

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'VE GOT 'TIL IT'S GONE...

BRYSON SMITH'S easy guide to preaching Hebrews

I HAVE A FRIEND WHO IS a crewman on a submarine in the Australian navy. He can be under water in confined spaces for days at a time. He can be at sea for months at a time.

I once asked my friend what it was that he enjoyed most when a mission was over. When he was out at sea, what did he look forward to most about being back on dry land? His answer? Fresh air! After months of breathing an atmosphere heavy with grease and oil and sweat it was wonderful to simply inhale a lung full of fresh air. "I guess fresh air is just one of those things we take for granted," he explained, "You don't really appreciate it 'til you have to live without it."

Life is full of those sorts of things. Things like family and friends and hot showers. Things we don't appreciate when we have them. But when they're gone.....that's when we truly come to understand how wonderful those things really were.

Hebrews is a letter written to Christians to help them appreciate Jesus Christ. Before they let the gospel slip from their grasp. It seems the original recipients of the letter were in danger of drifting away from Christ (2: 1-4). They had regressed from a state of boldness to a state of spiritual apathy (5:11-14, 10: 26-39). There is even the threat of apostasy (6:4-6).

To this situation of shrinking commitment to Christ, Hebrews stresses the grandeur and supremacy of Christ. The author wants his readers to appreciate just how wonderful Jesus is. The author wants his readers to appreciate that nothing could be more tragic than taking Christ for granted, and thereby perhaps drifting away from Him.

With many things in life, we don't appreciate them until they're gone. But when Jesus is gone, it's too late! "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened....if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance" (6:4-6).

Spoke...Sat

Hebrews starts with a bang rather than a whimper. The opening four verses are an impressive introduction in which the main themes of the letter are ingeniously summarised. These verses, which are actually a single sentence in Greek, are packed full of theologically pregnant words and phrases.

However, it is the two principal clauses which capture the major emphasis of the letter.

These clauses are:

- a) *that God has spoken by His Son*
- b) *that after making purification for sins Christ sat down.*

The combined thrust of these two ideas is the finality of Christ's work. Christ is THE decisive way in which God has revealed and reconciled himself to humanity. The remainder of the letter will expand this idea in a bewildering array of Old Testament comparisons. Continually the point is made that it is suicidal to drift from Jesus. There is no one and no thing better able to reconcile us to God.

Structure

Hebrews is a complex letter. It draws on numerous Old Testament ideas, events and people. Its logic is often subtle. The end result is that a wide range of literary structures have been proposed for the letter. For example it has been suggested that Hebrews has a structure based on the progressive exegesis of four central Old Testament passages (Psalm 8, 95, 110 and Jeremiah 31). Alternatively it has been suggested that Hebrews has, you guessed it, a chiasmic structure in which a central sacrificial section (8: 1-9:28) is surrounded by concentric sections on ecclesiology and eschatology.

All this is very interesting, but when it comes to preaching the most productive structure is that which reflects the development of pastoral ideas. In this respect Hebrews can be seen to have a simple four fold

structure:

1. *Introduction (1:1-4)*
2. *The person of Christ (1:5-T:28)*
3. *The work of Christ (S:1-10:18)*
4. *Following Christ (10:19-13:25)*

In a book as complex as Hebrews such a structure is of course, to some extent an over-simplification. It is for example, too simple to say that exhortations to follow Christ are confined to the final section of the letter. Several exhortatory passages are scattered throughout the earlier sections (eg 2: 1-4). Even so, in these early chapters such exhortations occur as short breaks within the discussion of important theological issues. Towards the end of the letter this pattern is reversed and exhortation takes centre stage.

