

Monday, August 24, 2009

I'm sure you've noticed history is being written by the moment. Even 24 hour news stations cannot keep pace with our ever changing world. Step back . . . look at the very large picture of history. Do you see God at work through all time, and can you recognize how God is working in your lifetime, in our day?

In our summer 2009 journey, one little verse has been our guiding beacon: ***“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”*** (Heb. 6:19) How is your “hope” level today? Two weeks from today is Labor Day and summer '09 will be history.

What have you found to be your greatest source of hope in your life? In the present world of terrorism, economic recession, rapidly changing political landscape, Iran and Afghanistan wars, moral decay . . . what are some of your “anchors (of hope) for the soul”?

This August, we're working our way through the book of Hebrews in the Bible. Hebrews is written mid first century to Jewish people struggling to turn from their dependence upon Judaism and its sacrificial system, Temple worship, High Priest, rule and regulations affecting every area of life . . . to Jesus Christ and His life, death and resurrection for their Salvation. “Faith in Christ” simply seems too easy. They are accustomed to living life with every aspect of life governed by Jewish laws and traditions (remember “Fiddler on the Roof?”). For those living within reasonable distance from Jerusalem, the Temple and all activities related to it cast a shadow over every aspect of daily life.

While different, modern day Muslim life may be our best visible example of how Jews in mid first century lived. Daily Prayers / special attire / rigid Sabbath observance / fasting and financial sacrifice / a very strong sense of identity distinctive from the rest of the world / confidence God's favor rests uniquely upon them as a people and not upon others / fiercely protective of their religious culture which essentially defines them as a people, etc. Does that help you understand? Do you see why it was nearly impossible for Jews to accept Jesus as their Messiah, and turn from all their traditions, rituals and laws, TO Jesus Christ for their full salvation? Look at Hebrews 4:13-16; 6:17-19 and link it with Ephesians 1 for true HOPE in Christ!

Tuesday, August 25, 2009

There are a few essential questions EVERY religion must answer. Here are some:

Who is God?

Is human relationship with God possible, and how?

What is necessary for Salvation from sin condemnation?

What happens after death?

Of course there are many others too. Three great Religions of the world trace their roots to the same place, the same great heroes and claim the same God! Judaism, Islam and Christianity all hold Jerusalem very significant / all claim God is creator of all, eternal, holy, and desiring a relationship with humanity / all view Abraham as very significant / all recognize the existence of Jesus Christ, but differ widely on who He is, what He accomplished and what His life, death and resurrection can achieve in and for us.

Our August study of Hebrews is challenging us to see Jesus Christ as the great “Anchor for our Soul” (Heb. 6:19), and also the hope for Jews, Muslims and those who pursue other religions. Hebrews 7:18-28 continues an important discussion about Jesus Christ as a unique “High Priest”. For the Jews, this person was their highest ranking spiritual leader. A modern day example might be the Pope for Catholics or significant Imam's for Muslims. His ancestry was traceable back to Aaron, Moses' brother, the first God appointed High Priest (Exodus 28,29). His role was clear . . . he represented the people before God, and was responsible to lead them in being God's chosen, holy people. In the nation of Israel, he was one of the three most significant persons . . . High Priest, King and Prophet, each with their unique role in leading the nation.

But, everyone knew he was fallible, and regularly had to make sacrifice and prayer for his own sin. He became sick and died just like any other person, and then needed replacing. Too often the High Priest was less than ethical and succumbed to selfish temptation of pride, power, etc. However, Jesus Christ, the ultimate High Priest, was perfect in every way and since He rose from the dead, never to die again, is able to fulfill every aspect of High Priest forever! Hebrews invites all religions who have human “priests” to consider Jesus Christ as the final, God appointed Priest who annuls all priests in every religion. Do you see why? Consider Heb. 1:1-4; 2:14-3:6; 4:14-5:9; 7:23-8:6.

Wednesday, August 26, 2009

In our modern world “agreements” are signed daily . . . business deals, wedding certificates, home purchase, car loans, medical consent forms, even international political agreements. Have you considered what a “covenant” might look like with God?? Did you know there are several in the Bible?

