israelites in the wilderness.

So the author might be saying, look, even in your wilderness, God is with you. It's not just about enduring hardship. It's about encountering God in the midst of it.

Now you're getting it. It really is a powerful way to connect with his audience, reminding them that they're not the first to face these kinds of doubts and struggles. It's like he's saying, look, even the Israelites, God's chosen people, went through this.

They messed up, they complained, but God never abandoned them. Right. And that same God is with you now, even as you grapple with these big questions and difficult choices.

It's a really encouraging thought. But I also noticed that the professor pointed out how the author of Hebrews doesn't shy away from using some pretty strong language at times. Like he's not just offering comfort, but also issuing some serious warnings.

Oh, yeah. There's definitely a sense of urgency there. It's like he's saying, don't take this lightly.

What you do with your faith has eternal consequences. Yeah. He definitely doesn't sugarcoat things.

Right. But speaking of consequences, what about this idea of perfection that the author keeps talking about? What did the professor say about that? I mean, none of us are perfect, right? Well, that's where it gets interesting. When the author talks about the Old Covenant not being able to bring about perfection, he's not saying it was bad or useless.

Remember, he sees it as part of God's plan, but an incomplete one. Okay. So what's he getting at then? What does he mean by perfection? He's talking about the fullness of what God intended for us, a state of complete wholeness and reconciliation.

It's about having a relationship with God that's not hindered by sin or fear, a relationship where we can experience His grace and love in a deep and transformative way. So it's not about being flawless or never making mistakes. It's about being made whole through Christ.

Exactly. It's about experiencing the kind of forgiveness and freedom that only comes through Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. That makes a lot of sense.

But then what about this idea of entering God's presence? What does that even mean? It sounds a bit mystical. Well, the professor explained that the author ties this idea of entering God's presence back to the Old Testament, specifically to the role of the high priest. Oh, right.

Like on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies, that innermost part of the tabernacle. It was this incredibly sacred space where God's presence was believed to dwell in a unique and powerful way. But only the high priest could go in, and even then, only once a year.

So it was this really restricted access, this sense of separation between God and His people. But the author of Hebrews is saying that through Jesus, all of that changes. That's exactly it.

He argues that because of Jesus's sacrifice, we no longer need a human high priest to act as a mediator for us. Through Christ, we have direct access to God. It's like that veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the tabernacle has been torn in two.

That's such a powerful image of what Jesus did for us. But if that's the case, if we now have this direct access to God, then why even bring up the tabernacle at all? Don't we still need a physical place to connect with Him? That's where the author pushes things even further. He argues that the physical tabernacle, and even the temple in Jerusalem, were ultimately just foreshadowing.

They were pointing towards something greater, something more permanent. Which is? Christ Himself. He becomes the true temple, the meeting point between heaven and earth.

Wait, so Jesus is the temple? I've never thought about it like that before. It's a radical idea, isn't it? But it really gets to the heart of the author's message. You see, the professor pointed out that the tabernacle and the temple, while meant to be places where God dwelled, also highlighted the separation between humanity and God.

Only certain people could enter certain spaces, and even then, only at certain times. So even the structures that were supposed to represent God's presence also served as a reminder of our distance from Him. But with Jesus, that distance is eliminated.

Exactly. The author of Hebrews makes this bold claim that Christ Himself is now the dwelling place of God, accessible to anyone who comes to Him in faith. It's so much more personal and intimate than having to go to a specific building or perform a bunch of rituals.

It's about having a relationship with God that's not bound by time or space. Right. And that's the beauty of the author's message.

It's a vision of a life transformed by that relationship with Christ. But it's not all just theory and lofty ideas. The lecture also dives into the practical side of things.

How do we actually live out this new life in Christ? Right. So we've talked about the why; now it's time for the how. What does the author say about putting our faith into practice? So how do we do that? How do we actually put this new faith into practice? Does the author of Hebrews give us any pointers? Oh, yeah.

He definitely does. He spends a lot of time in his letter on what scholars call exhortation. It basically means encouragement and instruction, giving practical advice for living out our faith.

Makes sense. These Jewish Christians were facing some serious pressure to abandon their faith. He's got to give them something to hold on to.

Right. So he emphasizes things like love, hospitality, faithfulness, and endurance- those core values that help us navigate the challenges of following Christ. It's like a spiritual toolkit, equipping them for the journey ahead.

I remember the professor talked about that image of running a race that the author uses. Yes. He tells his readers to run with perseverance the race that is set before us, with our eyes fixed on Jesus, whom he calls the author and perfecter of our faith.

Such a vivid picture of the Christian life. It really conveys that sense of pressing onward, of not giving up even when things get tough. But running a race can be so lonely.

How does the author address that sense of isolation that these Jewish Christians might be feeling? He reminds them that they're not alone. He talks about this great cloud of witnesses, all those who have gone before them in faith. Like those heroes of faith we read about in the Old Testament.

Exactly. Abraham, Moses, David, all those who faced their own trials and doubts but remained faithful to God. He's saying, look, you're part of this long lineage, this incredible story that stretches all the way back to the beginning.

Draw strength from their example. Let their stories inspire you to keep going. That's powerful.

It's like this huge cheering section surrounding us, urging us on. But you know, every runner needs a coach, someone to train them, to push them, to help them reach their full potential. Absolutely.

And that's where our relationship with Jesus comes in. He's not just telling us to run the race. He's offering to be our coach, our mentor, our constant companion.

So he's not just cheering from the sidelines. He's in the race with us. That's a great way to put it.

It's about recognizing our own weaknesses, our limitations, and leaning on Christ's strength, His grace, to help us become the people God created us to be. You know, remember the

professor ended his lecture by circling back to that comparison with the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. Oh yeah.

He left his students with that thought-provoking question. Why do you think the author of Hebrews makes that connection? What does it tell us about his message? It really is a question worth pondering, isn't it? What are those wilderness moments in our own lives? What are those trials and temptations that make us want to turn back, to give up? And how does God meet us in those moments, just as He met the Israelites in their wilderness? It's a reminder that the Christian life isn't always easy. There will be bumps along the way, times when we stumble and doubt.

But even then, even in those difficult seasons, God is with us. He hasn't abandoned us. And that's what the book of Hebrews is all about.

It's a message of hope and encouragement for those who are weary, for those who are tempted to give up. It reminds us that we're not alone in our struggles, and that there's a greater purpose, a greater destination that we're running towards. The incredible gift of eternal life with God is made possible through Christ's sacrifice.

You know, it's amazing to think that this letter, written centuries ago to a specific group of people facing very real challenges, still speaks to us today. Absolutely. It reminds us that the human experience, the struggles and joys of faith, are timeless.

And it offers a timeless message of hope that transcends cultures and generations. Well, on that note, I think it's time to wrap up this deep dive into the book of Hebrews. Yeah, but this is really just the beginning, right? There's so much more to explore, so much depth and richness to uncover.

So keep digging, keep asking questions, and most importantly, keep listening for how God might be speaking to you through this incredible letter. Thanks for joining us.