

LENT 2026

Reading our way through the
Letter to the Hebrews

FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS



**Wednesday 18 February to
Sunday 29 March**

The Letter to the Hebrews

General Introduction

It could be argued that “The Letter to the Hebrews” is one of the most theologically rich and stylistically sophisticated books in the New Testament. Unlike most New Testament epistles, it does not begin with a standard greeting or identify its author, which has led to centuries of debate about its origins. The book is often categorised as a sermon or homily in epistolary form, blending exposition, exhortation, and pastoral care.

To Whom Was Hebrews Written?

The title “To the Hebrews” suggests that the letter was addressed to Jewish Christians, likely a community familiar with the Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) and Jewish traditions. Several clues within the text support this:

- The extensive use of Old Testament quotations, especially from the Psalms and the Pentateuch.
- The emphasis on Jesus as the fulfilment of Jewish institutions, such as the priesthood, sacrifices, and the covenant.
- Warnings against apostasy and a return to Judaism, indicating that the audience may have been facing persecution or social pressure to abandon their Christian faith.

The exact location of the recipients is unknown, but many scholars suggest Alexandria, or a community in Palestine. The reference to “those from Italy” sending greetings (Hebrews 13:24) has led others to propose Rome as the destination.

Why Was Hebrews Written?

The letter’s purposes are primarily pastoral and exhortative:

1. Encouragement in Persecution: The audience appears to be experiencing hardship, possibly persecution, and the author urges them to remain faithful to Christ (Hebrews 10:32–36; 12:1–13).

2. Theological Instruction: The author presents Jesus as superior to all Old Testament figures and institutions—angels, Moses, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system—to demonstrate that Christianity is the fulfilment of Judaism.
3. Warning Against Apostasy: The letter contains strong warnings against falling away from the faith (Hebrews 2:1–4; 6:4–8; 10:26–31), suggesting that some in the community were wavering or considering a return to Judaism.
4. Assurance of Salvation: The author reassures believers of the certainty of their salvation and the reliability of God’s promises (Hebrews 6:13–20; 10:19–25).

The overarching theme is the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ, who is portrayed as the ultimate revelation of God, the perfect high priest, and the once-for-all sacrifice for sins.

Who Wrote Hebrews?

The authorship of Hebrews is one of the most debated issues in New Testament scholarship. Unlike the other epistles, this letter does not name the author. Early church traditions variously attributed Hebrews to Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, or even Priscilla and Aquila. The King James Version initially included it among Paul’s letters, but modern scholarship widely rejects Pauline authorship due to differences in style, vocabulary, and theology. From how the letter is written the author was clearly educated, familiar with the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint), and deeply versed in Jewish liturgical and sacrificial practices. The elegant Greek style and rhetorical structure even suggest a skilled orator or teacher. The letter’s unique theological emphases—such as the high priesthood of Christ and the concept of rest (sabbath rest)—set it apart from Paul’s other writings. Therefore, most scholars today consider Hebrews to be the work of an unknown but highly educated Jewish Christian, possibly associated with the Pauline circle but not Paul himself.

Theological Themes

There are a number of theological themes explored through the content of the letter:

- Christology: Jesus is presented as the Son of God, superior to angels and Moses, and the eternal high priest in the order of Melchizedek.
- Salvation and Atonement: Christ's sacrifice is described as the perfect and final atonement for sins, replacing the Old Testament sacrificial system.
- Faith and Endurance: The letter calls believers to persevere in faith, using examples from the Old Testament (Hebrews 11 is a series of examples from Hebrew Scripture of people of those who persevered in faith).
- Eschatology: The author emphasises the “already but not yet” tension of Christian hope, urging believers to look forward to the heavenly city and the fulfilment of God’s promises.

Why is Hebrews significant and worth us giving time to?

Hebrews bridges the Old and New Testaments, demonstrating how Christ fulfils and transcends the Old Covenant. Its message of perseverance, assurance, and the supremacy of Christ continues to resonate with believers facing trials or doubts.

Using this material

It would be very easy for us to encourage you to read through the Letter to the Hebrews without asking you to think what these words might be saying to us, as Jesus’s followers today. Yet, to read and sit with scripture is about absorbing these words as something past while listening for what they might mean for times to come. Therefore, we urge you not to just read a few verses each day. Instead, take a bit more time over the words: read—think—pray. If it helps, highlight words in the text, even scribble thoughts down. Do whatever feels most comfortable. Also, do not worry if some days the words wash over you, whilst others your mind races. Embrace the silence as well as the cacophony.

This letter was written for a community in another time. It also has some bits that might just need a bit of extra explaining. Therefore, at the beginning of each week, we do give a bit of an overview of what the next segment has in store. We hope that it is helpful in delving a little deeper and demystifying some of what the letter writer said.

