

Introduction to Hebrews

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, February 4, 2024
PASSAGES	Hebrews 1; Hebrews 2; Psalm 2; Psalm 45; Psalm 102; Psalm 110
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:37:42 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Hebrews is written to people who are tempted to walk away, and its argument for staying is not willpower — it is a person. The message is superior because the messenger is superior: the Son who made the world, upholds it by his word, and will one day roll it up like a coat. Everything that is currently wearing you down is here today and gone tomorrow. His throne is forever and ever.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Hebrews is anonymous in every direction — we do not know the author, the destination, or the recipients — and the letter's argument never needed any of that. Its whole case rests on who Jesus is.
- ◆ “Radiance” and “exact imprint” are not compliments about resemblance. A wax seal takes the shape of the ring because it is the ring's own impression. Jesus is God by nature, not by promotion.
- ◆ Because we can trust him, we can trust what he says and what he has done. The trustworthiness of the message is downstream of the trustworthiness of the messenger.
- ◆ Hebrews 1 is a bouquet cut from the Psalms — 2, 89, 97, 104, 45, 102, 110. What was said of Israel's king in a limited, adoptive sense is said of Jesus by nature.
- ◆ Angels are the chosen comparison because angels are the highest created servants. They are winds and flames sent to serve. The Son is worshiped, and seated.
- ◆ Jesus is the agent of creation and of creation's uncreation. The contrast is not that the universe lasts and we do not — it is that the universe will be changed and he will not.

- ◆ Hence the letter's first warning: pay much closer attention, lest we drift. Drifting requires no decision at all, which is exactly what makes it the danger.
- ◆ Because his kingdom endures forever, no investment made in him is wasted, however poor the earthly return looks at the time.

► 1:37:42

Matt had intended to start a series in the Gospel of John and, by his own admission, was not ready for it — so he opened Hebrews instead. What he had was a small amount of time and a small amount of text, and he spent both making a single argument.

1. A letter with no return address

► 1:38:20

The introductory questions got cleared away quickly, because the answers are all the same. We do not know who wrote Hebrews. We do not know where it was sent or who received it. What is unmistakable from reading it is the pressure those readers were under, and the author's response to it: stay with the faith, no matter how tempted or beleaguered you feel.

The reason he gives is not grit. This is a superior message to anything you might be tempted to walk away to — and it is superior because of who is speaking it. So the pain, the turmoil and the embarrassment are worth carrying, because the one who spoke the world into being endures, and so does his kingdom, and in his hand is rich reward besides.

2. The exact imprint, not a family resemblance

► 1:38:53

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

HEBREWS 1:1–4 ↗

► 1:39:24

God has spoken in a great variety of ways. Matt ran the range quickly: prophets we know by name who have books, prophets we know by name who do not, and prophets who went unnamed altogether. What changes in these last days is not the volume but the kind of speech. Moses was a friend of God. Jesus is God.

Then he pressed on the two images, because both are easy to soften. Radiance is not a reflection bounced off a surface; it is the sun's own light coming from the sun. And an imprint is not a likeness — “not just facial features,” Matt said. “Like a wax seal is from the ring, of his very nature. Not just, they have the same sense of humor. The very nature.” From which the practical point follows immediately: “Since we can trust him, we can trust what he tells us and what he's done. It's solid. We could bank on it.”

3. A bouquet cut from the Psalms

► 1:40:32

What the author does next is gather lines from all over the Psalter — some about the king, some about God — and arrange them into one portrait of the Son. Matt named the obvious objection and dispatched it: “Sometimes you're like, oh, that's a little weird — can you just pluck that verse like that? Yeah, you can, if you're an inspired author of scripture.”

► 1:41:29

[Hebrews 1:5](#) opens with [Psalm 2:7–9](#) — the psalm where the nations rage, God installs his king on Zion, and that king breaks them with a rod of iron. The same image turns up on the returning Christ in [Revelation 19:15](#), which Hope had worked through recently. Matt's point was the difference in register. Said of Israel's king, sonship is a relationship — something like a mentor, or a big brother. Said of Jesus, it is true by nature. He is God the Son.