Another over-simplification is to think that the person and work of Christ can be so neatly separated. They are in fact so closely linked that it is difficult to speak of one without implying things about the other. Nevertheless, between chapters 7 and 8 there is a discernible shift in emphasis from who Christ is to what He has done. This can be appreciated if we expand the above structure into the following:

1. *Introduction (1:1-4)*
2. *The person of Christ*
 - *more authoritative than angels*
(1:5-2: 18)
 - *more faithful than Moses*
(3:1-4:13)
 - *more effective than the Levitical priesthood* (4:14-7:28)
3. *The work of Christ*
 - *the best covenant* (8:1-13)
 - *the best temple* (9:1-11)
 - *the best sacrifice* (9:12-10:18)
4. *Following Christ*

It is important to note that the above structure reflects a movement from implicit to explicit pastoral intent. In sections 1-3 the author stresses the supremacy of Christ in a range of quite complicated arguments concerning angels, Moses, the priesthood, the new covenant and the sacrificial system. The pastoral reason behind all this is to highlight the tragedy of drifting away from someone as majestic as Christ. This is an important dimension to bear in mind when preaching through these theologically intense chapters. Failure to appreciate and apply the author's pastoral intentions will result in sermons that sound more like a doctrine textbook than a passionate plea to hold firm to Christ.

Sermon series

Hebrews was preached through in twelve sermons, though these were taken in two distinct stages. A six week series on Hebrews 1 to 7 was followed by a shorter sermon series from another Biblical book, before returning to Hebrews to complete chapters 8 to 13 in another six week block. This seemed to work well for several reasons. Firstly it gave people a break from the quite complicated logic of Hebrews and secondly it helped prevent people from growing bored with what, at times, can be quite a repetitive argument throughout the middle of the book.

What follows are brief notes on each of the sermons.

Resources

Useful commentaries include;

- Lane, *Call to Commitment*.
- Bruce, *The Epistle To the Hebrews*, (NICNT).
- Adam, *The Majestic Son*.
- Brown, *Christ above All*, (BST).

Talk Outlines

Talk 1

GOD'S FINAL WORD

Hebrews 1:1-2:4

1. JOHN, GARY AND HEBREWS

John is an alcoholic. During a particularly difficult time with his drinking he made a commitment to Jesus Christ. I meet with John again a little while back. Life is good for him now, his drinking is under control. But he has fallen right away from Jesus. John reckons he doesn't need Jesus any more.

Gary used to be a very keen Christian in a church I once attended. Gary was also a very successful doctor. Last I heard, Gary has fallen away from Jesus. His career is now the most important thing to him. Hebrews is written to make sure that you and I don't end up like John or Gary.

2. OFF TO A BIG START (1:1-4)

The first 4 verses of Hebrews summarise the message of the entire book. They tell us two things:

a) *God has spoken through His son.*

God has spoken! And not just through anyone! The very clear implication is that God's revelation doesn't get any better than this!

b) *Jesus is now seated at God's right hand.*

The fact that Jesus is sitting shows his work of purification is finished. The fact he is at God's right hand shows how important Christ is. Put these two key phrases together and they're telling us that no one is more important than Jesus. He is God's final word. The rest of Hebrews replays this truth over and over again. For the remainder of this chapter it's replayed in terms of Jesus and angels.

3. JESUS AND ANGELS

a) *a comparison (1:5-14)*

Jesus is far superior to angels as reflected by His name (v5), His nature (v7,8,11,12), His job (v13).

b) *a warning (2:1-4)*

If, in the Old Testament, it was serious to drift away from a message delivered by angels, how much more serious is it to drift away from Jesus?

4. JESUS AND YOU

Are you drifting? If you were drifting out to sea in a rip you'd put your hand up for help. It would be crazy not to. If you're drifting from Jesus, talk to someone and make yourself accountable. It would be crazy not to.

Talk 2

UNLEASHING YOUR POTENTIAL

Hebrews 2:5-18

1. THE PROBLEM OF BEING HUMAN

Our book stores are swamped with books on personal motivation and self development. Books like, How To Control Your Time And Your Life, The Success Factor, Your One Week Way To Personal Success. The sheer number of these types of books reflects that we are confused about how to bring out the best in ourselves. We have this nagging feeling that we can be better than we are. Hebrews tells us that Christ is the person through whom humanity can unleash its potential.

2. THE PROBLEM OF JESUS BEING HUMAN

Last week we saw that Jesus is superior to angels. This creates a problem though, because Psalm 8 says that man is a little lower than the angels (v6-8). So how can Jesus, a man, also be superior to angels?

