



The Book of Hebrews: Part 2 of 4 *Lecture Video Transcription*

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Last day I introduced the epistle to the Hebrews—the homily of Hebrews—and especially focused on the introduction and 1:5, Jesus greater than the angels. Especially focusing on the Son of God terminology in 1:5, quoting from 2 Samuel 7:15 and Psalm 2. Now, we’re going to open this up to questions in a few moments, but I want to take one more passage from chapter 1 that we’ll look at first to see that there’s a pattern here that’s taking place. And then we’ll open it up and then press on.

A little farther down in the passage, we read, verse 7, “In speaking of the angels he says, ‘He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire.’” Again, quoting from the Old Testament, Psalm 104. [Hebrews] verse 8, “But about the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.’” In other words, the claim of verse 8 is that Jesus is superior to the angels, amongst other reasons, because God addresses him as God. That’s the argument. Now, it’s worth looking again at the Old Testament passage in its context before we try to see exactly what the writer to the Hebrews has done with it here. So turn to Psalm 45. And to understand the flow of this passage, and especially verses 6 and 7, which are quoted as Hebrews 1:8, it’s worth reminding ourselves of what is said in the superscription. It’s called “A wedding song.” That’s an inference, but it’s a reasonable inference as you’ll see in a moment. Run through this Psalm. Verse 1, “My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.” Now that is a kind of reflection by the writer; a reflection by the writer of what is about to take place. There are a number of Psalms that have similar introductory reflections; 34:1-3; 49:1-4; and so here.

What’s worth noting, however, is that this is about the king, “I recite my verses for the king.” Now, that could be about the king – it could be addressed to the king, but not about the king – but as we’ll see, as he addressed the king, you discover that in this Psalm it is about the king. And the king at the time really meant the Davidic king, so at least you are in the realm of the Davidic.

Then, what you have in verses 2 to 5 is an emphasis on the king’s majesty and stature. “You are the most excellent of men... your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever.” That “God has blessed you forever”

language is itself a reflection on the Davidic dynasty. “Gird your sword on your side, you mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty. In your majesty ride forth victoriously,” and so forth. And here this includes not only truth, humility, and justice – verse 4 – but conquering enemies – verse 5 – these are all the things that the king would have to do. And so he is being praised. This sounds like the writing of a courtier praising the king. And then, verse 6 to 9, it’s elevated again; it’s not just his performance as it were—his majesty—but his person, his state. And the courtier says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad.” Now when you first read that, you might be tempted to ask yourself, is it possible – since this happens often enough in the Psalms – that the writer switches the person he’s addressing? He was addressing the king, let’s say, and now he’s addressing God. “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever.” The problem with that solution is that it won’t fit verse 7. He’s clearly addressing the king in verse 6, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever,” – verse 7 – “therefore God, your God,” because you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness, “therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you.” In other words, even though the courtier is addressing this Davidic king as God, he’s acknowledging that he’s not the ultimate God; “therefore God, your God.” Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever; you have loved righteousness, hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you; which presupposes there’s a God above this one being addressed as God. But that means that the language really is a bit stunning. So often in the Old Testament, a contrast is drawn between God and human beings. Now, there are plenty of passages in which some sort of link is made. For example, we are made in the image of God. But to address a Davidic king as God is very unusual language. You think of the kinds of contrasts drawn by the prophet Isaiah in chapters 40 to 45, for example.

But before we go and reflect on that a bit more, it’s important to keep running through the passage just a bit because the significance of this being a wedding song has not yet been tapped into. In verses 10 to 12, the emphasis is on the bride’s allegiance, “Listen, *daughter*.” Okay, here you do have a clear change in the person being addressed. “Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention: forget your people and your father’s house.” That is, don’t show ongoing allegiance to the family from which you come; you now must have your allegiance to the family into which you are marrying, and especially to your husband. This is, in some ways, a kind of royal female equivalent of what is said about marriage in Genesis 1 and 2. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh.” Do you see, there’s a new home that is being built up. But it’s particularly important in the political sphere when there’s a royal wedding. “Let the king be enthralled by her beauty,” and all of that. And if you are loyal to him, “honor him, for he is your lord,” then you’ll discover that “the city of Tyre will come with a gift, people of wealth will seek your favor” – Tyre proverbial for wealth and so forth. Then, the wedding train, for lack of a better word, is described in verses 13 to 15.

And then verses 16 to 17, once the wedding has taken place – the end of 13 to 15 as everybody enters into the palace of the king and this great royal wedding – we then read, and hear the pronoun show, in Hebrew, that this is being addressed to the man again, it is being addressed to the king. “Your sons will take the place of your fathers; you will make them princes throughout the land. I will perpetuate your memory through all generations; therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.” Now the reason why that’s important is because you can see here that what is envisaged is a real wedding with real progeny. One of the things you want out of a royal wedding is progeny for the sake of the succession; a succession of establishing the dynasty, do you see? So your sons succeed and replace your fathers. And the current king makes them princes in the land, and that’s the way the line continues; that’s the whole point of verses 16 and 17. You have the royal wedding in order to produce royal heirs. Otherwise, eventually, the dynasty drops away. In fact, it could end up in civil war if there’s some disputed claim about who the next king should be.

Now the relevance of that to our discussion is, that means that you cannot imagine that this is being addressed *exclusively* to Christ. It’s not that kind of oracular prophecy, where the writer, borne along by the Spirit of God, is addressing this directly to Jesus himself. “Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever.” Don’t think anachronistically here. What is in mind here is a Davidic king; a Davidic king who produces children, do you see? So that raises the question again all the more intensely, what is the writer of Hebrews doing when he quotes these words to prove Jesus’ superiority over angels?

