

Jesus is best! (The Book of Hebrews)

Week 8: Jesus is the mediator of the best covenant

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing and sharing together.

Can we really believe in what we can't see?

The writer of Hebrews says, "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith". (12.1-2)

The race marked out for us is our life. But how can we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus when he is at the right hand of the Father in heaven?

WORSHIP

Thank and praise the Lord Jesus Christ for the ways in which he has blessed you as individuals and as a group since the last time you met.

WORD

Read Hebrews 12.18-29

1. What are your initial thoughts about this passage?

2. The race marked out for us is our life. But how can we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus when he is at the right hand of the Father in heaven?

Growth Group Notes

Summer 2024



In 1917 two girls, Elsie and Francis, were playing by small river near their home. Elsie had taken her father's camera with her and the photographs the girls' took brought them international fame for they had taken first ever photographs of fairies. In 1920 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle unwittingly gave credence to one of the greatest hoaxes of the 20th Century when he published the Cottingley fairies photographs. He wasn't alone, many others believed that these photographs were evidence that fairies existed! In 1983 Elsie and Francis admitted that they were fakes. They'd copied images from a child's book, stuck them on cardboard cutouts and propped them up with hat pins. Francis said, "I cannot to this day understand why they were taken in."

3. Why do you think they were 'taken in'?

Trusting in what you can't see can be a difficult message to share.

In verses 18 to 24 the writer presents a contrast between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the tangible and intangible.

I want to resurrect two old fashioned words, the words sensible and insensible. The original meaning of sensible was not about being boring and level-headed. If something was 'sensible' it could be sensed through one of the senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste or touch. If something was insensible it couldn't.

In our culture if something is insensible then it's not real. I often put my glasses down and then can't find them. But just because I can't find them it doesn't mean that they no longer exist. We have two cats and they excel in sensible. If they're upstairs having a nap, and I start to open the cat biscuit jar in the kitchen, they can be downstairs before I can get the lid off. We can't determine reality based only on what we sense, we must open our eyes to the invisible, to the insensible.

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The Matrix, a story of the technological fall of humanity, in which the creation of artificial intelligence led the way to a race of powerful and self-aware machines that imprisoned humans in The Matrix virtual reality system to be farmed as a power source. The main character, Neo (Keanu Reeves), starts with a vague awareness that the world is not quite as it should be but everything about him looked real and normal. Morpheus serves as a leader in the real world, steadfast and courageous in the face of great danger and difficulty. Neo is referred to as the One, that is, the chosen one, sent to deliver salvation for those caught up in the Matrix.

It's only after taking the red pill and not the blue pill that he wakes up to what is truly real. Welcome to the real world, he gets to see what is more real than the reality he was so used to. His lived reality had been simulated by machines using his brain, while all the time his body was being used as a kind of battery from which the machines could gain energy.

Yes, it's a pretty weird film but taking the red pill was a bit like Neo's conversion, a conversion which opened his previously blind eyes to reality and even though everybody else in the Matrix at the time thought the idea of humans being used as batteries ridiculous, that was in fact the reality.

4. Hebrews asserts something similar. What do you think that might be?

As we know Hebrews was written mainly for Jewish believers in Jesus who were proud of what God had done for them through their ancestors. One of the most significant moments was the gathering of the people on Mount Sinai. That was where Moses had first encountered God at the burning Bush, and the place he led the people to after freeing them from slavery in Egypt. It was an overwhelming sensory experience: fires, darkness, storms, trumpet blasts, and most terrifyingly the voice of God that caused Moses to tremble with fear.

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The mountain was filled with God's holy presence and that holy presence was a threat, because without holiness no one can see the Lord because he is holiness personified. Even animals near the mountain (v20) were at risk, even the earth was shaken at the sound of his voice. (v26).

The people were terrified, and they begged that no further word be spoken (v19). They wanted an intermediary, even though they already had one in Moses, and he too was terrified.

It was God encountering them face to face and creating a nation out them. The Jewish religion revolved around the physical reminders of the presence of God and the holiness of God.

5. Why might this have caused the Jewish Christians to turn away from Christ's new covenant through the cross and resurrection back to the old covenant including the temple sacrifices?

6. And the Lord provides the sacrifices to deal with our sin. Why is that?

7. The Jews who trusted in Jesus were told that a manmade temple is no longer required because if you believe in Jesus. "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor 6:19). But what if the sacrifices are taken away and you can have something infinitely better, something that means we don't need to return to the old ways of sacrificing animals?

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8. What would the writer of Hebrews say to those Jewish Christians back then and to us today?

The reference to Mount Zion (v22) doesn't refer to the actual mountain in Israel, rather it refers to the heavenly Jerusalem. The writer is saying that when we meet something amazing takes place.

9. In light of this, what is the implication for us when we gather together to worship as a church (vv22-27)?