3. THE REASON FOR JESUS BEING HUMAN

Although Jesus is superior to angels, he willingly became a man so as to save mankind (v10-11). If a person is trapped in a burning building you don't send in someone with only speedos on. If someone's drowning you don't get a fireman in all his heavy clothing to dive in the water. The type of rescue defines the type of rescuer you need. Jesus needed to be man in order to rescue mankind (v14-18).

4. IMPLICATIONS OF JESUS BEING HUMAN.

By His death Christ restored us to glory (v10) ie the role God intended for humanity (cf Ps 8). Christ's death frees us from the power of death (v14). This brings us into our full potential as human beings. In Christ we have an eternal hope which puts all of life into context. We can see what really matters in life. The result of all this is that death need not make our life a mockery any longer. We can recapture the control in our lives that God always intended for mankind. We no longer have to be controlled by fashion and peer pressure and materialism since, in Christ, there's more to this life than this life.

Talk 3

KEEP ON KEEPING ON

Hebrews 3:14:13

1. 1 A QUESTION OF FAITHFULNESS

I started by reading a letter which appeared in a women's magazine. A woman was writing of her despair over her lazy and selfish husband. She concluded, "I don't know what to do. I feel trapped. I feel betrayed." Most of us know the pain of being hurt by someone's unfaithfulness. In Hebrews 3 we meet someone who will never let us down; Jesus Christ. The sting in the tail is that after explaining Christ's faithfulness to us, the chapter then asks us how faithful we are in response! The chapter does this by comparing us to Israel's situation just after the Exodus.

2. FAITHFULNESS EXEMPLIFIED: MOSES S. JESUS (3:1-6)

If we imagine God's people as being like a house, Moses is a special part of the house, but Jesus built the whole thing (3:1-6). In that respect Christ's faithfulness is even more impressive and important than Moses. This is especially the case when we consider that it was a painful and humiliating experience for Christ to build the house!

3. FAITHFULNESS URGED: ISRAEL AND US (3:7ff)

Jesus has been loyal to us. How loyal are you to Him? The tragedy of Israel was that after all God had done for them they turned their back on God and failed to trust. Because of their disobedience they failed to enter God's rest. We need to learn from their mistake. We need to ensure that our faith isn't fleeting and that our trust isn't superficial.

4. WHO DO YOU TRUST?

Israel's problem was that when the going got tough they stopped trusting that God knew what was best for them. The same thing still happens to so many people (eg people who chase their career even though God says to seek first His kingdom). They know what God says, they just don't trust that it works. The way to strengthen our loyalty to Christ is to do what Hebrews suggests ie to fix our thoughts on Jesus (3:1). Dwelling on Christ's faithfulness will spur us on to be faithful in return.

Talk 4

CONFIDENT LIVING

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

1. YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU'VE GOT 'TIL IT'S GONE

In this section, Hebrews tell us why it is we should hang in there as Christians. The writer wants us to be so convinced of the greatness of Jesus, that we will see with great clarity how crazy it would be to ever drift away from Him. We've already seen some reasons for staying close to. Now another reason is added; the fact that Jesus is a great high priest who gives us confidence in approaching God.

2. WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT PRIESTS?

In the Old Testament priests were vitally important because they were the mediators between a sinless God and a sinful people. In the OT, high priests were especially important because they were the ones who carried out the annual sin offering on the Day of Atonement. As important as those priests were, Hebrews now explains four ways in which Jesus is a high priest who is superior to the OT ones.

3. JESUS IS A GREAT HIGH PRIEST BECAUSE..

a)...*he has gone through the heavens* (4:14).

Jesus is an impressive high priest because He has heavenly connections. If anyone is going to be able to mediate between us and God, Jesus is it!

b)...*he sympathises with us* (4:15)

Jesus is not so heavenly connected that he fails to be earthly minded (v15) At the root of all our temptations is the same basic struggle to be obedient and to trust God. Jesus knows exactly what that's like in this life.

c)...*divinely appointed* (5:1-6).