The second line, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son,” carries the same weight from the same direction — the promise to David's offspring, established forever, celebrated in [Psalm 89:26–29](#).

4. Angels are servants; the Son is worshiped

► 1:43:07

The comparison the author reaches for is angels, and [Hebrews 1:6](#) sets the terms: when the firstborn is brought into the world, let all God's angels worship him. Of the angels themselves he says only what [Psalm 97:7](#) and [Psalm 104:4](#) say — he makes them winds and flames of fire. Powerful, and staff. To the Son he says something else entirely.

“But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.’”

HEBREWS 1:8-9 ↗, QUOTING PSALM 45:6-7 ↗

A psalm addressed to God is applied, without apology, to Jesus. That is the ground of the trust Matt kept returning to — our lives, our reputations, our feelings, our families, handed to a king whose throne has no expiry.

5. He made it, and he will roll it up

► 1:44:24

“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”

HEBREWS 1:10-12 ↗, QUOTING PSALM 102:25-27 ↗

Jesus is the agent of creation, which is already an enduring enough figure to steady anyone. But Matt pushed further: he is also the agent of creation's uncreation. Set your troubles beside a universe that gets folded away like laundry, and they shrink to the size they actually are. The chapter closes with [Psalm 110:1](#) in [Hebrews 1:13](#) — sit at my right hand — and then, in [Hebrews 1:14](#), puts the angels back where they belong: ministering spirits sent out to serve those who are to inherit salvation.

6. Therefore, do not drift

► 1:44:55

“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it... how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”

HEBREWS 2:1-4 ↗

► 1:45:57

Matt stopped to ask what the “it” is that they might drift away from, and answered it plainly: the gospel message of who Jesus is — God the Son, God's anointed king, who took on flesh for our sake, embracing humanity, dying on our behalf and giving us his life so that we can live with God. That, and the fact that all the hopes and promises they had been carrying find their fulfillment in him. The verb is the warning. Nobody decides to drift.

And God has not been quiet about it. He “has underlined, highlighted and made exclamation points around this gospel message,” Matt said — firsthand sight, the enduring witness of the apostles, the Spirit poured out on the church and giving gifts generously, so that we can hear it and hear it again, feel it and feel it again, and know that he is trustworthy and good.

7. Where can he take ground?

► 1:47:23

Earlier in the service Matt had asked people to pray about a specific challenge — a thing to add, a thing to drop, something of God's character to take to heart — and he came back to it as the application of the text. The question he wanted left in the room was where God might take territory: the place where you feel beleaguered, backed against a wall, or simply dead, and where you could ask him to breathe new life. Not a chore added to a tired life, but, as he put it, dropping dead weight in exchange for his joy and glory.

► 1:47:55

The close tied the application back to the argument. “His kingdom will go forever,” Matt said. “Every investment you make in him is a good idea. The return on investment might look dumb sometimes here, from an earthly perspective — but that's not the perspective we want. Think higher, my friends, higher.” You can take the risk, because the one who endures forever is with you when you do.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Hebrews 1:1–4](#)
- [Hebrews 1:5](#)
- [Psalm 2:7–9](#)
- [Revelation 19:15](#)
- [Psalm 89:26–29](#)
- [Hebrews 1:6](#)
- [Psalm 97:7](#)
- [Psalm 104:4](#)
- [Hebrews 1:8–9](#)
- [Psalm 45:6–7](#)
- [Hebrews 1:10–12](#)
- [Psalm 102:25–27](#)
- [Psalm 110:1](#)
- [Hebrews 1:13](#)
- [Hebrews 1:14](#)
- [Hebrews 2:1–4](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Hebrews was written to people tempted to walk away. What is currently making that temptation real for you — pressure, weariness, embarrassment, disappointment?
2. Matt distinguished a family resemblance from an exact imprint. Where does your working picture of Jesus quietly settle for the smaller version?
3. The author reads the Psalms as being about Christ. How does that change the way you would read the Old Testament this week?
4. Drifting takes no decision. What would “paying much closer attention” actually look like in the next month, in concrete terms?
5. Where is God asking to take ground in your life, and what is the one thing you will do about it this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53sA8P_e4Nw&t=5862s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.