If what this letter might be saying to church today feels a little illusive, then please look at or listen to our sermon series at Bromley United Reformed Church through Lent. Hebrews is not the Epistle in the Revised Common Lectionary for this year. However, we are pairing Hebrews with the Gospel readings for each Sunday as we prepare to enter Jerusalem with Jesus once again.

Elaine and Stephen

WEEK I

The Supremacy of Christ

Hebrews 1:1-2:4

Introduction

A sermon, one is told, should open in a way that captures the congregation's attention. As should the ending, it should be polished as it sets the scene for what is to be said. The opening sentence of the letter to the Hebrews does just that; its rhetoric is persuasive and sets forth what this letter, or probably more accurate description of it as a sermon, is about: humanity and God!

The first four verses summarise one of the main theological themes in the letter: the author's understanding of Christology. The son, Jesus, is introduced as God's new means of communication to the backdrop of all other attempts made by God to communicate with humanity. Jesus is also made central to the new covenant which ultimately saves humanity. However, this does not mean everything that happened before should be discounted or dismissed.

The rest of chapter 1 builds up the identity of the son with a lot of reference to angels. Angels are the other heavenly messengers that we find in the Bible. In the Old Testament, they can often be found associated with the revelation of law and covenant. For Christians versed in the Hebrew scriptures, as this community potentially was, in troubled times it may have been easier to think of Jesus as just another of God's angels. Although the author wanted the hearers of this sermon to recognise Jesus's divine, heavenly character, they also wanted it to be recognised that Jesus is more in both heavenly and earthly terms.

The second part of chapter 1 contains a series of quotations from the psalms, Nathan's oracle to David (found in 2 Samuel) and Deuteronomy. What the author could be described as doing here is proof texting! What better way to make their point about who Jesus was/is than throwing some biblical quotes at the hearers. But remember, although "the Hebrews" would have known these

scriptures they were not written down in the way we have our Bibles. Therefore, we need to look a little differently at what the author was doing. They are reminding the hearers that what they have come to believe is of old as well as new! They should not ignore what they already know, instead look at it through a slightly different lens.

This moves us into chapter 2 and to a word of warning. If the author did intend for this letter to be preached, they are nailing the tools of a good oratory in keeping the listeners engaged. Time to throw in a bit of judgement to wake the people up! Yet, this recollection of what happened to God's people in the past when they disobeyed God is not about putting the "fear of God" in the hearers. The author was setting out further the purpose of this letter/sermon. As Christians it is no good just being theologically proficient. It is also no good just being focused on actions. How we understand what we believe and how we behave go hand-in-hand. We need to delve deeper to maintain the energy and faith needed for what God calls us to as God's people today.

Ash Wednesday 18 February

Hebrews 1:1-4

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Long ago...

*God in many different ways you have tried to speak with us,
To show us your glory, your power and might.
Yet we did not listen to your word in the thunder or birdsong;
We did not listen when you spoke to us through angels or prophets;
So you took on our human form and came among us.
You lived our life, felt our pain,
even passed through the valley of death
in the hope we might hear and want to know you better
opening ourselves to your shaping and guiding.*

*As Jesus, you showed us how we can be our best selves.
You showed us what our relationship with you could be.*

*It is all there in the beauty of creation,
in the songs of the angels,
even the words of warning from the prophets.
Yes, long ago you spoke,
yet you are still speaking
if we open our ears and listen.*

Thursday 19 February

Hebrews 1:5-7

For to which of the angels did God ever say,

“You are my Son;

 today I have begotten you”?

Or again,

“I will be his Father,

 and he will be my Son”?

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

“Let all God’s angels worship him.”

Of the angels he says,

“He makes his angels winds
 and his servants flames of fire.”

*In the days of David,
it was hoped your kingdom had been established,
that your people would know your steadfast love forever.
As their victories multiplied, as the prestige of power grew,
the praise that was offered was to the king.*

*Before the earthly throne did the people kneel.
However, this was not the greatness and might
to which all honour and praise should have been given.*

*Before a throne, with the angels you bid us kneel.
That throne, though, belongs to you.*

*Whatever our successes,
from wherever our relationship stands with you,
may we worship you, giving thanks and praise
for all you have done and are doing in our lives.*

Friday 20 February

Hebrews 1:8-14

But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,
and the sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of your kingdom.
You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”
And, “In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like clothing;
like a cloak you will roll them up,
and like clothing they will be changed.
But you are the same,
and your years will never end.”
And to which of the angels has he ever said,
“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

All of creation is yours, O God.

*You are at the beginning
and there at the end;
nothing changes without your knowledge.*

*This closeness of your presence
you made known to us through Jesus as son.*

*This closeness of your presence
leaves us in awe and causes us to reflect:
Do we honour your presence in our lives?
Do we act as those who have been called to be your people?*

Saturday 21 February

Hebrews 2:1–4

Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message declared through angels proved valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was confirmed for us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.