God initiated “covenant agreements” with mankind going all the way back to the beginning. In the garden of Eden, God's covenant with Adam and Eve was simple . . . life would be perfect, as long as they didn't eat the fruit of ONE tree (Gen. 2:16,17). Why do “covenants” like that cause us to hunger for the forbidden? We all know what happened . . . we live in the shadow of evil, the result of their rejection of God's conditional covenant with them. They failed the condition.

God's second covenant was an unconditional one made with Noah, remember? Genesis 9:8-17 ***“I establish My covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood . . .”*** The rainbow is the sign of God's commitment to His unconditional promise protecting us from such a global flood.

God's covenant with Abraham was multi-faceted. He promised to bless this old, childless man with a miracle son from whom would come an entire nation of people (Gen. 15). Isaac was that son. Ishmael, you'll recall, was the result of a dysfunctional plan by Abraham, Sarah and Hagar to “help God” produce the child, and the Arab nations trace their heritage to Ishmael, thus the “Arab-Israeli” conflict began in Abraham's tent as sibling rivalry. God also promised Abraham a land (Canaan) for this miracle nation (Gen. 15:18-21), and then established a permanent sign, circumcision, for this covenant between God and this special nation of people (Gen. 17).

God's covenant with His people at Mount Sinai begins in Exodus 19:5, continues through the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, the social laws of Ex. 21-23, the worship specifics of Ex. 25-30 and concludes with Sabbath! The ‘blood of the covenant’ (Ex. 24:8) ratified this nation defining covenant. Hebrews 7:22-8:13 speaks of a “better covenant” between God and ALL mankind, through Jesus Christ!! Yes, God is offering you and me a new covenant relationship! Are you living it?

Thursday, August 27, 2009

Have you ever noticed the number of books or movies which seem fascinated with time travel? Why do we rarely enjoy “today” and are constantly either longing for the “good old days” or anticipating better days ahead? In a sense, the Bible is a “time travel” experience, isn’t it? As we read it, we travel through time in both directions (past and future), with God leading us as our travel host! (think about that a moment)

Hebrews 7:18-8:9 is a powerful “time travel” statement from God regarding the timeless nature of Jesus Christ as our ultimate High Priest. **“The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless”!** The author is speaking of the Covenant God made with Moses and His people at Mount Sinai, which I wrote about yesterday. He is declaring it no longer valid, worse he says it was “weak and useless”! WOW! Remarkable but true.

Do you understand that all those complicated laws, regulations, commandments, and the entire sacrificial system had one primary purpose . . . to help the people realize it is impossible to live a perfect life, that sin separates us from Holy God, that sin is so serious God views it as death to our relationship with Him and nothing we could ever do can restore that relationship! In other words . . . we live just as hopeless in our bondage to sin as those Hebrew slaves lived in bondage to Pharaoh and his Egyptian slave drivers! YES . . . the entire story of the Exodus is a PICTURE of you and me in our hopeless bondage, only rescued by our complete trust in the blood of the Passover Lamb (Jesus Christ), and the powerful deliverance work of God taking us out of bondage to Satan, sin and death, and delivering us to live in restored relationship with God (like they did at the mountain and with God’s Presence among them).

Notice **“Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant”** (Heb. 7:22). Jesus IS the guarantee, because this new covenant available to us with God is ONLY available through Him, and once we trust Him to be our Savior, because He lives forever (7:24), He guarantees our covenant relationship will never be broken by us, by God or by Satan!! **“Therefore He is able to save COMPLETELY those who come to God through Him . . . ”** (Heb.7:25) Are you “saved completely”? How was your salvation accomplished?

Friday, August 28, 2009

In our consumer oriented world, we are accustomed to having many options for any decision we have to make. We bristle if we sense one brand or company has a “monopoly” in the market, right? The American way is open and fair competition. So . . . how many roads lead to God? How many different methods of Salvation are there available to you and all of us? Which Salvation method is the most “cost effective”, gives you the “highest return on investment”, has earned the most accolades?