Now we’ve already seen that, in general, the line of thought in Hebrews 1: 5 and following is that Jesus as the son of God is superior to angels, and not because the primary emphasis in 1:5 is on his ontological sonship. There is something of his ontological sonship in the prologue as we’ve seen, but on the fact that he is the Davidic king. As the Davidic king, he reigns. And that can’t be said of any angel; he doesn’t have that status before God. But mind you, the Davidic king develops into quite a spectacular person even in the Old Testament. He is initially the Davidic king David, and then David’s son Solomon, but already in chapter 9 of Isaiah, we saw in the Eighth Century, there is an elevation of this ultimate Davidic king such that he is called the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. There is this rising edge to this Davidic expectation. And this too, then, belongs to that typology – to this track of this Davidic typology that is looking forward to the ultimate David coming along. Now within that framework, then, how can the writer address a Davidic king long before the Messiah comes, and say, “Your throne, O God?”

Well, it is unusual, but it’s not completely unprecedented. Moses, for example, can say that he doesn’t just speak as God – which is what our translations say – but that he is God speaking to the people. Now, it’s not really making an ontological claim, but you can see nevertheless how almost shocking that is. And in so far as this Davidide is reigning, as it were, as God’s son with God’s priorities in justice and righteousness, that’s why all of these opening verses that stress his integrity, and his

strength, and with justice and humility, and so and so. He's supposed to be reigning as God, do you see? It's not just court flowery language. Then in that sense, he is representing God, he's part of the God-family, as it were. That's the kind of sonship he's got on this axis of reigning. So I'm not sure that this is trying to make some sort of ontological statement for the original Davidic king, but all that Psalm 45 does in elevating this Davidic king is now picked up by the writer to the Hebrews, and certain steps need to be understood. Here in this Psalm, it's the courtier who's addressing the king, and then the bride, and so forth. But if this is Scripture, and of course it is, then in some sense, it's God himself speaking. Certainly the New Testament writers understood that this was Scripture, and in Scripture God speaks. So if the courtier addresses this Davidic figure as God, in some sense God sanctions those words. It's God's word, and thus, God thus is, in that sense, addressing the Davidic king, O God. But this does not mean that the Davidic king really is God in some ultimate sense, because in the next verse you go on to say, "Therefore God, your God, has anointed you above your fellows."

So, when you come then to Hebrews 1:8, what you have is *God* speaking to the *son*. Well, the shift from the courtier to God is explained because this is Scripture. That it's now speaking to the son, yes, but this is the son in the Davidic sense, already established from verse 5 on. That is, not "son" as all of Israel; not "son" just because he's a human being; not "son" in those other uses of son as we explored last time; but "son" as the Davidic king, do you see? And thus, God does address this Davidic king as God in this specific language from Psalm 8. Now, undoubtedly in the wake of the entire typology and all of the increasingly augmented language, and so on, through the Old Testament, then there is an overtone of ontology here too that you cannot quite escape anymore. But suddenly it does not seem quite so fanciful, and this Psalm is relevant in that once again it is placing Jesus on this Davidic typology trajectory. And what establishes Jesus as superior to the angels is bound up with God's treatment of his own son; language that is stunning. The point is probably not so much "he is my son," in the Trinitarian sense, although there might be an overlap of that from the introduction, the prologue. As he really is the Davidic king who brings about all of God's reign on the earth, as promised; no angel is going to do that – this is a Davidic promise. Yet what a David it is, far outstripping that first David. That first David, or the second David, or the third David, although the courtiers might say, "You ride forth in justice and humility," they didn't always manage that; the ultimate David does.

So, if we had time, we could work through all of these Old Testament quotations and discover there are similar kinds of usages throughout. Let me pause and go one step farther before we open it up for questions. One might well ask the question, how on earth do you preach this? I mean, how many people in our congregations, let alone in the broader society, are sitting around thinking "I wonder if Jesus is greater than the angels?" How do you build a big sermon out of that? And yet, when you look around, I'm not sure what TV program it was, *Touched by an Angel* maybe? We have lots and lots and lots of these sort of silly programs where there are angels coming around and helping you, and some dude gets bumped off and he comes back

and helps his wife, and she can see him but nobody else can. And then we have our zombies, and then we have our, you know, all of these. And then throw in a bit of astrology and on and on and on. And at the end of the day, I know some of it is sort of fantasy stuff, but there is a kind of desire to have a control in life, or a helper that comes along. And of course, it mustn't be God, certainly not the God of the Bible – I'm sure that's got to conflict with the Constitution somewhere – and so, we have an angel or two. And suddenly what you have is a kind of displacement so that people actually really do think that they can get help by reading their horoscope in the morning, and hope that somehow some dead relative is looking over them to protect them along the way, or whatever. And against all of that sort of thing, from the very first century, the Bible says, Jesus is Lord. He's the king. He's the promised Davidic king. Fear him and no one else. Bow to him and bow to no one else. And suddenly you see that this is not quite so irrelevant as you might have thought. The particular forms of angelic adoration of the First Century might not be ours, but this looking for some other mediation is common among every generation, in every society, in every culture.

