

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of June 2018

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Seven Surprises

Per S Olyott

(Review of last time) -

In the past few weeks, we've seen our Lord spending time with His disciples, in the 'upper room'. He has washed their feet and explained many wonderful things to them, looking to the future. Our Lord had the 'last supper' with 'the Twelve'. But one, Judas, has left - and it was night! Later Jesus left the upper room with the 11 and walked through the streets. Again He spoke to them about the future, using the 'picture' of the vine and the branches. Teaching them valuable lessons. Then whilst they were there in the street, our Lord stopped, lifted up his eyes to heaven and in the presence of His disciples, He prayed the most marvellous prayer, which the world has ever heard.

He went to the Garden of Gethsemane: there He was arrested; through the night there were many trials. Mockery of trials! There was not a speck of justice in it. The Jews broke many of their own laws, trying to bring some charge against the Lord Jesus Christ.

We read last week of His crucifixion. His burial and how two secret disciples came out of their secrecy, taking the body of Christ to a sepulchre – a cave in a mountain side used as a grave. When the body had been placed there a stone was rolled across the entrance. That was Friday evening.

The Sabbath came – it starts on Friday evening. Nobody did anything! All day Saturday everybody was very quiet. It was a special (high) Sabbath – two Sabbaths – one Ceremonial – coincided on that day.

Now we read in John chapter 20 what took place on Sunday morning:

The first day of the week. About 2000 years ago.

We consider both Chapter 20 and 21 together under the title “Seven Surprises”.

- Surprise #1. Verses 1-2:

It's early! And it's still dark, Sabbath is over – it ended on the Saturday at sunset. It will soon be dawn. In that dark, fearful place – putting her fears aside, comes Mary Magdalene – out of whom Christ cast seven demons. (cf Mark 16:9) She comes up to the sepulchre – and it's surprise number 1! The stone that had been rolled over the cave mouth. Wasn't there!

She must have looked in, but it was dark – she couldn't see very well. She turns round and runs, back to Simon Peter. And as we read in verse 2 – *Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved*, – which is John of course, who is writing this Gospel.

She runs back as fast as she can to Peter and John: she says, *“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”* The body's gone. We don't know where they have taken Him! Surprise #1:

The grave was empty!

- Surprise #2, Verses 3-10:

The grave clothes were undisturbed! We have now the almost amusing sight of Peter and John, running as fast as they can to the tomb. Peter is the older – perhaps 'middle age' is starting to effect him. John is still much younger. He outruns Peter. He arrives at the grave mouth. It's still quite dark!

What would you do? Don't be too hard on John. He's afraid to go in. Peter when he arrives – that impetuous Peter – he goes straight in. Then John follows him. We read, surprise number 2: verse 6. The grave clothes were undisturbed
⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus'[a] head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;
...

When they buried the dead, they didn't use shrouds. They weren't in use in that day and place. They wound cloths – like bandages – round the body and in between the layers were various spices. Some remaining solid and some soaked into the bandages. In order to preserve the body. But they only bound the bandages up to the neck. Then they wound – like a turban – separately, the head.

Our Lord would have been laid on a shelf (carved from the rock) in these grave clothes. When they go in they see the linen cloths 'lying'. And the cloths which had been about His head, wrapped¹ up in a separate place. The cloths used to bind the head were still together in this turban shape. And the cloths used to bind the body were just lying where they would have been when around His body – just lying or collapsed in place. Not discarded and strewn around as a grave robbing would have caused.

Our Lord has left the grave clothes, in which He was wrapped, but they have remain in place and undisturbed. The body has gone. The cloths are like a cocoon which has collapsed. The grave clothes are completely undisturbed but the body has gone!

When John saw that: he believed! As yet he had not recognised the Scripture that said that Christ must rise from the dead. He didn't understand the Old Testament well enough to see that it did teach, that when the Messiah came, He would rise from the dead. For some reason none of the disciples had listened to and understood Christ's many predictions that 'after three days He would rise again'. But when John saw those grave clothes, completely undisturbed, he knew that no body could have wriggled out of them. No one could have unwrapped himself and then wrapped them up again. The body had passed through the clothes and was gone. The grave cloths were undisturbed.

¹ It is the word *entetuligmenon* (ἐντετυλιγμένον), which means 'wrapped up' or 'wound round'. And of great interest in this context is that it is exactly the same verb that Matthew (27:59) and Luke (23:53) use to describe how Joseph of Arimethea prepared the body for burial: he wrapped it round with grave clothes.