*The stories of old tell of judgment;
they leave a ringing of despair and doom
for all who do not obey, it is said, will be destroyed!*

*Is this the message that should be being proclaimed from pulpits?
Is this how our actions as your people be perceived?*

*Through Jesus, you told us how you want us to know you better.
Through Jesus, you showed us how actions can say more.
In Jesus you brought word and action together
so the world, so that we, might not live in fear of judgement
but live as ones loved and who love as you command.*

Sunday 22 February

Lectionary at Bromley URC:

Hebrews 1:8-12, 2:1-4

Matthew 4:1-11

Sermon available online

WEEK 2

Faithful Son, Faithful People

Hebrews 2:5-3:19

Introduction

The Epistle to the Hebrews, with its rich Christological focus, speaks powerfully to believers navigating doubt or persecution. In Hebrews 2:5–3:19, the author transitions from Christ’s divine supremacy (chapter 1) to His incarnate solidarity with humanity, presenting Him as both the perfect High Priest and the ultimate example of faithfulness. This passage is particularly significant for those Christian scholars who often emphasize Christ’s humanity as a model for social justice and compassion. S Marcus Borg highlights how Jesus’s identification with human suffering challenges believers to engage in transformative love and solidarity with the marginalised.

The section begins in 2:5–18 by grounding Christ’s mission in His shared humanity, quoting Psalm 8 to illustrate humanity’s intended glory—now fulfilled in Christ. His suffering and death are framed not as defeat but as the means to “destroy the one who has the power of death” (2:14, NRSV), offering liberation from fear. Some theologians, such as Elizabeth Johnson, see in this passage a call to confront systemic injustices, as Christ’s victory over death symbolises hope for oppressed communities.

In chapter 3, the author contrasts Christ’s faithfulness with Israel’s wilderness rebellion, warning against spiritual complacency. The reference to Psalm 95 serves as a timeless admonition: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (3:7–8). This resonates with Liberation Theologians, who argue that faith must be active, resisting structures of oppression. The passage ultimately challenges believers to persevere, holding fast to Christ as the “apostle and high priest of our confession” (3:1). For modern readers, this is a call to both personal devotion and communal responsibility, ensuring that faith translates into justice and mercy.

Ultimately, Hebrews 2:5–3:19 presents a dual message: Christ’s work is sufficient, but it demands a response. Believers are called to fix their eyes on Jesus, the “apostle and high priest of our confession” (3:1), and to persevere in faith. The passage challenges readers to reflect on their own spiritual journey—are they embracing Christ’s grace, or risking the same hardening of heart that led to Israel’s downfall?

Monday 23 February

Hebrews 2:5-9

Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere, “What are humans that you are mindful of them or mortals that you care for them?

You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honour, subjecting all things under their feet.”

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

In these verses, we’re reminded of the profound humility and love of Christ, who—though crowned with glory and honour—temporarily became “lower than the angels” to suffer and taste death for us. This sacrifice not only reveals God’s grace but also invites us to trust in His sovereignty over all things, even in our struggles.

*Lord, thank You for Jesus,
who embraced our humanity and bore our suffering
so we might share in Your eternal glory.
Help us to live with gratitude for this gift and to walk in faith,
knowing that You are working all things for our good.*

Tuesday 24 February

Hebrews 2:10-13

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”

And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Here am I and the children whom God has given me.”

God, in His wisdom, perfected Jesus—the pioneer of our salvation—through suffering, making Him the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him. These verses remind us that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters, having shared in our humanity. His sacrifice unites us as one family under God, offering hope and belonging to all who trust in Him.

*Lord Jesus, thank You for enduring suffering
to bring us to glory and for embracing us as Your own.
Help us to live as Your siblings, united in faith and love,
and to reflect Your grace to the world.
May we always find our identity and hope in You.*

Wednesday 25 February

Hebrews 2:14-18

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Jesus shared in our flesh and blood to destroy the power of death and free us from fear. As our faithful High Priest, He understands our weaknesses and intercedes for us, offering mercy and grace in our times of need.

*Lord Jesus, thank You for becoming like us,
for breaking the chains of sin and death,
and for standing as our merciful High Priest.
Help us to approach Your throne with confidence,
knowing You sympathise with our struggles.*

Thursday 26 February

Hebrews 3:1-6

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, partners in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also “was faithful in all God’s house.” Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honour than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. Christ,

however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the boldness and the pride inspired by hope.

We are called to fix our thoughts on Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. He is faithful over God's house, and we are His house if we hold firmly to our hope and boast in Him.

Heavenly Father, help us to keep our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

May we remain steadfast in hope, trusting in His faithfulness and living as Your holy dwelling place.

Friday 27 February

Hebrews 3:7-11

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,
“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,

as on the day of testing in the wilderness,
where your ancestors put me to the test,
though they had seen my works for forty years.

Therefore I was angry with that generation,
and I said, ‘They always go astray in their hearts,
and they have not known my ways.’