One more question about how to preach this. You see, it would be legitimate to preach this, virtually the whole chapter, in one sermon. Where the simple logic – God addresses the son as son and he doesn't address the angels as son – could be stated in the simplest sort of way, and make your main point... that's legitimate. But if on the other hand, you have a well-informed congregation, biblically speaking, that knows its Bible pretty well, then it might not hurt to go a little more slowly and spend time on the Old Testament passages and their contexts, and so on. And do the same kind of thing for them that I've done for you in the last few minutes and the previous lecture, so that people can begin to understand how their Bible is put together. Because there are many serious Bible readers in our congregations – there are lots of people who don't read their Bibles in our congregations – but there are many serious Bible readers in our congregations who occasionally read a passage like this and think, "Oh, that's an interesting argument; let's look to the original Old Testament passage." And they look and they look, and they think, "Good grief, I don't know what's going on here; I don't know, pastor knows, I guess," and then they move on. And somewhere along the line, what that means is that pastors have got to unpack things, explain things, so that their own people are reading the Bible intelligently and faithfully. All right, let me pause there for questions, comments.

I have long since learned that when there are no questions it means one of three things. Number one, things have been so admirably explained that there's no question left to ask, that's what I'd like it to be. Or number two, things have been so miserably explained, people can't figure out what to ask. Or thirdly, the speaker has the gift of intimidation. What one of those three? Take your pick and we'll open up for questions again in a few moments.

Now, the mention of angels runs into chapter 2. By all means continue to use your outline, the analytical outline, distributed to you on Moodle. But, before we get there, there is, what I called in the outline, in italics, an embedded warning: *do not*

turn away from the words spoken by God's son. There are several of these embedded warnings, they're warnings and encouragements, but it's worth observing the shape of this one since it is so heavily dependent on the main thought structures of the epistle of the Hebrews. The main argument in chapter 2, verses 1 to 4, is this: if, under the revelation of God in the old covenant there were sanctions imposed – severe sanctions imposed – upon those who did not listen to the word of God, did not submit to it, did not trust God, did not obey him, how much will his sanctions be when this superior revelation is ignored? It's a "how much more" argument. "We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how should we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?" So, this reference to angels is what ties this passage to chapter 1, and on to chapter 2, verses 5 and following. And you ask yourself, "Well what do angels have to do with the revelation of the old covenant?" There, what I strongly urge you to do – I remember reading this years and years and years ago and having that same exact question in my head – and what I did, was I took a concordance and simply looked up every use of "angel" or "angels" in the Pentateuch. And you discover how often angels appear, in one fashion or another, as part of the great revelation of God given through Moses to the people – the old covenant. I suggest you do the same, I won't take time to run through those passages with you, but once you do that, you can see how it is pretty common.

Sidebar: this bit is for free. Because we live in the West, which is so influenced by secularism and suspicion of the supernatural and so on, we sometimes forget how important angels are in other cultures. I have a friend, Marantika, Chris Marantika, in Indonesia. Indonesia is the country in the world with the highest number of Muslims, and there are also many Christians, and as a result, there is more interaction between the two dominant religions. And Chris Marantika has for years and years and years been a Christian evangelist, and seen in that context many, many, many men and women of Muslim persuasion come to faith in Christ. And what he says about Christmas is, he loves, at Christmas, to preach Matthew 1 and 2 because there are so many angels and visions. Whereas, when we get to Christmas, you know, we have to have a little crèche and have an angel scene somewhere and all that, but that bit is slightly embarrassing, you know, angel choirs in the sky, you know. Let's get to the sort of humbler stuff, people coming from a long way away and the shepherds and, you know. The angels singing in the sky is for little children, we acknowledge and sing "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," and then pass on to something a little more credible. Now we don't put it quite so crassly, but from his point of view, he's emphasizing it all, because in that culture, there's an awful lot more credibility if the angels are involved. Do you see? So, when you read the Pentateuch in that way and look up every passage where angels are mentioned, then you discover that the mention of all those angels is really designed to say, "This is God doing something to sanction, to warn, to authorize this revelation," so that God is going with them by his angels. Do you see? And then when you see that and now are introduced to the Son who outstrips the angels, then the argument becomes really powerful. And then you come to the warning and say, "Listen, if that

revelation of the old covenant was given, mediated in some sense through angels, then how much more are we in really serious problems if we overlook what is given to us by and through the son? How shall we escape if we ignore so great salvation, this salvation which was first announced by the Lord was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders, and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”

Now then, the author hasn't quite fully finished with his treatment of angels, but now he really spins out the argument in a different direction. In 1:5 to the end of [verse] 14, he's really talking about the Son's superiority over angels, but the last verse, 1:14, gives a hint of where the argument is going before the embedded warning: “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” So, in other words, not only is the Son superior to angels, but angels must be distinguished from human beings who inherit salvation. And the argument is going to go on to point out that there has arisen a redeemer for fallen human beings, but not for fallen angels. When the eternal Son joined us, he did not become an angel, he became a human being. That's the thrust of the argument. And thus, the angels themselves are not only not the Son, but they're not the redeemed either; they're rather ministering spirits sent to help the redeemed. So what on earth are you doing fastening your attention on angels? We're the redeemed, not they; and Christ is Lord, not they.

Now we don't have time to follow all of the argument in chapter two, but I want to draw your attention briefly to the initial quotation, 2:5: “It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified, ‘What are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet.’ In putting everything under them” – that is under human beings – “God left nothing that is not subject to them.” Yet at present that's not what we see. We don't see the whole created order under human beings. What do we see? We see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while. That is, he emptied himself, became a nobody, joined with us, but is now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death. And now, you see, what you really have, is an exposition of the introduction, verses 3 and 4. He had the name that was above every name, but then after suffering, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven and thus became as much superior to the angels as his name had already made him superior to the angels. And thus, you're right into the heart of the incarnation and cross work of Christ, all in the context of talking about angels. In other words, this author has a laser vision that takes you back to the Gospel and the Cross all the time, even though he doesn't use exactly that language.