Being a high priest is not an position to be grasped. You don't make yourself a high priest. Jesus was chosen by His Father (5:1,4-6). He waited submissively for His Father's appointment

d) ...*he was made perfect by obedience* (v7-10)

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus learnt what it was like to pray for something and not receive it. He experienced casting himself on a God who was able to save him, but who didn't. Jesus knows what it's like to not be delivered from agony but to be given the strength and peace to endure it instead. As such he was made perfect. Not perfect in the sense of morally perfect – which he was already – but perfect in the sense of becoming fully qualified as a saviour.

4. CONFIDENT LIVING

No matter what's in your past, as a Christian you can approach God, confident of mercy and of receiving the help you need in times of difficulty. God won't refuse you because we have a GREAT high priest. It'd be crazy to drift away from him (4:14).

Talk 5

DOCTRINE IS NOT A DIRTY WORD

Hebrews 5:11-6:2

1. BABY FOOD, FAST FOOD, SOLID FOOD

"Australians are eating themselves to death." Well that's at least what Time Magazine said in one of it's recent articles. 56% of all men are now overweight. 38% of all women are now overweight. Worse still, one in every nine people is technically obese. The basic problem is; that we are what we eat. And we eat junk food. It estimated that, on average, people are spending 1/4 of their weekly household budgets on takeaway food and restaurants. Hebrews wants us to see that as Christians we are what we spiritually eat. Our choice of spiritual food will determine what sort of Christian we are and will become. Last week Hebrews told us about the high priesthood of Jesus. Hebrews has much more to say about this, especially regarding a fellow called Melchizedek. But the writer doesn't know whether his readers have got what it takes to understand this teaching (v12-13).

2. THE DANGERS OF A POOR DIET

a) *immaturity* (5:13-6:3)

If the only teaching you ever get from the Bible is on a Sunday morning you're a baby and you're in a very vulnerable position (v13-14). You'll be easily led astray - unable to produce fruits of godliness (v7-8).

b) *active apostasy* (6:4-8).

But there's an even greater danger than just being immature and naive as a Christian. It's the danger of being led into wholesale apostasy (v4-6).

3. THE JOYS OF A GOOD DIET (6:9-12)

A balanced spiritual diet will produce a productive life full of the fruits of the spirit. Faith, hope and love will abound. As you go deeper into truths, we will experience the deep joys and genuine assurances of being a follower of Jesus. Doctrine is not a dirty word. It will help us negotiate and cope with life and fully savour the joy of being a disciple of Jesus

4. HOW TO GET A BALANCED DIET

If you've never done it before make a project of reading the whole Bible. Join a small group. It will help make you accountable at spending time in the Bible. Try and read at least one substantial Christian book a year. Take advantage of opportunities to get into the bible in an extended L concentrated way eg Christian conventions.

Talk 6

A FIRM AND SECURE ANCHOR

Hebrews 6:13-7:28

1. "TWISTER"

"Twister" is a pretty scary movie. Tornadoes causing havoc, Tractors, buildings and people being tossed around like toys. The key to survival was to have a firm anchor. Hebrews wants us to have a firm spiritual anchor. Last week Hebrews warned us that some solid food was coming (5:11). Now it's served up!. This is a very complicated section but the controlling idea is that in Christ we have a firm anchor for our soul (6:19). The passage revolves around two oaths which God has made.

2. OATH 1 (6:13-18).

God promised to give Abraham many descendants and make them His treasured possession. He also added an oath to make it doubly sure. What makes our hope certain? God has promised and vowed to form a people for Himself.

3. OATH 2 (6:19bf)

God has also made an oath that Jesus will be a priest forever (7:20-22). Jesus is not on casual rates, He is full time, 24 hrs a day and He will never reach retirement age. In this respect Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek (6:20) and is therefore superior to the Levitical priesthood. Four reasons are given for this:

- a) Mel's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood because it lasts forever (the Bible never actually says that it comes to an end). Jesus' priesthood is like Melchizedek's (7:23).
- b) Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of his possessions thus revealing Mel's superiority to Abraham and His descendants (7:4-6, 8-10).
- c) a closely related reason why Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priests is that Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek and not visa versa (7:6-7).
- d) Psalm 110 would not promise another priest like Melchizedek if the Levitical priesthood was all that was needed (7:11).