As in my anger I swore,
‘They will not enter my rest.’ ”

The Holy Spirit warns us not to harden our hearts as Israel did in the wilderness. Today, if we hear the Spirit's voice, we must respond in faith and obedience, lest we miss the rest promised.

*Holy Spirit, soften our hearts to hear and obey Your voice.
Keep us from stubbornness and unbelief,
and lead us into the rest and peace
that come from trusting in You.*

Saturday 28 February

Hebrews 3:12-19

Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end. As it is said,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

Now who were they who heard and rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? And with whom was he angry forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

We are urged to guard against unbelief and encourage one another daily. The Israelites’ failure to enter God’s rest serves as a warning—only faith and perseverance will see us through to our eternal inheritance.

*Lord, guard our hearts from unbelief
and help us to spur one another on in faith.
May we hold firmly to our confidence in You
and enter the rest You have prepared for us.*

Sunday | March

Lectionary at Bromley URC:

Hebrews 2:16-18. 3:1-6

John 3:1-17

Sermon available online

WEEK 3

Entering God's Rest

Hebrews 4:1-6:12

Introduction

In chapter 4, the author continued their reflection on psalm 95:7-11. However, where in chapter 3 the words of the psalm were a sharp warning, here they offer hope. Although the perils of unbelief and unfaithfulness are never far from the author's mind, they encourage "the Hebrews" to trust God.

Within the first thirteen verses of chapter 4, there is an entanglement of God's rest and sabbath rest. Psalm 95 would suggest God's rest as a future event, potentially a reward for faithfulness. The idea of sabbath, though, comes from the story of creation and when God rested from work. On the face of it these would seem to be two different things. But when we think about Jesus's response to the Pharisees regarding the disciples breaking the laws around the sabbath, what, in fact, the author was doing was trying to deepen the people's understanding of sabbath. They highlighted that we might never fully comprehend it in human terms; true understanding will be found in that thing we call "our eternal rest." Sabbath is a moment where glory and honour should be given to God. It is a break from the everyday, yet it is caught up in the work we are called to through Jesus Christ. It is past, present, and future and available to all if we but listen to God's word.

In chapter 5, the author returned to expanding their Christology with the introduction of Jesus as high priest. The temple high priest, who was uppermost in the author's mind, was seen as an intermediary between God and the people. The priest could approach God in the Holy of Holies on behalf of the people as well as be seen as representative of God's holy presence among the people. Therefore, in developing the character of Jesus, as God's son who better is there to stand between God and humanity representing both. However, in Jesus, the role of high priest does not continue as it was. There is a shift which is alluded to by the author claiming Jesus is a high priest

according to the order of Melchizedek. What this means will be explored later in the letter. For now, it is worth recognising how as God's son, Jesus's role as priest bridges the gap between humanity and God in a way the priests of old could not as they were not divine. Also, Jesus does not just offer sacrifices on behalf of the people, he is the sacrifice.

By the time we get to chapter 6 we begin to see that the message of Hebrews is not easy to simplify. The author's weaving and layering of theological ideas leaves one a little exhausted and pretty glad this is not like most sermons preached today. However, in how the author challenged the original hearers there is something for us to learn today. Taking a break from the theology, in the beginning a chapter 6, the author makes the point that if the people want to grow spiritually, they cannot stay where they are comfortable. They need to make sure the foundations of their faith are strong and build on them. It is not easy, but if one is willing to endure the struggle the prize of knowing God intimately better is priceless.

Monday 2 March

Hebrews 4:1-5

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For indeed the good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed are entering that rest, just as God has said,

“As in my anger I swore,

‘They shall not enter my rest,’ ”

though his works were finished since the foundation of the world. For somewhere it speaks about the seventh day as follows, “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” And again in this place it says, “They shall not enter my rest.”

*Open our ears, our hearts and our minds, Lord,
so that we do not just hear but respond to your word.
We want to rest in your presence,
so may the good news be always transformative in our lives
strengthening our belief and trust in you,
ensuring our song is always of praise and thanksgiving
proclaiming you are great and the one
who is above and before all things.*

Tuesday 3 March

Hebrews 4:6-13

Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he sets a certain day—“today”—saying through David much later, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day. So then, a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God, for those who enter God’s rest also rest from their labours as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.

Indeed, the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

*Do we work without rest? Do we rest without work?
How is the word of God influencing our lives?
Are we obedient to it?*

*Nothing we do, say or think is hidden from you God.
Everything we are and everything we are not
is laid bare before you. You know that we are not perfect.
Therefore, strengthen us to strive for better
in how we live our lives in honour of your name.*

Wednesday 4 March

Hebrews 4:14-16

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

In the trials and temptations of our worldly lives, when we are struggling to hold fast to our faith, even questioning what we believe, it is hard to know how to pray.