Now then, I said I wanted to say something about this quotation, this quotation of course is Psalm 8, and it has one little bit in it that causes translators perpetual debate. “LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens. Through the praise of children and infants you have

established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of him, human beings that you care for them?" Now, if you translated the Hebrew literally, it is, as the NIV footnote points out, "What is a human being that you are mindful of him, a son of man that you care for him?" Now you folks know that the heart of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. And parallelism – there are different kinds – but in synonymous parallelism the second line says roughly what the first line says, but in a somewhat different way. So I would argue pretty strongly that the way to read those two lines is to see that they're saying roughly the same thing in slightly different ways. "What is *man* that you are mindful of him, a *son of man* that you care for him?" And a son of man is just another way of referring to a human being. Or, to use it in the language of the 2011 NIV, "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" But some people argue that "son of man" here is a Christological reference, because, after all, "son of man" in the New Testament regularly refers to Christ. And therefore, the argument in 2:5 and following, they say, is this: yet at present we do not see everything subject to human beings, but we see Jesus who is the ultimate son of man. So the NIV 2011 asks, "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him?" Now, although there are some fine expositors that take "son of man" that way, in my view it's mistaken. If "son of man" were already in the Old Testament, a semi-technical term that always had the same referent, then I would say that would be a good case. But "son of man" in this sense taken up in the New Testament in a messianic sort of fashion, really derives from Daniel in only one passage. Whereas "son of man" as an expression is much more common; it's used 80 times, for example, in Ezekiel where God addresses Ezekiel and says, "Son of man stand up and I will show you" whatever. And there, the whole point of the son of man language is that he's a human being and not God, which is why some translations sometimes try to catch the idea by saying, "Mortal man, stand up." And the parallelism here in Psalm 8, to my mind, suggests that you don't have a messianic claim being made in the expression "son of man," it just means "human being." And then the argument it seems to be in 2:5 and following is clear enough. It's not to angels that God ordained the ruling over the entire world, even at creation itself, it was to human beings, that's part of Genesis 1 and 2. We've seen how the author's mind can go back there. And that's already attested in Psalm 8 as well. That's his argument, but that's not what we see taking place in the world. What we see taking place in the world is that we're a broken damaged people who don't rule effectively over very much. We bully things, but we don't rule. What do we see? We see Jesus. And he emptied himself to become one of us, he made himself a nobody, and lowered himself, thus, in some sense, below the status of angels, but now he's crowned with righteousness and glory and is at the father's right hand. And he is the firstfruits of the humanity that comes along behind. Do you see? That's the argument. So that what is going on in the talk about angels is not merely a way of confusing the binding authority of *Touched by an Angel*. It's also a way of showing the whole scheme of things: where human beings are, where Christ is in God's whole redemptive plan begins already in the garden and runs all the way to the consummation. Do you see? It's a massive

vision. And then toward the end of it, not only does the eternal Son become a human being, but he becomes a human being in Abraham's line. And now Abraham is introduced, and thus Israel, and thus Israel's history, and eventually the priesthood, and so on. So that's the way we've moved, you see, from creation through human beings to Israel itself.

Now I don't have time to unpack more of those verses, I want to press on to chapters 3 and 4. In chapter 3:1-6, there is a brief contrast, having introduced the Abrahamic line, between Jesus and Moses; it's an obvious pairing up. What's interesting here is that the form of Jesus-better-than-Moses is not, "Moses was a great prophet, Jesus was a better prophet." It's not, "Moses gave the law, Jesus gave the Gospel." It's not, "Moses came first, but the best comes last." It's not any of those things. It's a difference in category that's again tied to son language. You discover again how unified the thinking is of the writer to the Hebrews. Moses was a faithful servant in the house, the household of God. Now even there, the author is being polite. He wasn't always faithful, but by and large, he was an astonishingly faithful man. Before we tear a strip off him for losing his cool the second time he hits the rock, I doubt if most of us would be so presumptuous to think we would have done any better. He was an astonishingly faithful servant in the household of God. What makes Jesus stand out is not just that he was perfectly faithful, though that's true, it's not where the argument goes. The argument goes instead, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, he was a faithful servant in God's house, but Jesus is the Son, so he alone is the heir." It's a fundamental difference in category. It's a qualitative difference, not merely a quantitative difference.

And now we come to a long passage, 3:7-4:13, which again involves exposition of Old Testament text, but is tremendously insightful, not only in how it uses the Old Testament, but in how the author puts together the Bible, to use our categories. In one sense, this is picking up further warning. In some ways this is a wee bit parallel to the embedded warning of 2:1-4. In other words, if they had sanctions with which they were threatened under the terms of the old covenant, boy, we'd better be careful how we listen today. So in that sense, this is unpacking that embedded warning a little further. Yet at the same time, there are two kinds of arguments from Scripture that need to be distinguished. The text that the author is going to meditate on is Psalm 95. [Hebrews] Chapter 3, verse 7, "So, as the Holy Spirit says" – incidentally on the fly here, it's worth observing how this author refers to the Old Testament, "as the Holy Spirit says," as someone somewhere says, and so on and so on – wide diversity of formulas for introducing Scripture. And then he quotes these verses: Psalm 95:7-11 in the English Bible, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as you did in the rebellion during the time of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for forty years they saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation. I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray and they have not know my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.' "