It's important to stress that what had occurred was resurrection! Resuscitation, by contrast, is coming back to **this** life. Resurrection is being raised to the power of an **endless life**.

Jesus had brought others back to this life: the daughter; the son; and significantly (after four days) Lazarus. After the rest of their earthly lives these all departed this life permanently. But Jesus' resurrection (the 'sign and seal' of the eventual resurrection of believers) was to another life. Jesus' resurrected body was different. One of the powers that He possessed was to be able to pass through, what we call solid objects and leave them undisturbed.

We shall see that again shortly as this Gospel concludes, where on two occasions our Lord appears in rooms where the doors are locked.

His resurrected body – being a spiritual body. It was a real body – you could touch it, but it was a body capable of moving in the spiritual dimension, by being able to pass through what we call physical objects.

Surprise number 2 (and an immense surprise for them all), **the grave clothes were undisturbed** and the body was gone.

- Surprise #3 is in verses 11-18:

The Lord was seen!

Peter and John went back to where they had been staying. Mary Magdalene is now back at the tomb. The Lord has gone. Peter and John don't seem to have explained what they had seen to her. Her Lord has gone. That's all she knows. She was coming to put more embalming on the body. The body's gone. She's crying. She looks into the tomb. There are angels sitting there. One at the head and one at the feet of where the body of Jesus had been. They ask her why she is weeping. She's almost off hand with them: *“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”* Often, in Scripture, when people saw angels they fell down. Being overcome by the sight. Mary though has only one thing in her mind: Christ's body has gone!

Now here is Jesus standing beside her. She doesn't know it's Jesus she supposes it's the gardener. Because they were in a garden she supposes he was the person who tended that garden. It may be that she didn't recognise Jesus because of her tears, but also there was something different about the physical appearance of Christ after the resurrection, so that you couldn't see who it was without spiritual enlightenment. He had a body capable of moving in a spiritual dimension.

Eventually Jesus speaks to her: “Mary.” It was that one word. Her own name, spoken by the lips of the Son of God, which clears her understanding and she 'sees'. Imagine that! Her heart broken, her mind completely occupied with one thing: “They've taken away my Lord's body.” But now standing beside her is that Lord! *“Rabboni!”* (which means Teacher), she says. She goes to embrace Him,

but He says, “*Do not cling to me, ...*” (Not, “Don't touch me at all.”) “I've a message I want you to take to my brothers.”

What a marvellous way He describes His disciples. “... *say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'*”

(Of course God is His Father in a different way than God is our Father)

She hurries back to the assembled group of disciples and tells them that she's seen the Lord.

Now there is something of the grace of the Gospel. Here's a woman whose been despised for years. She was possessed with demons. The Lord had delivered from that. But people don't let you forget your past. Yet it is this woman who has been despised, generally speaking, in public, who sees the Lord first. Isn't Christ kind!

Surprise number 3: **Christ was seen.**

- Surprise #4 verses 19-23:

It's Sunday evening. There should be 11 disciples gathered. But there are only ten. We don't know why Thomas wasn't there. The doors were locked! “If they crucified Christ.” think the disciples, “we're His disciples: it's most likely they will be after us.”

While they're there in fear ... Jesus comes and appears to them.

Surprise number 4 is that the absent Lord appeared.

His first words: “Peace.” Marvellous again! Our Lord had been in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. He said, “Peace.” And the storm stopped at once. The same thing happened in that little room that night. Their hearts were filled with terror and our Lord said, “*Peace be with you.*” Their tears were taken away. Here they were in the presence of Christ and they could see Him. He shows them His hands and His side.

There's a spirit of gladness now in the room. *Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.* Everything is different: Christ is alive! He is present with His people. No doubts because they can see Him and the marks of crucifixion and the marks of the spear.

They hear His word again. It's not the end. It's the beginning! “... *the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*” He says.

Then, He said something that people have squabbled over, for 2000 years: verses 22 & 23. ²² *And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.* (Because for nearly six weeks the Lord was to appear and disappear and they wouldn't come into the full blessing of Pentecost for a while yet.) They needed supernatural strengthening until then. He gave this to them as He breathed on them in that moment. They were strong from that moment. The next time they met, although they were still behind locked doors,

there was no mention of 'fear of the Jews'.