The awesomeness of the incarnation, of Jesus bringing the gap between heaven and earth, and being our high priest is that he knows our weaknesses and our difficulties, he does not expect our offerings to be perfect, only honest.

Therefore, may we boldly open our hearts to you, God, not trying to find the words we think you want to hear, but sharing every emotion, joy, and sorrow. Help us to trust in your grace and mercy because through Jesus Christ you understand.

Thursday 5 March

Hebrews 5:1-10

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness, and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this honour but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest but was appointed by the one who said to him,

“You are my Son;

today I have begotten you”;

as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,

according to the order of Melchizedek.”

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

*What you achieved for us through Jesus is hard to grasp.
That sacrificial offering on the cross for all
who want to be cleansed of their sin we wrestle with;
why have you done away with our individual obligation
to offer repeated sacrifices on your altar?*

*Because you want us to live differently.
You want us to know that our fragility
does not prevent us from being your servants in the world.
You want our lives to glorify you and not be always in fear of you.*

*Therefore, may we, in Christ's example,
pray and offer our supplications
for you are listening and you will guide us on the path ahead.*

Friday 6 March

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

About this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become sluggish in hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

Therefore let us go on toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, instruction about baptisms and laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And we will do this, if God permits.

*How are we doing with the sharing of the gospel?
How confident are we in what God calls us to do and be in the world? How firm are our foundations?*

Though we might be old in the years of the world, does what we believe still feel in its infancy? How might we change this? How might we grow in faith and deepen our relationship with God?

*Take a moment to think about what you struggle with in your faith.
What could you do with more help to understand?
Then consider what you might change in your daily life to enable a
deepening of your faith, and what might need to change in the
church of which you are apart for that to be possible for all.
And then pray for God's help and encouragement.*

Saturday 7 March

Hebrews 6:4-12

For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come and then have fallen away, since they are crucifying again the Son of God to their own harm and are holding him up to contempt. Ground that drinks up the rain falling on it repeatedly and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is cultivated receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned over.

Even though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

*God, you want us to flourish.
You do not feed and nurture us
so that all that we are is a tangle of weed.*

*Although we might not always understand,
and our faith at times can waver,
help us trust that you will not forsake us.
Let us look upon the cross and not see failure,
but the hope we should have in you
because through Jesus you have lived our life
and are familiar with all our weaknesses and promise.*

Sunday 8 March

Lectionary at Bromley URC:

Hebrews 5:11-6:12

John 4:5-42

Sermon available online

WEEK 4

Melchizedek and the New Covenant

Hebrew 6:13-8:13

Introduction

Hebrews 6:13–8:13 offers a profound exploration of God’s unchanging promises and Christ’s eternal priesthood, themes that resonate deeply with traditional, Liberal and Progressive Christian thought. The passage begins in 6:13–20 with an appeal to God’s oath to Abraham, framing divine promises as an “anchor for the soul” (6:19). This imagery has been embraced by Liberal theologians like Paul Tillich, who interpreted such assurances as grounding for existential hope in an uncertain world. The author’s emphasis on God’s reliability invites believers to trust in His faithfulness, even amid personal or communal struggles.

The discussion of Melchizedek’s priesthood in chapter 7 is pivotal. Unlike the Levitical priests, Melchizedek’s priesthood is eternal, foreshadowing Christ’s perfect intercession. The theologian Walter Brueggemann, notes how this challenges hierarchical religious structures, emphasising instead a priesthood rooted in grace rather than ritual. Jesus, as a priest “in the order of Melchizedek” (7:17), embodies a ministry that transcends human limitations, offering a model of inclusive, compassionate leadership.

In 8:1–13, the author introduces the New Covenant, quoting Jeremiah 31 to contrast it with the obsolete Old Covenant. This shift from external law to internal transformation aligns with Liberal Christian ethics, which prioritise heartfelt devotion over legalism. Theologians like Sharon Ringe highlight how the New Covenant’s promise of forgiveness and intimate knowledge of God (8:10–12) calls believers to embody these values in their relationships and social witness. This passage reassures believers of Christ’s eternal priesthood while urging them to live out the radical love and justice inherent in the New Covenant.

Together, Hebrews 6:13–8:13 presents a compelling vision of Christ's priestly work and the reliability of God's promises. The author's purpose is clear: to strengthen the faith of believers by reminding them that their hope is secure in Christ, whose priesthood and covenant are eternal, unchanging, and utterly trustworthy. This passage challenges readers to persevere in their faith, knowing that God's promises are as certain as His character.

Monday 9 March

Hebrews 6:13-20

When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, “I will surely bless you and multiply you.” And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. Humans, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute among them. In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

God's promise to Abraham, sealed with an oath, is our unshakable anchor in life's storms. Jesus, our forerunner, has entered the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf, offering us hope that transcends circumstances. This passage reminds us that our faith is grounded not in fleeting emotions but in God's unchanging character.