Well, Psalm 95 is one of many historical Psalms, so called. In the historical Psalms, what happens is that the Psalmist goes over some part of Israel's history and draws some moral applications, some moral implications. What is interesting now is that the author is going to read Psalm 95 first in a moralizing way, and second in a typological way. Now, you've been around theological discussions long enough to realize that Biblically informed Christians are at least a little bit suspicious of merely moralizing readings of the Old Testament. You know those sorts of sermon series you get – Life of Abraham, Life of David, Life of Daniel, whatever – and often they get reduced to, "This king was a bad king, so don't be bad; this king was a good king, therefore be good. Abraham was a man of faith, therefore be sure you exercise faith; Abraham told a bunch of lies over here, don't be a liar." That's a moralizing use of the Old Testament, and after a while, you get a bit cynical about that sort of preaching and you start saying, "Isn't there more to the Bible than that? I mean, how is that drawing you to God? Is the Bible nothing more than sort of a Sunday School manual of moralizing lessons?" And then you can become so suspicious of it that you're trying to find typology everywhere, and you're trying to find a deeper meaning, and so on. And you start treating the Bible as if it has no moral lessons. But what's interesting here is, from here, 3:7 in the quotation of Psalm 95 to the end of chapter 3, it's all a moralizing lesson. And then in chapter 4, it's not a moralizing lesson, it's a typological lesson and it's important to understand both of them.

The moralizing lesson first. The moralizing lesson, to sum it up, is: think carefully who these characters were, described in Psalm 95. They were people whom God had already rescued from slavery in Egypt; that was already on their CV. But they had not yet got into the land of promise, into the land of rest. They had got out *from*, they had not got in *to*. But because of their whining, ingratitude, and unbelief at places like Massah and Meribah, and later – although the Psalmist doesn't deal with all of the occurrences – later with the report of the ten faithless spies, therefore that whole generation got wiped out of the desert for forty years—they just died like flies—till the whole generation was wiped out. They never got into the Promised Land. So the moral lesson from that is, make sure you persevere. That's the nature of the argument.

"See to it," verse 12, "brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today.' " All right, now the author is actually picking up specific words from the quotation. Do you see what's said? Verse 7, "So, as the Holy Spirit says: '*Today*, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.' " So when Psalm 95 is written, the Psalmist is making a moral application based on events at the time of the Exodus. And the writer to the Hebrews is picking up on the "today" and says, in effect, "As long as there's still a today, then the warning still applies." It's a moralizing argument, pure and simple. So "encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today,' so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly till the very end." We'll come back to that verse. As has just been said, "*Today*, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in

the rebellion.” Who were they who heard and rebelled? Weren’t they all those that Moses led out of Egypt? In other words, they had already escaped. They had been saved from. With whom was he angry for 40 years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And whom did God swear they would never enter into his rest? That is, the rest of the Promised Land, the rest of Canaan. It was called regularly, Land of Rest. This was the promised rest. Wasn’t it those who disobeyed who did not get in? So we see that they were not able to enter because of their unbelief, and now you don’t fall into the same trap.

Now go back to verse 14; verse 14 has in some ways already been anticipated by verse 6. 6b, “We are God’s house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.” That is, we persevere. Now verse 14 says, “We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly till the very end.” I would argue that in this context, this is almost a definition of a true Christian. In other words, a true Christian, by definition, sticks. That’s the most profound thing I’ll say all morning. A true Christian, by definition, sticks. Now, this is a common theme in the New Testament. We sometimes forget how common it is, because it is a theme that is cast in many, many different categories. Think, for example, of the parable of the soils, sometimes called the parable of the sower. One of the kinds of soils is what the author calls rocky ground, stony ground. What it means in Palestine is a limestone bedrock not far under the surface and sometimes cropping out, and a relatively thin layer of topsoil. So you throw your seed on that and because the soil is so shallow, it warms up the fastest in the spring, the seed germinates the quickest, and it seems to be the most promising of the crop. But in the first rain’s drop away, and the sun pelts down, and the latter rains have not yet come. So the plant keels over and dies – it put down some roots trying to find some water, but all it hits is limestone bedrock – so the plant keels over and dies. And when Jesus explains the people he says, “These are the ones who hear the word of God and immediately receive it with joy.” That is, they seem to be germinating fastest. They seem to be the best of the new converts. But afterward when persecution or trouble comes, there’s no depth and there’s no way of pulling in water, it’s superficial, they keel over and die, they remain fruitless. Do you see? But we have become partners of Christ, we have become sharers in Christ. If we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfastly to the end. If your original conviction perseveres. Or again, 1 John chapter 2, verses 18 and 19, referring to certain people who had left the congregation: “They went out from us in order that it might be made clear that they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would have remained with us. But their going shows that they were not of us.” In other words, what proves they weren’t really converted, to use the language of conversion, is that they didn’t persevere. What proves that they are with us, of us, is that they do persevere, same language as here. And, of course, that language is found in Paul as well in stunningly stark language. Recall this passage from Colossians 1, beginning in verse 21: “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation, if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out

in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.”