He went on to say, verse 23: ²³ *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.*”

Some people think that this gave to the Apostles the power of the Priest – so that they could absolve people from their sins. That they could forgive anybody they pleased or hold back forgiveness from anybody they pleased. **That can't possibly be what our Lord meant!** Our Lord has made it plain throughout this Gospel, that whoever calls upon **Him** will be forgiven their sins, and whoever stays as he is will remain unforgiven. Our Lord had repeated it again and again. Whoever comes to the Saviour will receive pardon and everlasting life and whoever doesn't come to the Saviour will be lost and damned and punished.

So how could our Lord now, give to these disciples, the power to forgive sins and the power to retain sins?

What was meant, of course, was this: That these Apostles were His appointed messengers. If they held the message of the Gospel – the only message through which people are saved – to themselves then one thing would result. If they gave out the Gospel to others something else would result. It was the *message* of forgiveness that was in their hands.

Nobody would ever have been forgiven, unless the Apostles went out with the message of the Gospel. Nobody would ever be forgiven if they kept the Gospel message to themselves. Therefore the whole issue of whether anybody would ever be forgiven or nobody was forgiven in a very real sense was in the Apostles' hands. Remember he has already said: *As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*” *This occurred as the 4th surprise: when the **absent Lord** (from the grave) **appeared**.*

Now this special commission was given to the Apostles when there was no other source of hearing the Gospel. It was they who had been given the task and the Spirit lead ability to commit it to writing – the New Testament.

Disciples today (you and I) don't have the special powers of the Apostles, but instead there is the Word and the Spirit together which contain and enable the message of the Gospel to be effective in the lives of those today who were specifically (by name) given by the Father to the Son before the world began. But the normal 'means' by which the Word is introduced to potential believers (firstly in our own families) is by our witness and invitation .

Don't just hold the message of the Gospel to (for) yourself. Give it to others!

[2394]

May this be the case for all the saints gathered here today.

Surprises # 5 - 7 next week.

Seven Surprises – Pt 2

Per S Olyott

(Review of last time) -

So far 4 surprises: an empty grave; undisturbed grave clothes; a Lord who's been seen; and an absent Lord who appears,

The next week after these events was surprise #5, verse 24 onwards,

The invisible Lord: overheard.

Previously when the 10 were together and saw Thomas they said to him, "You don't know what you just missed! The Lord was there. We saw Him. We spoke to Him. We actually saw the crucifixion marks; in His hands. The mark of the spear in His side. We've just seen Christ, Thomas!"

But he wouldn't believe: *"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."* He was adamant. He did not believe. It was like a 'fairy tale'.

But the next Sunday evening, they were all together: eleven of them.

The doors were locked but not from any sign of fear. Surely Thomas must have noticed the change in them! Here again our Lord appears. *"Peace be with you."*

²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

Oh Thomas! He had spoken words to only ten other people, but they had been overheard by the Resurrected Christ. Thomas had spoken words that nobody else had overheard, but Christ had heard. And now they were being given back to Him.

We can be sure that ever afterwards, Thomas keep a very close watch on his lips. Knowing whatever He said, Christ heard it. He's the silent listener to every conversation.² Thomas now knew that the day would come, when every word he had ever spoken would be repeated to him again.

But at this present moment as he sees Christ, he doesn't reach forward his finger, he doesn't thrust his hand into the side. He knows that it is true. His doubts have been conquered. His unbelief has been dispelled. He falls down at Christ's feet and uses two lovely words. There are two great words for God in the Old Testament, and he uses both of them: My LORD and my God.³ What David had said of Yahweh, Thomas says of Jesus. Jesus is Yahweh.

Note that Jesus didn't say to Thomas: "Don't you dare say that to me!" If the JW's are

² *And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)

³ **Κύριός** (Kyrios) – LORD and **Θεός** (Theos) – God

correct. (If they are.) That's what Jesus should have said. Jesus should have said: "Thomas! I will not be spoken to as LORD, or God. But the so called Jehovah Witnesses ARE NOT right! When Thomas used those two lovely words: my LORD and my GOD, Jesus says, that now Thomas really was a believer. He believed because he had seen, but there are others even more blessed, who have believed without seeing.

You aren't a believer unless you believe in the LORD-ship and GOD-ship of Jesus Christ. The essence of being a Christian is that you can say to the resurrected Christ: "My LORD and my God". That's what being a Christian is in its most simple way of putting it.

So an **invisible Lord who overhears**. Two more surprises to come.