Roll all this up, and the logic is; Jesus makes the best possible high priest because he, like Melchizedek has a permanent priesthood that lasts forever. For this reason Jesus provides a firm anchor for our soul.

4. BLESSED ASSURANCE

For all the twists and turns of these verses, they're worth struggling with because they hold great comfort. You can be sure of going to heaven!

Talk 7

OUT WITH THE OLD

Hebrews 8

1. NOT KNOWING WHAT YOU'VE GOT

The Italian embassy in New York discovered that a statue in the foyer was a Michelangelo. It used to be neglected, now it's the focus of great attention and care. The first seven chapters of Hebrews has been drumming home the idea of not neglecting Jesus because He is so valuable. Hebrews still hasn't finished with this lesson, however the focus now shifts slightly from who Jesus is to what he has done.

2. A LOOK BACK, A LOOK FORWARD (v1-6)

v1-2 summarise the lesson so far: Jesus is the best possible high priest.

v3-6 summarise what Jesus does as a priest; He offers the best sacrifice, in the best temple and mediates the best covenant. The covenant theme is taken up for the rest of this chapter while the themes of sacrifice and temple are explained in Hebrews 9-10.

3. A NEW COVENANT

a) *what's a covenant?* A covenant is a formal agreement. Jesus brings in the best agreement between man and God possible. It was one promised in Jeremiah 31.

b) *the ultimate covenant.* This new arrangement is better than the previous ones because people will

respond with a heart felt faithfulness (v9-10), there'll be deep intimacy with God (v11) and forgiveness of sins (v12).

4. **STATE OF THE ART CHRISTIANITY**

Christ isn't like a car or a computer that will be updated and improved. The arrangement between us and God through Christ can never be improved on. It's state of the art and will never become obsolete. When you follow Jesus you don't just have a relationship with God. You have THE relationship with God. In Christ it doesn't, it can't, get any better.

Talk 8

THE REAL THING

Hebrews 9:1-10:18

1. **CHANGING PROTOCOL**

Remember the fuss when Paul Keating actually touched Queen Elizabeth! If he had tried that stunt a couple of hundred years ago, he probably would have lost his head in the Tower of London. It's just that royal protocol has changed since then. Access to royalty is now more open. That's what Hebrews 9-10 is all about. It's all about a change in protocol, not towards British royalty, but a change to divine protocol. Whereas access to God used to be highly restricted, now in Christ there is great freedom and liberty to approach God. We noticed in Hebrews 8 that Christ ushers in a new covenant. Hebrews 9-10 expands on this idea by explaining that all the sacrifices, temples and priests of the OT were a shadow of the greater reality to come through Christ.

2. **THE OLD WAY (v1-5)**

a) *an earthly temple*. In the OT the way in which people related to God, revolved around an earthly tabernacle or temple (an overhead was put up showing the floor plan).

b) *earthly sacrifices*. Sacrifices were the way sinful people cleansed themselves from sin so they could enter God's presence (9:18-22). All this was only ever intended to be a shadow. The reality is that Jesus comes and revolutionises the divine protocol by offering the best possible sacrifice in the best possible temple.

3. **THE NEW WAY**

a) *a heavenly temple* - Christ was actually in heaven itself, before God Himself (v11).

b) *the ultimate sacrifice* - The sacrifice Christ offered was Himself. In God's eyes you couldn't get a more costly or important sacrifice and for that reason the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice. No other sacrifice is ever needed again (9:25-26, 10:11-14).

4. **OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW**

It's not often we get to enjoy the very best of anything. We can never afford the best holiday package, we don't have the best job we can imagine, friendships aren't the best they could be. Yet as Christians, in the things that matter most we have nothing but the best. Christ, the best priest, offered the best sacrifice in the best temple so that we enjoy the best possible relationship with God.