Now, that importance of perseverance is also tied in Scripture, of course, to God’s preservation of us. In one sense, we persevere because God preserves, that’s true. But at the phenomenological level, by definition, it’s the one who perseveres who is considered finally genuine. That’s what this argument is saying, we have come to share in Christ if we indeed hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. Therefore, don’t be like those people who were saved out of, but never got in to. The argument is so strong that you realize that you have to think about the whole doctrine of conversion pretty carefully at this point, because some of us have come from backgrounds where conversion is a pretty light thing. That is, you walk forward and you pray a certain prayer and then you’re okay. Once saved, always saved. And you’re not long in the ministry before you find some dear troubled mother who says, you know, “My son Johnny accepted Jesus at Bible camp when he was eight. Of course since the age of 14 he’s been indistinguishable from the world of flesh and the Devil and he’s now 46 on his fourth marriage, and has spent two times in jail... But I believe once saved, always saved.” What do you say? We have been made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfastly to the end. That’s almost a definition of what real Christianity looks like. So you can still believe in once saved, always saved, as long as you understand that by “saved” you mean not simply a status, but life-transforming power. That doesn’t rule out the possibility of backsliding – I mean, Peter backslid, you know. Peter can backslide, I’m sure I’m allowed to. So you don’t want to dump on everybody in some sort of legalistic fashion, but at the same time, these warnings are serious. And what marks out a genuine believer is that they persevere to the end. It also shows that genuine Christianity is both a salvation out *from* and a salvation in *to*. It’s out from sin and degradation, and the wrath of God standing over your head, and so on, and so on, and so on, into all the ultimate rest, as we’ll see, and the ultimate rest is the new heaven and the new earth. Now, if we’re really Christians, we already come into some of that rest now, and we will persevere to the end. But at the end of the day, it really is important to see that just as the Israelites had to wait after they got out of the land of Egypt before they got into the land of promise, so there’s a sense we too await our consummation, and we have all the assurance in the world that we will persevere to the end, unless we’re presuming on grace and acting indistinguishably from the world and the flesh and the Devil. Now, there are more entailments to this that we’ll bring up when we come to chapter 6 and chapter 10, and the warnings there, but it’s important to see that the argument here is a moralizing argument based on Israel’s experience so far.

Now then, before we open it up to more questions, look at the argument in chapter 4, by contrast, because this is *not* a moralizing argument. It begins by reminding you of the moralizing argument, but then it turns into something rather different. It’s an entirely broader sweep. Now, the actual flow of the argument is a bit complicated, so I’m going to show you a couple of the points and then I’m going to summarize it for you just for want of time. “Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still

stands,” that is, it still stands in the Psalms – Psalm 95, which after all is what the author is appealing to – “since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.” Oh, now wait a minute. That is already raising a huge point. How is Psalm 95 giving you a promise to enter rest, when by this time the Israelites have entered into the land of promise? In other words, they didn’t get in under Moses, most of them, because of their unbelief but died like flies over four decades in the desert. But eventually under Joshua, they did get in, so they got into the land of rest. And here you are, centuries later, with a Psalmist saying, speaking for God, “Today” – that is in the Psalmist’s day – “if you don’t harden your heart, you can enter into my rest,” God says. Which necessarily means that entering into God’s rest was not completely fulfilled in entering into the Promised Land. Entering into the Promised Land cannot possibly be taken as the fullness of what it means to enter into God’s rest. Otherwise, Psalm 95 makes no sense. Do you see? Now that’s just hinted at in verse 1, but it becomes specific a little further down. By the time you get to verse 8, you see where the argument is going, “For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.” In other words, entering into the land of rest cannot possibly be all that is meant by entering into God’s rest since, after all, centuries later God is still saying, “*Today*, if you hear his voice, make sure you don’t fall away, but strive to enter that rest.” Is that clear? That’s not a moralizing argument anymore, that’s reading Psalm 95 sequentially against the backdrop, not only of the failure in Moses’ day, but the success in Joshua’s day. You’ve got a pattern developing here, you’ve got a trajectory developing. What Christians in another time would have called a typology. But it gets more complicated than that, as you read on. And here, we don’t have time to go through the argument in detail, but let me pick up a couple of details. Verse 3, “Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ ” Now that’s quotation from the Psalm – Psalm 95. The words are actually quoted in chapter 3 of Hebrews, verse 11, “So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ ” And this author is thinking through every word in this quotation. He’s fastened on the word “today” and he’s shown what that means when you read it in the sequence of the biblical narrative in its canonical fashion that sees the trajectory. Now he’s gonna focus on the word, “My.” God says, “They shall never enter *my* rest.” So look what he does with that, he’s still meditating on this Psalm. “Yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world, first somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words, ‘On the seventh day God rested from all his work.’ ” And again in the passage above, he says, “They shall never enter *my* rest.” Now you can see the gears turning over in his head, they shall never enter my rest, where does God speak of rest? Of course the first place God speaks of rest is at the end of the creation account. End of chapter 1 into beginning of chapter 2, “God rested from all his labor.” That’s God’s rest. What does he do? He stops from his work. Now in Psalm 95, he says, if they don’t continue, “They shall never enter into *my* rest.”

So now he’s got a rest theme at creation, failure to enter the Promised Land under Moses, getting into the Promised Land of rest under Joshua, promise of more rest in the time of the Psalm, and now as long as the today still applies, it’s implying back

down here. Then he throws in a couple of more points along the trajectory. He draws attention, for example, in verse 9, "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God." And again, people who know their Bibles will remember that when the Sabbath is given, it's tied to Creation. "Remember the seventh day and keep it holy, for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth. And the seventh day..." Do you see? And now you've got a huge trajectory. You start from Creation and then you come to the Law, and the Sabbath rest is supposed to mirror, in some sense, God's patterned rest after the creation week. And yet, the people don't enter into the land of rest that was promised to them because of their unbelief. They had been saved from but never got in *to*, yet the people did get in *to* in the time of Joshua, but that can't be the ultimate rest, because in the time of the Psalms. Therefore, this promise of more rest, "don't fall away," it's got to be more than getting into the land. And that today still applies to us today, until finally you start saying, "And who's the ultimate Joshua? Who gets people in the of land rest?" And every person in the First Century knew that Joshua was the Hebrew form of Jesus, Jesus was the Greek form of Joshua. Joshua led the people in the land of rest. Who's the ultimate Joshua? Who's the ultimate Jesus? That first Joshua can't be the ultimate Joshua, because after all, Psalm 95 comes after the people getting into the Promised Land. And now you've got a whole typological reading of the Psalm. That is, reading the Psalm, taking it seriously – taking the language seriously – in the canonical context. When God says, "My rest," it's not arbitrary. You've got to start thinking, where does God's rest come from? And now, you see how there is a typology that is in Scripture that is identified by Scripture. It's not something that we're imposing on the top. Do you see? It is something that the later biblical writers are discovering in canonical Scripture, and insisting that we see it too, or else we misread the account. That doesn't mean they can't do the moralizing thing, nor is it just Hebrews 3 that does the moralizing thing, there's a very similar argument to the Hebrews 3 point in 2 Corinthians 10. In fact, when we were doing 2 Corinthians 10 on the fly-by, I mentioned to you that 2 Corinthians 10 has a moralizing argument; 2 Corinthians 10:1–13, about how the people of God fell away in the Old Testament, make sure you don't act like them. And I said, Hebrews 3 picks up here, well Hebrews 3 picks it up. Do you see? But Hebrews 3 does more than pick it up, it also gives us a trajectory argument, a typological argument, that binds all of Scripture together.