Lord, thank You for being our anchor in uncertainty.

*Help us to cling to Your promises,
especially when life feels unstable.*

*May we find courage in knowing that Jesus has gone before us,
securing our hope in You.*

Tuesday 10 March

Hebrews 7:1-10

This “Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham as he was returning from defeating the kings and blessed him,” and to him Abraham apportioned “one-tenth of everything.” His name, in the first place, means “king of righteousness”; next, he is also king of Salem, that is, “king of peace.” Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

See how great he is! Even Abraham the patriarch gave him a tenth of the spoils. And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to collect tithes from the people, that is, from their kindred, though these also are descended from Abraham. But this man, who does not belong to their ancestry, collected tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had received the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In the one case, tithes are received by those who are mortal; in the other, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

Melchizedek, the mysterious priest-king, foreshadows Christ's eternal priesthood—one not bound by lineage or tradition but by divine appointment. His blessing of Abraham symbolises the superiority of Christ's priesthood, which transcends human systems and offers grace to all.

*Jesus, our eternal High Priest,
thank You for a priesthood that knows no boundaries.
Help us to recognise Your authority in our lives
and to receive Your grace with open hearts.
Teach us to bless others as You have blessed us.*

Wednesday 11 March

Hebrews 7:11-22

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood—for the people received the law under this priesthood—what further need would there have been to speak of another priest arising according to the order of Melchizedek rather than one according to the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. Now the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

It is even more obvious when another priest arises, resembling Melchizedek, one who has become a priest, not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent but through the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of him,
“You are a priest forever,
according to the order of Melchizedek.”

There is, on the one hand, the abrogation of an earlier commandment because it was weak and ineffectual (for the law made nothing perfect); there is, on the other hand, the introduction of a better hope through which we approach God.

This was confirmed with an oath, for others have become priests without an oath, but this one became a priest with an oath because of the one who said to him,

“The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind,

‘You are a priest forever’”

accordingly Jesus has also become the guarantor of a better covenant.

The Levitical priesthood, though sacred, was incomplete—it could not bring perfection. Jesus, however, inaugurates a new covenant through His indestructible life, becoming the guarantee of a better hope. His priesthood is not temporary but eternal, rooted in God’s unbreakable promise.

Lord Jesus, thank You for fulfilling what the law could not.

Help us to trust in Your eternal priesthood

and to live in the freedom of Your perfect sacrifice.

May we rest in the hope that You alone provide.

Thursday 12 March

Hebrews 7:23-28

Furthermore, the former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests humans, who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Unlike earthly priests who die and must be replaced, Jesus lives forever to intercede for us. He is holy, blameless, and set apart—our perfect High Priest who offers Himself once for all. His sacrifice doesn't just cover sin; it transforms us, making us holy as He is holy.

Holy Jesus, thank You for Your unending intercession and Your once-for-all sacrifice.

Cleanse our hearts and make us more like You, that we may reflect Your holiness in our daily lives.

Friday 13 March

Hebrews 8:1-7

Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are already those who offer gifts according to the law. They offer worship in a sanctuary that is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one, just as Moses was warned when he was about to erect the tent. For, God said, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.” But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on the basis of better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need to look for a second one.

Jesus, our High Priest, ministers in the true sanctuary—heaven itself. The earthly tabernacle was but a shadow of the reality found in Him. His ministry is superior because it is rooted in the new covenant, where God's presence is no longer distant but intimately near.

Lord, thank You for bridging the gap between heaven and earth. Help us to fix our eyes on the reality of Your kingdom, not the shadows of this world. Draw us closer to You, where true worship begins.

Saturday 14 March

Hebrews 8:8-13

God finds fault with them when he says:

“The days are surely coming, says the Lord,
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah,
not like the covenant that I made with their ancestors
on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the
land of Egypt,
for they did not continue in my covenant,
and so I had no concern for them, says the Lord.
This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, says the Lord:
I will put my laws in their minds
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
And they shall not teach one another
or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.
For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more.”

In speaking of a new covenant, he has made the first one obsolete,
and what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear.

God promises a new covenant, not written on stone but on our hearts. This covenant is marked by forgiveness, intimacy, and transformation—where everyone, from the least to the greatest, knows the Lord. The old system is obsolete; in Christ, we are invited into a living relationship with God.

Gracious God, thank You for writing Your law on our hearts and offering us forgiveness and renewal.

*Help us to embrace this new covenant fully,
living as Your redeemed and transformed people.
May we reflect Your love to the world.*

Sunday 15 March

Lectionary at Bromley URC:

Hebrews 6:13. 8:1-6

John 9:1-41

Sermon available online

WEEK 5

Faith and Worship in Action

Hebrews 9:1-11:40

Introduction

Chapter 9 begins with the author giving the hearer a fleeting tour of the tent that acted as God's resting place among the people in the wilderness and beyond, until Solomon built the temple. We might have been on one of those tours to a religious building where the tour guide quickly goes from one thing to another without giving anyone the chance to absorb what they are seeing or take in the atmosphere. This is what we might describe the author as doing, yet there is more going on. The author's tour takes the hearer to sections of the tent that no one is allowed but the high priest. They briefly draw back the curtains to expose the mystery. They also hint that, despite the beauty and wonder the tent provides, it is not where the living God is encountered.