This is absolutely critical friends . . . your life depends on it, your eternal destiny depends on it! Salvation is not multiple choice, nor is it a round robin tournament, nor is it a democracy! Salvation is God’s plan, designed and defined by God. If you work too hard to “filter” it or “re-shape” it to be what you want, you likely will miss it completely! **“Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him . . . ”** (Heb. 7:25)

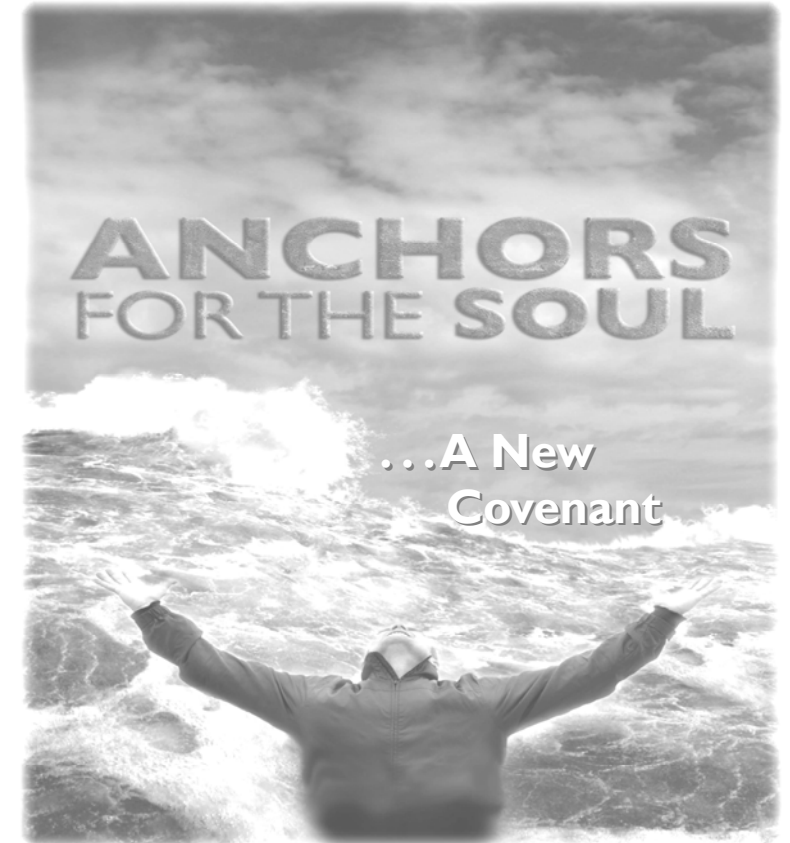
I am amazed at the confusion, even in good churches like ours, among good people like us, about God-designed, Jesus-accomplished Salvation! Hebrews is all about making sure we get it right. Hebrews and Romans and the words of Jesus make it unmistakably clear. Let’s be very, very clear on this . . .

- * Everyone is a sinful person, (Rom. 3:23) the result of your sin is separation from God (Rom. 6:23) and if you die without salvation, you spend eternity in your sin separated from God (John 8:24).
- * Jesus Christ is fully God in human flesh (John 1:14), He lived a perfect life, thus His sacrificial death on the cross was atonement payment for the sins of anyone who would trust Him to be their Savior (1 John 4:9,10; Rom. 5).
- * Jesus Christ is the ONLY provision God has made for Salvation from sin and restoration of a relationship with Him, and eternal life with Him (Acts 4:12; John 14:6; John 3:16-18).
- * Salvation is a work ENTIRELY accomplished in the repentant sinner by God Himself. We can do NOTHING to save ourselves or add to God’s saving work (Ephesians 2:1-9; Hebrews 5:9; 7:25).
- * Our part in our salvation is this: we admit to God we are sinful (confession), we turn from our sin to God (repentance), we believe God’s truth and we fully trust Jesus’ atonement to be enough for God to save us!

May I urge you to be SURE you are saved by God’s definition of Salvation? Are you? (Rom.10:9; 2 Peter 3:9; Acts 10:43; Rom.4:5)

Pastor Doug Anderson

August 24 - 28, 2009



Verse of the Week

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“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul,
firm and secure . . .” (Heb. 6:19)*



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