Now, it's within that framework, then, that we come to verses 13 and 14. Often people preach from 13 and 14 as if they're abstracted from the rest of the argument; it's all about Scripture and the nature of Scripture. Well, these verses are about Scripture, but they're prompted by the author's own reflection *on* Scripture. "For the Word of God," and he's thinking of the Word of God in Psalm 95 that he's simply expounded against the background of the canonical structure, "is alive and active." It all holds together. It's alive and active because the one who's given it is alive and active, it's God's word, so it still comes to us with astonishing power as you see how God's word fits together in all of its parts. Do you see? "Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." You see at this point, it doesn't let us off the hook. It tells us we have come to share in Christ if, indeed, we hold our

original conviction firmly to the very end. It's all built on a pattern, structured right into Scripture. We're dealing with the God who was sovereign over the whole lot, from beginning to end. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give [an] account." And thus, you see, you are implicitly returning to the embedded warning.

Questions?

Student 1: "During your comments on verse 14, just wondering, in terms of preaching and teaching this text, where does assurance come into this, cause I can see somebody back in my church saying like, "Woah, wait a second, who's word is this?"

Yeah, that's exactly the right question to ask. That's exactly the right question. And I will suspend it. Because the question was, in case you didn't hear it in the back: if you're gonna focus on 3:14 in exactly this way, what does this have to do with assurance? So won't this end up destroying assurance you don't know that you're in until you're in? And that is the right question to ask, and it becomes more acute with the warnings in 6. So I will introduce those warnings in a few moments and we'll finish them next day and come back to that question of assurance, because that's exactly the right question to ask.

Student 2: "It seems like, you know, throughout this whole book – as a contrast between law, praise, or old covenant, new covenant – it seems like there really is a temptation there to kind of demonize the old, or make the old really bad, and that's not what it does. I guess I've just heard a lot of sermons like, "Oh yeah, the law was bad, but now we have the good – grace." How do we avoid that sort of temptation?"

Yeah, good question. The question was: there is a constant running contrast in this book between the new covenant and the old covenant, between Christ and what came before, and so on. And that can lead to a certain amount of preaching, not necessarily done in Hebrews, but a certain amount of preaching in which the old covenant and the law in particular, are demonized. And then Jesus' good and everything that came before was bad. And that can have the effect, then, of making people not want to read the Old Testament, too. But it's worth pointing out, that, first of all, the author himself is careful not to do that. So that even when he mentions Moses, he doesn't say, "Moses was a twit," or "Moses was a great sinner," or, you know. He says he was a faithful servant. So the notion is not that it was all bad, it was that he had his particular role to play in the history of redemption, but the fulfillment comes with Christ. So, one of the important things to do when you are preaching from the Old Testament, or when you are referring to the Old Testament from the new, is to point out this laid out the groundwork, establish the categories. If you started up with the New Testament and didn't know anything about the Old Testament, what does it mean to say "Jesus is priest" or "king"? King like a British constitutional monarch? Or like a despot? What does that mean? What does tabernacle mean? What does sacrificial system mean? What does Yom Kippur mean?

What does Passover mean? So many of the categories that are used to explain Christ are essentially incoherent unless you have that Old Testament background. And that's the sort of thing, it seems to me, you need to spend a lot more time emphasizing. And then, there are also moralizing lessons to be learned. Are we so much better than the Israelites in the desert? So there are moralizing lessons to be learned, but there are also these typological lessons that actually show how the whole Bible fits together. And when you show those, it seems to me, one of the effects is that people actually begin to see how wonderful God is. He's the God who was there from the beginning; he knows where the pattern is going, even when the first steps are laid down. And so, what becomes a whole typology of rest, is already there in nuce, in creation. Now you have to be careful that you don't read it all back into it, but nevertheless that's the beginning... And so, at some point if you're preaching from Genesis 1 and 2, it is worth it to take a small excursus in saying, now you need to see where this is going. God knows where it's going, and we can know where it's going too, because we live so much farther along the trail. And even if the first readers of Genesis 1 and 2 didn't see where it's all going, we don't have the excuse of ducking it. We really do see where it's going, and then you begin to unpack the trajectories and so on. So the people then are learning how to read their Bibles and thus come to a deeper worship of God who has put the thing together in such a spectacular fashion.

Student 3: "If this trajectory addressed finds its ultimate fulfillment, in a sense, in resting by faith in Christ's finished and by that we enter into God's rest, does this make obsolete principle of "one day in seven, we take our rest?"