The first 14 verses of Chapter 21: **the Power of the Lord was seen again.**

Three and a half years earlier, Jesus was pressed in upon by a great crowd. They wanted to hear His words. So He goes into a boat, close to shore, and preached to them from there, so as to be heard and not crushed by the crowd. He uses Simon Peter's boat. When the sermon is over He says, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets. You'll have a great catch!" (Luke 5:1-11)

Peter says, "We've toiled all night! But nevertheless: you've commanded it we'll do it."

They let down the nets. Drew them up again. The nets were so full they were being damaged. Back, those three and a half years ago, Peter had said, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*" He hadn't seen a great deal at that time but, he had felt overcome with a sense of his sin. His shame was such that he had to ask Christ to go away from him. It was really the time of his conversion.

Now they are back at that shore where that previous miracle had taken place. When they are not far from shore there is someone calling to them from the shore. "Have you caught anything?" They have toiled all night and caught nothing. "Try the right side of the ship!" Like before the catch is huge but this time, miraculously, the nets aren't damaged. Then someone (John) is caused to recognise that it is Christ. Good old Peter there at verse 7: when he hears from John that it is the Lord, while he is 'stripped for work', he puts on his fisherman's coat and jumps in (as usual) to reach the Lord. He gets to shore first! That very man who said a few days before that he had never heard of Christ. But he can't keep away! He wants to be as near to Christ as possible. The fishing, even that marvellous catch, means nothing any more.

Those still on the boat struggle to get its haul of fish to the shore. When they arrive Jesus has a fire going and breakfast is being prepared. "*Come and have breakfast.*" He invites.

They look at Him but none of them dares to say, "Who is it?" They know it's the Lord. But why should they, in their hearts, want to say, "Who is it?"

There is something different about the physical appearance of Christ. They knew it was Christ without being able to recognise Him physically with their eyes. They knew it was Christ through their spiritual perception.

The Apostle Paul tells us that nobody now recognises Christ in a physical way⁴. The only way anybody ever recognises Christ now is spiritually. And that was true even then when He was physically visible in this post-resurrection period of 40 days.

People today can be acquainted with all the facts about Jesus Christ. But still don't see who He is. All the facts which we have. We know who He is. We can't understand how they can miss it. It seems so obvious to us! The explanation is that it is necessary for God to bring the necessary spiritual perception: the 'new birth'; conversion; the heart of flesh rather than the heart of stone. All these ways of describing this work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.

So the **Lord's power is shown again**. That wonderful haul of fish. When He was crucified no doubt at first they had said to them selves, "It's all over. We'll never see those wonderful miracles He did, again." But He does. And much much more! Even through the hands of these very Apostles. Such miracles to demonstrate that they (only) were His special messengers. By whose writing or superintendence the New Testament became the normal means of God's continuing revelation and call of the Gospel to the elect.

Perhaps the most surprising surprise, especially to Peter, was the seventh: verses 15 – 24. The **Word of the Lord heard again**.

Jesus takes Simon Peter aside on his own. The conversation went like this:

Verse 15, Jesus says:

"Simon, son of John, do you love [ἀγαπᾷς (agapas)⁵ – love you] me?"

He said, "Yes Lord you know that I love [φιλῶ (philō) – I have affection for] you. Peter couldn't say he loved Christ in the same way, because he knew how badly he had let Christ down. He did love Christ with all his heart. He wanted to be with Christ. Christ was every thing to him, but he couldn't presume to say he loved him because of his sense of shame. So he says in effect, "Yes, Lord you know that I like you."

The Lord is very compassionate, and makes it plain even to this 'failure' that there is work to be done in the future. There are such things as spiritual lambs to be tended. A great sense of consolation for those in Christian work to know that the tending of lambs and the feeding of sheep is in the hands of failures. Jesus said, "Feed (tend) my lambs."

Verse 16, Jesus repeats the same question, receiving the same answer. But this time He goes on to say, "Feed (tend) my sheep." Not just the new (young) converts but those who are a little more mature in Christian things.

Verse 17:

"Simon, son of John, do you Love [φιλεῖς (phileis) – have you affection for] me?
– Do you like me?"

Now Peter's heart is breaking because the third time Jesus asks, He doesn't say, "Do you love me?", but in effect, "Do you like me?"