Talk 9

DON'T SHRINK BACK

Hebrews 10:19-39

1. **THE LOSS OF SOMETHING VALUABLE**

Imagine buying something worth \$2000 but only paying \$20 for it. That's exactly what happened to Robert Jordan. Jordan brought a small wooden writing chest at a garage sale for \$20, only to discover it was actually a Victorian period antique. He was a happy man. But you couldn't help feeling sorry for the poor people who'd sold the chest at the garage sale. Imagine how they felt! Hebrews doesn't want us to easily give up Jesus for He is of immense value.

2. **THE SUMMARY SO FAR (v19-20)**

Those verses pretty well wrap up everything we have seen in the past 10 chapters -the idea that in Jesus we have the ultimate of everything. Jesus is the ultimate priest, offering himself as the ultimate sacrifice in the most Holy Place. Hebrews now turns to give us the application of all that theory.

3. **"LET US..."**

a) confidence in God (v22-23)

The first two "let us" phrases revolve around having confidence to approach God because of what and who we are in Christ.

b) cane for one another (v24-25)

The second cluster of "let us" phrases, shift focus to caring for one another. That's because when something is really important, we should help each other. We urge each other on at sport and we support one another in work projects. If the blessings of following Christ last all eternity, it would be scandalous if we didn't help one another to persevere in our faith.

4. **THE DANGER IF WE DON'T (v26-31)**

Christianity is not a game. You can not get anything worse than ignoring and drifting from Christ.

5. **THE JOY IF YOU DO (v32-34)**

Staying with Christ brings eternal joys which outshine any of the fleeting joys of this world.

6. **"WHERE ARE THEY NOW?" (v35-39)**

Every now and then "Who" magazine, have an edition which they call, "Where are they now?" Where will you be in 10 years time? Still playing around the fringe of a church without really getting involved? Or going on strong in your faith and helping others stay loyal to Jesus? This isn't a game. Drift from Jesus and there is no where else to go.

Talk 10

KEEPING THE FAITH

Hebrews 11:1-12:3

1. **THE POWER OF EXAMPLE**

During the 1996 Olympic games, gymnasiums and health clubs did record business. Seeing all those fit, firm bodies running round a track and swimming up and down a pool spurred 100's of Australians to get out and do some exercise. That's because seeing another person succeed somehow inspires us to succeed. This is what Hebrews 11 taps into. Hebrews 10 closed with a comparison between those who stick with Jesus through thick and thin and those who give it away when the going gets tough. Hebrews 11 is purely to motivate us (v1), to lift us above our struggles and to show us how the great ones of God have lived. There are three main ways we are to imitate them.

2. **LESSONS FROM THE FAITH HALL OF FAME**

a) faith is not an optional extra

Faith is THE characteristic way of life for those who follow God. The chapter is full of all sorts of different people. It stretches from creation in v3 through to Jesus in v12, it's got old people & young people, men & women, rich people & poor people, Jews & Gentiles. But their common link is faith. The lifestyle of faith isn't reserved for overseas missionaries and full time ministry workers. It's what every authentic Christian does. But how does faith work?

b) faith looks beyond present circumstances

Living by faith means we look beyond present circumstances. Faith looks to the future, trusts in what God will achieve in the future and then uses that perspective to shape what we do here and now (v1).

c) faith is reflected in action.

In the wake of the bomb blast at the Centennial Olympic Park, the Mayor of Atlanta, Bill Campbell, held a press conference to urge people to return to the Park when it was reopened. For a few minutes it was all talk. But then Bill Campbell said, "When the Park is reopened, I will be there with my wife and children." And he was. That was faith. He put action where his mouth was.

3. **JESUS: THE PERFECTER OF OUR FAITH**

In all this list of the great ones, there is actually one who is the greatest. One whose faith is so inspirational and so crucial for our salvation, that Hebrews talks in terms of him being the author and perfecter of faith. Jesus Christ.