Now we should not read what the author says as condemnation of the old ways. Particularly in the wilderness, the ritual and sacrifice centred around the tent and the Holy of Holies was symbolic of the journey the people were on with God. Therefore, although through Jesus the author speaks of a new covenant, they are not ignoring what is a powerful inheritance in understanding humanity's relationship with God. In Jesus there is a completion as well as a continuation but through a new way of thinking and experiencing.

Chapter 9 closes with the author returning to a bit of theology and what actually might be meant by our purification through death. Under the mosaic law, every purification ritual demanded death through the sacrifice of an animal establishing the dogma that there is no forgiveness without the shedding of innocent blood. A deep delve into both the Old and New Testaments would show us that forgiveness does not always require death but causing us to think of forgiveness in these doctrinal terms emphasises that forgiveness costs. Although Jesus's death removes that need for the sacrificial rites practiced in the temple, the author is gently warning the hearer over complacency.

The author might not want the people to become complacent, but they also want the hearers to move on in their relationship with God and fully understand what God achieved through Jesus. Chapter 10 does not say anything that has not already been said. However, the author was again trying to move the people on in their understanding.

Although for forgiveness there must be sacrifice, because there is forgiveness there is also no need for sacrifice! What the author means is that we should not be coming before God with a sense of guilt seeking to atone. Instead, our approach to God should be about seeking to do God's will (in the words of the psalmist) and becoming more and more attune with God's ways (as described by the prophet Jeremiah).

How does God's ways and will become more integral to the way we live as Christians? Well, the author said, in how we worship. The author reminds us that worship is a community activity where, in the knowledge of God's grace, God's promises are held and hope abounds. It is through worship a community encourages its members on the right path and recognises that their congregation is not alone but part of something that is past, present, and future. In troubled times, as they potentially were for the original hearers, to be upbeat and hopeful in worship is a struggle. The author recognised the tiredness, discouragement and pain the people were experiencing. With the help of words from Isaiah and Habakkuk they cheered the people on, encouraging them in their worship and confession of faith.

Chapter 11 begins with the author defining faith. Despite there being a lot of theological development through the letter, as a systematic theological definition what the author said about faith is incomplete. However, it is worth remembering this letter is not a piece of dogma; it is more of a sermon. Therefore, the author's working definition is there to support the goals of the sermon, which regarding faith is that it has both an inward confidence and outward actuality.

The rest of the chapter shows how that faith has been lived out by individuals the original hearers would have heard many a story of. The author has grouped the ancestors of Israel into four groups each demonstrating a virtue that comes to perfection in Jesus. These virtues include righteousness, obedience, and living with the challenge of suffering.

Monday 16 March

Hebrews 9:1-10

Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. For a tent was constructed, the first one, in which were the lampstand, the table, and the bread of the Presence; this is called the holy place. Behind the second curtain was a tent called the holy of holies. In it stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot speak now in detail.

These preparations having thus been made, the priests go continually into the first tent to carry out their ritual duties, but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent is still standing. This is a symbol of the present time, indicating that gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right.

*Our buildings stand as a memorial to God:
they represent a time past, and a future hope.
In our mind's eye, they have become the way
yet many are empty shrines.*

*Have we become too invested in bricks and mortar
that we are not listening to the Holy Spirit?*

*Have we limited the space where God is present
so we do not see God elsewhere?*

*Ever present God, we seek a place of sanctuary
where we can feel your presence and bare our souls to you.
However, we sometimes become too caught up
in the physical and lose sight of who we should be for you.
Recentre us when we drift from your purpose.*

Tuesday 17 March

Hebrews 9:11-28

But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the holy place, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant. Where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated

without blood. For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you.” And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the holy place year after year with blood that is not his own, for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Because of Jesus, we should feel free and unimpeded in our access to God. We do not need a priest to take an offering into the Holy of Holies, for Jesus, as the one who is of our flesh but was there before the beginning of creation, has taken the final sacrifice into the presence of the one true God. This brought to an end the old way governed by laws and rituals, and into being a new way of relationship with God, one that should be driven by hope.

We are forgiven. This is what should inform our lives, not that we have sinned!

*Jesus, by your blood the new covenant was sealed.
We do not need to live with the weight of our misspoken words,
unthoughtful deeds, and selfish actions on our shoulders.
We need to live in the knowledge
that although we will get things wrong,
if we are open to your leading,
you will help us stay true to your teaching
and in the promise of eternity with you.*

Wednesday 18 March

Hebrews 10:1-18

Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach. Otherwise, would they not have ceased being offered, since the worshipers, cleansed once for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body you have prepared for me;
in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.