4 1 Corinthians 2:14 & 2 Corinthians 5:16

5 See the chart which shows the Greek used – all 6 cases translated as the English word 'love'.

“Oh. You know everything”, he says, “You know that I like You!”
Jesus again says, “You feed (tend) my sheep.”

That was a healing word from Christ to show him that there is future work for failures. The great message of the resurrection. You may look back over your Christian Life (long or still developing) – there are so many times when you have let the Lord down. You doubt your value to Christ. That's the Christ that takes you aside on your own; speaks a personal word to you; draws out from you that passionate response: that you really do love Him. Even though you can't put it into words because of your sense of shame. He reads the heart and He does have work for you to do. This is the Gospel. The Gospel doesn't write off failures, if these failures come sincerely to Christ.

Now a further surprising thing Jesus says to Peter: ¹⁸ *Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.* ¹⁹ *(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”*

Earlier Peter had boasted that He would die for Jesus, but had failed at the first hurdle. But now this prophesy was assuring him that he would have the privilege to be martyred for Christ.

Verse 20:

Then Peter looks over and sees John nearby. “Well Lord what's going to happen to him?”

“Even if it were my will that he should remain alive until I come again. It's none of your business.” “You are to follow me!”

That caused a rumour to spread around the Church. By the time he was writing the Gospel, John was old – but still vital enough to write this; three letters; and the Revelation. However people were saying that John would live on. So as he brings his Gospel to a close he dispels that rumour.

So John concludes with his personal testimony and affirmation: Verse 24

²⁴ *This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.*

“When I write of all these things: – the seven surprises we have just detailed last week and this week – I'm only writing of what I've heard and seen myself!”

“Well John. Why didn't you tell us more?”

Look at the very last verse of the Gospel: John knew if he were to tell you more he wouldn't be able to stop.

²⁵ *Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*

Just think if everybody who ever met Christ were to write a book – in the finest detail – told you everything they knew of Him and had happened to them. There's no library or group of libraries in the whole world that could contain the books that would have to be written.

If everybody who has met Christ since and had their lives changed by Christ since, having come to know God since. Had their sins pardoned through Christ since ...

“Well, John if you can't write everything, why did you write the things that you did write?”

Go back to the end of Chapter 20:

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

So after these many months that we have been studying John's Gospel, we ask the question: Are you now clear on the identity of Christ? Do you now have life through His Name? Are you clear as to who He is? Are you clear as to what He has done? Then. Have you come to Him and found Him to be all that He said He would be.

[2226]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

ἀγαπᾶς (agapas) love you;	φιλῶ (philō) I have affection for
-	
ἀγαπᾶς (agapas) love you;	φιλῶ (philō) I have affection for
φιλεῖς (phileis) have you affection for(x2);	φιλῶ (philō) I have affection for

Delivered Sunday 17th June 2018

Hebrews

Hebrews – Overview

(The Sermon today will be a presentation of the Bible Project Video: **Hebrews.**)

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

□

Hebrews 1:1-9

Hebrews – Introduction

per S Olyott

We cast our attention back to AD 65. This is about 35 years after the Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ; His Resurrection; numerous appearances; Ascension; and the special coming, sent by Him, of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers at Pentecost.

Many Christian Churches have grown in the known world - the Mediterranean region, and even beyond. There are some who were alive 35 years before and were eye witnesses of the miraculous events, even a few Apostles. But the majority are second generation believers, who received their faith through the regeneration of their 'hearts of stone' to 'hearts of flesh' by God, the Spirit; and the preaching of the Gospel by those original Apostles and their disciples. The Temple still exists in Jerusalem. Its days are numbered. There are hints in this letter that it will be gone very soon. (AD 70 after the insurrection of the Jews from AD 66.)

This letter to the Hebrews, was written and sent to a particular type of Christian Church. One which was composed of members who were Jews by birth, in the first instance. And then for instruction and admonition to all Churches since – right up to us here today.

It is possible that the particular church was in Jerusalem – because of the references to the Temple. But equally the church could be in Rome – since in verse 24 of the final chapter greetings are sent from “those in Italy”.

The initial purpose was to revive a church or churches who had lost impetus in their Christian growth and practice. They were not in a good condition. We shall see later in the letter some of the things that were going wrong. They had become 'luke warm'. The first flush of their acceptance of Christ had dimmed. Their faith is in danger of petering out. Some don't even bother to come to church (Chapter 10). Those who do bother don't take much interest in the preaching. They don't 'give earnest heed to it'. All are prone to discouragement. They should have been teachers of the Christian faith by now, but instead they show so very little interest in growing in the Christian faith that they haven't even mastered the ABC of Christianity. They need to be told and re-told all the basic things all over again as we shall see in Chapter 5.