4. **ARE YOU KEEPING THE FAITH?**

Are you looking beyond the here and now to the new heaven and new earth that God says is coming? Are your actions, decisions, conversations, spending patterns, pastimes and priorities

reflecting a genuine life of faith? Or are there sins that are tripping you up and entangling you?

Talk 11

GROWING BETTER NOT BITTER

Hebrews 12:4-13

1. BOB & JO-ANNE

Bob and Jo-Anne were Christians who both went through difficult times but who came out the end of them in completely different ways. Jo-Anne grew in faith and was a better Christian because of it. Bob gave up his faith and became bitter because of it. Why is that? What makes that difference? Hebrews 12 is a passage which helps us to view the problems of this life in such a way that they will cause us to grow better rather than bitter.

2. ENDURE MARDSHIP AS DISCIPLINE (v7)

"Discipline" here is meant to be taken in the sense of training, rather than punishment. Therefore v7 means to enter into the hard times of life by thinking of them as a training experience. We *are* to view our difficulties as God given opportunities to grow in maturity of faith. This is a very radical way to look at life because it assumes that the most important thing in this life is not to be happy or comfortable or fulfilled. The most important thing in this life is to know God. Future hope is more important than present happiness. When problems are seen in that context, two very positive lessons emerge.

3. POSITIVE LESSONS FROM PAIN

a) evidence of sonship (5-9)

A loving parent disciplines so that the child will grow up to be the best person they can be. Even though a child may think that it's alright to have junk food all the time because it tastes good, the parent's greater wisdom, disciplines the child to have a balanced diet. It's in this way that God gives us difficulties in our life, out of love.

b) a constructive experience (viO-11)

Not only does enduring hardship as discipline enable us to see problems as a sign of God's love. It also allows us to see problems as the opportunity for a constructive experience rather than a destructive experience.

4. "THERE IS NO FUTURE IN FRUSTRATION"

When problems come, there's no point in growing bitter and cynical. There is no value in simply complaining and blaming everyone else. When problems come endure them as discipline. We need to see them as being given to us by a loving Father so that we might be the best people we can be, so that we might be strengthened in the things that matter most - our trust in Christ.

Talk 12

DIGGING OUT BITTER ROOTS

Hebrews 12:14-13:25

1. THE UNSEEN ENEMY

I have a friend who went through the horror of serving in the Vietnam war. When he does talk about the war he always says the same thing - that the worst thing was the enemy was always unseen. Even the innocent looking situations had to be treated with caution. Living as a Christian in this world is exactly like that. Life is full of ambushes and unseen booby traps which can go off at any time, and which can start the rot which may eventually cause us to turn our backs on Jesus Christ. And so Hebrews now closes with a host of specific sins which we are urged to stay away from so as to safeguard our alliance to Jesus. The controlling thought in all this section comes right at the beginning of it (12:14-15).

2. SOME BITTER ROOTS TO AVOID

a) neglect (13:1-3,16)

Neglect can be a bitter root, which grows up to cause trouble. When someone feels overlooked, they can become cynical and overly critical. They start to only see the negatives in church and eventually they can drop, not just out of the church but far more seriously out of Christianity.

b) sexual immorality (12:15-16,13:4)

Our sexuality is a powerful force. In the right context it can bring so much pleasure and enjoyment but

in the wrong context it can absolutely demolish your Christian life. It happens time and time again and none of us are immune.

c) love of money (13:5-6)

If sexual immorality is a powerful temptation, this one is the most subtle and probably claims the most victims. The sure way to cure a love of money is to start giving it away.

d) attitude to leaders (13:7, 17)

We don't like submitting to anyone, and so the temptation is to whinge and complain about our church leaders. If you can't graciously obey, it's far better for you to find another church family where you can.

3. **A TALE OF TWO MOUNTAINS (12:18-29)**

If it was bad to miss out on the old covenant how much worse is it to miss out on this new covenant. And so at the end of this wonderful letter Hebrews calls us to action - to wake up to ourselves and to realise the importance of Jesus and to do whatever it takes to stick with him. Take drastic steps to ensure your faith is never undermined by sin.

Bryson Smith is the senior pastor of Dubbo Presbyterian Church