

Reading Schedule for February 26 – March 4, 2018

Were you surprised by the inspiration you received through the reading last week? I think it has been a long time since we've read through the Book of Hebrews. It is especially uplifting to think about the supremacy of Jesus Christ. It seems like the Hebrew believers were minimizing the significance of Christ and the far-reaching effect of his sacrificial death. Hebrews is a great book to read as we anticipate the suffering, death and resurrection leading up to Easter.

February 26 - Hebrews 4:12-16: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." (v.15) I highlighted verse 12 in the introduction last week as we launched into the Book of Hebrews. There is no question that the inspired Word of God is living and active. Verse 14 seems to pick up a new theme. But it is good to know that as we are convicted by God's Word, we have a Savior who wants to walk alongside and help us fulfill the message of truth we are reading. Isn't it great to know that Jesus can identify with you and me? He went through life and faced many of the challenges and temptations that we face. With Christ's help, a temptation can actually make us stronger. When we persevere through it, and pass the test, we become stronger. But we don't have to do it alone. In our temptations, we can be comforted by the fact that nothing that entices us is foreign to our Lord. He too felt the tug of sin, and yet never gave in to such temptations. We can be strong in him. How do you respond to this marvelous reading for today?

February 27 - Hebrews 5:1-10: "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered . . ." (v.8) This is one of the most interesting concepts to me – that Jesus learned obedience. It seemed that Jesus gained understanding through experience by living as a human being. He knew the challenges of obedience in the midst of suffering. But at every turn he remained faithful to the Father and obedient to his call as the Messiah. We can be strengthened by the fact that Jesus learned, and we can too. Because Jesus obeyed perfectly, even under great trial, he can help us obey, no matter how difficult obedience seems to be. Does that make sense? Are you ready to obey the Lord today?

February 28 - Hebrews 5:11-14: "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!" (v.12) Did you know that this is a theme verse for me as we began 2018? I have made the observation that New Harvest is the most spiritually mature church I have ever served as a pastor. At the same time, I have made the observation that mature people teach others. If we are stuck in the basics, and continue to live in fear or doubt, we are just where the devil wants us. Maturity does not automatically equal fruitfulness. To be fruitful is to pass on the truth that we learn to others. Jesus did that with his disciples, and they continued to do the same. This has been the way that God's kingdom has expanded as one person passes onto another the truths of God, as well as being an example to others of how to live well in Christ. Who are you passing on the truth of God that he has taught you?

March 1 - Hebrews 6:1-12 "But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned." (v.8) These words sound very much like the four seeds that fall on different types of soil. It also reminds

me of Jesus' analogy of the vine and the branches in John 15. These words have been debated by Christian scholars for centuries. I think the writer of Hebrews is addressing a wavering people who were not sure that Christ was really the Son of God. They weren't sure that the law was obsolete. There were wavering back and forth, soon to discard the genuine message of Jesus Christ and try to be "good enough" to earn God's favor. This approach would end up worthless because they would never fulfill the law. They had investigated Christianity, but decided to turn back to Judaism, cutting them off from God's forgiveness. You may have a different understanding of this text, but I share those words with you prayerfully. Many people dabble with Christianity, rather than wholeheartedly receiving Christ and the marvel of his amazing grace to forgive all our sins. The writer of Hebrews is warning them of a fateful separation from God forever. How do you respond to these sobering words?

March 2 - Hebrews 6:13-20: "And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised." (v.15) This paragraph begins with Abraham, who is an example of one patiently waiting on God for his promises. Abraham waited 25 years for the birth of Isaac. His patience and faithful waiting is to be imitated. So too with the promise that Jesus offers. God's promises through Christ are guaranteed by God's own perfectly trustworthy character. Therefore the promise of salvation through Jesus, the real high priest, is a secure and trustworthy hope. This is the message of this paragraph and one to give us greater assurance in uncertain times. What stands out to you in this paragraph?

March 3 - Hebrews 7:1-10: "Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!" (v.4) The author of Hebrews is setting up a contrast between Jesus and Melchizedek. There are a few similarities that he highlights. We know very little about Melchizedek, how his life began, or how it ended. In a sense, he continues as a priest forever. In a way, you can think of Melchizedek as an ordinary man who was a "type" or a foreshadowing of Christ (Romans 5:14). In this way, Melchizedek is comparable to the eternal high priesthood of the righteous Son of God, who is truly the king of righteousness and who brings true peace. This is a set up for our reading tomorrow. Why do you think the author connects Jesus with Melchizedek? How does this elevate Christ?

March 4 - Hebrews 7:11-28: "Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant." (v.22) The word "better covenant" points to the new covenant. You can read about the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Jesus fulfills the new covenant. Jesus guarantees that the new covenant is superior to the mosaic covenant. I love the prophecy about the new covenant and how we exemplify the new covenant every time we take Communion. Our sins have been forgiven by the sacrifice of the lamb of God. We have access to the most high God through Jesus. He now lives in us. These are the tenets of the new covenant. These supersede any promises associate with the mosaic covenant based on the law. There are other marvelous things said about Jesus in this section. What stands out to you? How do you appreciate the affirmation that Jesus intercedes for you at the right hand of the Father right now?

Prayers - Pray for the elders as they to on their annual retreat, seeking God for wisdom and direction.