Cut to the chase. The question is, now, what does this do for Sabbath today? Or Lord's Day observance, and so on. That, of course, historically has been an intensely convoluted debate. There are, at the risk of oversimplification, essentially three positions that are adopted today. The dominant one in the Christian Church has been: the Sabbath commandment, like the other nine parts of the Decalogue, constitutes moral law; therefore, they are unchanging. The principle is one day in seven, and it has to be observed. For the Christian, it's the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. That a transfer was established because Jesus rose on the first day of the week, not the last day of the week, is a symbol-laden way of saying there's a new beginning. And Christians eventually came to worship on the Lord's day despite that 10-day week in the Roman world, they didn't abandon the seven-day cycle, they just transferred the day from Sabbath to Sunday. And therefore, this is still mandated today. We recognize that it's not the ultimate rest, but nevertheless, it is still part of the structure of things until the new heaven and the new earth. That's the dominant position today, and it is especially strong in the Reformed camp. There are so many interlocking issues. One is how you go about the business of defining moral civil and ceremonial law. I've hinted of that a little earlier. The most important book defending the traditional stance on these issues in recent years is a book by Philip Ross. I've reviewed it at length in a forthcoming article, if you are interested I can give you a copy, but it will be published in due course. I'm not sure that that standard category is quite the set of categories that the biblical writers think in.

Moreover, it's really difficult to find anything in the New Testament that establishes a clear transfer from Sabbath to Sunday; from Saturday to Sunday. You can observe descriptive passages like, "On the first day of the week, the disciples gathered together," or Paul instructing the Corinthians on the first day of the week, "Make sure that you gather your money together," and so on. So, you can observe things descriptively, but there is simply no New Testament passage that ordains a transfer. Which is why in the second position, there are some who say, if you read the Sabbath law carefully, it does not say one day in seven, it says the seventh day. If it's moral law, keep the moral law. And therefore, they become seventh day Christians. Now, some of them have slunk off to almost cultic mentalities and some denominations are somewhere on the borderlands between historic Christian Confessionalism and almost a cultic mentality. Seventh Day Adventists churches vary a great deal from essentially being Evangelical Churches to being something else, but they still insist that the right day of the week to worship, and so on, is Saturday. And there have been, historically, groups of Seventh Day Baptists and other groups, you see. They've always been a minority report, but we outline some of them, for example, in the book that I edited thirty years ago called, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*.

Then the third position argues the ultimate fulfillment of the Sabbath is Christian rest. That is, it's the Gospel. So, one of the points along the trajectory that the writer to the Hebrews doesn't mention, but it really is crucial, is Jesus' saying in Matthew chapter 11, "Come to me all you who are weary and laden, and I will give you rest." So that the ultimate rest is not Saturday or Sunday, the ultimate rest is Gospel rest. Now, those who take that stance vary. Some will say therefore just don't worry about Sabbath Sunday things at all. But others will say something a little more nuanced, and if I have to fly my flag, this is where I am. I'm more in the third camp than either of the other two on this one, partly because all the details aren't too important. Nevertheless I want to nuance things just a wee bit. We're not in the consummated rest yet, and quite apart from questions of day, about which I'll say a couple of things more in a moment, the Lord Jesus in the days of his flesh did tell his disciples, "Come aside." They're tired and they need rest. We can so worship work in a workaholic society that at the end of the day we think that if we take any rest, we're somehow letting down the side, and that can be kind of idolatry too.

So I have no doubt that there's an important thing for rest. What is striking is that although there is no clear transfer theology from Saturday to Sunday in the New Testament, I don't see how you can dispute that, that's just objectively the case. Nevertheless, there is this pattern that is established in the New Testament in which the Church, when it has a choice, worships on Sunday. So that in Jerusalem, they still, apparently, observe Sabbath, at least in the early weeks and months they observe Sabbath, but still gather together as Christians on Sunday. And in the Roman world, where they were on a 10-day week, they still observed the seven-day cycle, but met on the Sunday and that meant meeting early in the morning, late at night. So I would want to argue that there is enough pattern along those lines to warrant a conclusion that Sunday is an appropriate day for gathering the church together for corporate

praise and worship. That's a little less than saying, it's the Sabbath day and that's still mandated. I'm not quite sure that's how it works, quite. But nevertheless, I think that's right. But on the other hand, I'm not too troubled when some missionary friends of mine who work in the Muslim world use Friday, which is the Muslim holy day, as their day for worshiping and evangelism and so on. I don't think they're letting down the side and defying the God Almighty, because there isn't that kind of transfer theology that is unambiguous and explicit.

So, that's where I am which means that some of my strongest Reformed friend think that at this point I've taken leave of my senses and have abandoned the faith. What I have also observed is that actually Christians are often closer in practice than they are in theory. So, I know quite a lot of people who take my stance, who nevertheless are pretty careful about what they do and don't do on Sunday. And I know all kinds of people who call themselves strict Sabbatarians who would do things on Sunday I wouldn't do. So it's not just a question of the formal structures of your theology, but how you put some of these things together too, it seems to me. What I do observe is that the Apostle Paul in Romans can say, "One man views one day above another, another views all days the same, let each be fully persuaded in his own mind." Now I know that a strict Sabbatarian finds that uncomfortable and says, "Well he's really talking about a certain type of Sabbath day, but not the regular Sabbath day." Well, it's not really clear that that's being said in the text. You can't imagine the Apostle Paul saying, "One person view adultery as a no-no, others say it's all right; we have freedom in Christ, let each be fully persuaded in his own mind." You know? There are some limitations on Paul's flexibility, do you see? But it's remarkable that he dares say something as far out as that.

So, I was going to introduce chapter 6 today, that's what we'll begin with next day, and that'll tie together the question that was raised earlier about assurance too.

God bless you.