They have been through persecution and with-stood it, so far. But chapter 10 shows they were beginning to weaken. A reason for this was that at that time in the Roman Empire to be a follower of the Jewish religion was tolerated. It was legal but Christianity was not. “Wouldn't it be better”, these Jews were thinking, “to give up this Christianity and return to Judaism. After all, the persecution would be over?” (For now!) Far less trouble. Much easier. To a church like this comes this letter.

Early Church tradition attributes this letter to Paul. But nowhere in it, is this stated. There are many characteristics of the way it is written that are consistent with Paul's other letters:

- affinities in the language,

- Paul always has the work of Christ and His Glorious Person central in his mind,
- Paul knew Timothy (see 13:23),
- Paul often 'signed off' his letters with “Grace be with you all”.

Some can make the case for Apollos (under Paul's superintendence) or Aquila or Philip the Deacon or Clement of Rome. So we don't know. One thing we do know is that the early Church wouldn't have accepted it into the Canon, if it had not been written by an Apostle or someone under the close supervision and influence of an Apostle.

However for once we may agree with a statement of the early Church commentator, Origen, that: “God alone knows who wrote this Epistle (letter)”.

The purpose of the letter is clear:

Years ago when Doreen and I lived in a country town that was renowned for its cold nights and days, we had a wood fire in the lounge that moderated the whole house. The fire would be stoked with wood at night and by morning it would have burnt down to embers covered with ash. It looked like it was out! But there under the ash there were still some glowing embers. That could burst into life again if some more fuel were added and the embers fanned with a flow of air. Otherwise the fire would very soon be really dead.

The recipients of this letter were in a Church that seemed dead. But there was still a spark. They needed to be refuelled and re-energised. And so do many – dare I say most – churches today.

The letter to the Hebrews seeks to rekindle the 'fire' of a congregation in two ways:

- Through teaching (1:1 to 10:18) with 7 'suggestions' of the form “ ..take heed.” interspersed throughout, and
- exhortation of the form “... having therefore ... let us ...” (10:19 to the end).

In the process one's understanding of spiritual things is enhanced.

As we study this letter in the coming months we will find it useful to look out for certain things: Key words; Concepts, and Contrasts.

- Key Words:
BETTER – Christ is better than the old Prophets; angels, Moses, Joshua, Aaron, Old Covenant (with its Sacrifices, promises and prospects); PERFECT;
ETERNAL; PARTAKER; HEAVENLY; BLOOD; FAITH; SACRIFICE; COVENANT;
SON; HIGH PRIEST; MINISTRY; LOVE.
- Concepts:
Person of Christ – who He is;
Work of Christ – what He does;
Relation of the Old Testament to the New;
Unbelief – why it is sinful
Disobedience;
Why God tests Christians;
What are the 'marks' of a mature Christian,
- Contrasts:
What is the difference between the Son of God and an angel of God?

... Son of God and Moses His Servant?
... Canaan's rest⁶ and God's rest?
... Aaron the High Priest and Christ the High Priest?
How to distinguish: spiritual infancy from spiritual maturity.
... Apostasy and Perseverance.
... the Old Testament Offerings and the Offering of Christ.
... Faith and 'sight'.
... Mt Sinai and Mt Zion.

This letter can clarify questions you may have or will occur as we proceed with the study:

- Do you need to understand the place of the Old Testament in God's unfolding Revelation of Himself and His plan of Salvation for a 'fallen' world? The best commentary of the Old Testament (of any part of the Bible) is the Bible itself. In this case that is Hebrews.
- Do you want to understand Old Testament: History; fulfilled Prophecy; and the Old Testament institutions of Worship – which are Types which point forward to Christ, in that He is the ultimate sacrifice for sin; the true High priest that lives for ever and the one and only Mediator between God and Man?
- Are you confused about what Jesus Christ is doing now? You may be clear on what He has done. But what about what He is doing now?
We will learn what Christ's 'Session' and His intercession is, now that He is seated at the right hand of the Father and why this is vital.
Just as Yahweh brought His People out of the wilderness to the Promised Land, the Lord Jesus guides us through this life: supplying our needs; protecting us from our enemies; chastening us when necessary; and certainly bringing us into God's promised rest!
- Do you sometimes get tired of the Christian Life? The reasons can be:
 - being a professor but not a possessor (have the right words but not grasping – taking hold of – the New Testament promises);
 - already in a backsliding condition;
 - tempted to turn away from the simple faith in Jesus;
 - playing down the Glory of Jesus; or
 - wanting to compare other religions favourably with the Gospel.

Reading Hebrews, with attention, can satisfy these needs. It shows to you the folly of going back to your former life. It re-emphasises the unspeakable blessings, which are found in Jesus Christ, but are not found anywhere else.

The great theme of the letter is "Consider Him!" The antidote to all spiritual ill is a greater view of Christ. It's a panacea – a medicine that cures all spiritual trouble. That is why the epistle concentrates on holding up the Lord Jesus Christ. It does it from the beginning to the end. As you read you will see Christ in His Glory and dignity. You'll see the beauty of His person. The importance of His finished work. You will see Him in all the pages of this letter.

⁶ An alternative name for the temporal Sabbath rest, and the 'rest' of the wanderers when they finally arrived in the 'promised land' with Joshua.

Even after a few verses you will stand back in awe and wonder at the magnificence of Christ. His Deity. His Humanity. His Sacrificial work. His Priestly office. His Kingly reign. It's all here! As you study Hebrews you will really come to know the Lord Jesus Christ by the end, better than you knew Him at the beginning. Your spiritual ills will begin to recover.

How awful it is to see a Christian 'looking over their shoulder', to the things that they left behind. A wistful look – half wishing they had never turned their back on the world. That they were back there with everybody else. They half regret that they ever set out to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

None of us are immune from these dangers. From the threat of 'luke warmness'. And even from the threat of apostasy. That's why we need to be serious about our study of Hebrews:

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full on His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.” (Rejoice 532)

This introduction has the purpose of stirring our appetite for the letter so we begin –

How could such a letter open? It tells us 4 things. They are, in brief, the themes of the whole letter.

1. The fact of a divine revelation. Verse 1 ... *God spoke* ... in the past, and verse 2 ... *he has spoken*

There is a God! The first verse declares it. There is no need to prove it. The conscience of every human knows it. The heart of every believer believes it. And we know what God is like. Because as the epistle announces, God has spoken. The truth is: not that man has discovered God. The truth is that God has revealed Himself. He's made Himself known.

From this is stressed the greatest duty of the human race: the greatest duty of the human race is, not to wonder, nor speculate, nor to dispute, nor to philosophise, nor to guess! These methods can never come up with the truth. The greatest duty of the human race is to listen and to obey.

Your duty is not to ask: “.How can these things be?”

Your simple duty, in your mortal life, is to ask, “What has God said?”

The epistle commences with the fact of divine revelation. **God has spoken.**

2. The reality of the Old Testament as a divine revelation (beginning at verse 1). *God spoke to our fathers*, that is in time past, *long ago*. But He didn't speak all at once: ... *at many times* ...
God didn't suddenly announce everything He wanted us to know all at once. The

Old Testament revelation is a progressive revelation.

God said something. Then He was silent. Then He spoke again. Silence. Then again ... Through the long centuries He told more, and more, and more

So we are learning of the reality of the Old Testament as a divine revelation – a divine disclosure-- but a progressive one.

Nor did he always speak in the same way. Still in verse 1: *...and in many ways,*
...

Sometimes He spoke directly in an audible voice; by writing with His own finger; through visions; God's Spirit came upon a person so that their thoughts were God's thoughts; and other different ways.

Yet as one 'word' followed another it was always an incomplete revelation. Still more to come. Abraham hears God speak. Years later Moses speaks, then David and many people afterwards. Each time nobody knew if it were the last time God was going to speak or not. They were always open to the point that God may speak again.

That tells us more about the Old Testament: it's a progressive revelation; it's a varied revelation; but what is most important to the purpose of the epistle is that the Old Testament does not contain every thing that God has to say.

You can see now why the epistle is starting this way. These people of Jewish background were being tempted to give up Christianity and go back to Judaism. But they are being told right at the beginning that if they go back to an Old Testament religion, they go back to an incomplete revelation. God has truly spoken and some of it is in the Old Testament. But that is not all that He has to say! (But nevertheless we should not ignore the Old Testament!)

Next week we continue to explore the first 4 verses, to find that Christ completes the revelation of God and that Christ is greater than everything else.

[2229]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.