Then I said, ‘See, I have come to do your will, O God’
(in the scroll of the book it is written of me).”

When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then he added, “See, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But

when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God,” and since then has been waiting “until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, “This is the covenant that I will make with them

after those days, says the Lord:

I will put my laws in their hearts,

and I will write them on their minds,”

and he adds,

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

The saying goes, “forgive and forget,” but how often do we? Guilt lingers, maybe in some circumstances haunts us. We question time and again, “could we have done something different?”

In what the author says to the Hebrews, the old ways encouraged the people not to forget. Offering sacrifices over and over again kept all those wrong words and deeds at the forefront. There was no moving forward, just a continuous looking back. Jesus changed this. The people who the author was speaking to, needed help in seeing this, as maybe we do too.

*Loving God, because of Jesus
guilt should not be part of our lives.*

*Although we must deal with the consequences of our actions,
they should not overshadow our lives forever.*

*We need to let you in,
letting your love change us and improve us.
We need to let your will instruct us,
so that we do not repeat our mistakes.*

Thursday 19 March

Hebrews 10:19-39

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

For if we wilfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins but a fearful prospect of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy “on the testimony of two or three witnesses.” How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know the one who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to insults and afflictions and sometimes becoming partners with those so treated. For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting. Do not, therefore, abandon that boldness of yours; it brings a great reward. For you need endurance,

so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what was promised. For yet
“in a very little while,

the one who is coming will come and will not delay,
but my righteous one will live by faith.

My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back.”

But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost but among those who have faith and so preserve our souls.

When one invites Jesus in, life does not automatically get easier or simpler. There is still suffering; the worldly struggles continue to be there to contend with. On bad days, even the most faithful amongst us question. Therefore, telling others about what Jesus has done is not straightforward, especially when we are reminded that saying “Yes!” to Jesus does not also mean that we can continue with our lives as they are. There are changes to be made, and deep thought should be given to everything we do and say from that point on. Although, God does not expect us to get things right all the time; there is the expectation that we will try.

Despite the home truth from the author, they did not want those original hearers to be discouraged, or to switch off from what they were saying. They wanted the hearer to be encouraged. Yet, the Christian life is not without its challenges. But it is not faced alone. There will be those who will always come alongside and God is always present. So have courage.

*Lord, teach us to be mindful—
to respect the promises made.*

*Lord, teach us to be bold—
encouraging others in their faith
as well as declaring our own.*

*Lord, teach us to have courage—
the road might be uneven,
but you will not let us fall.*

Friday 20 March

Hebrews 11:1-28

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death, and "he was not found, because God had taken him." For it was attested before he was taken away that "he had pleased God." And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would approach God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance, and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith, with Sarah's involvement, he received power of procreation, even though he was too old, because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who

speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better homeland, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom he had been told, “It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.” He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, “bowing in worship over the top of his staff.” By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial.

By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king’s anger, for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

Reading your way from the books of Genesis and Exodus and you will find all the characters mentioned in this section of Hebrews. As can happen with a sermon, only the good bits, or the bits relevant to the theme, are highlighted. Despite how it might read, none of these characters were perfect. But if you read their stories, you do discover moments when in having faith, putting their trust in God

and listening, things worked out, although maybe not quite how they expected or within their generation.

Living in full obedience to God, trusting and having faith can lead to some amazing things, as well as perilous situations. But when we need to have a bit of hope, when we need to take that step of faith, let us look back on those times, into those lives where that has happened. Let us see again where that led and be inspired!

*Lord, let us walk not by sight
but by faith and trust in you.*

Saturday 21 March

Hebrews 11:29-40

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death; they were sawn in two; they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains and in caves and holes in the ground.

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

*Faithful God, we look back on these lives
and give thanks for their faithfulness to you.
We give thanks that in their stories
we can see our own and take courage.*

*Living by faith is the greatest challenge you ask of us
because we have to hand everything over to you,
and your ways are not our ways, nor your thoughts.*

*As we face the future, encounter its many trials,
help us to do so in faith.
Help us not lose heart when things do not go our way;
when there are more hurdles, than resolutions.
Help us to rely on you.*

Sunday 22 March

*Lectionary at Bromley URC:
Hebrews 9:23-28, 11:1-3
John 11:1-45
Sermon available online*

WEEK 6

Running the Race

Hebrews 12:1-13:25

Introduction

Hebrews 12:1–13:25 is the Epistle’s crescendo, blending exhortation with theological depth to inspire perseverance and holy living. The passage opens in 12:1–3 with the vivid metaphor of the “race of faith,” urging believers to “lay aside every weight” and fix their eyes on Jesus, the “pioneer and perfecter of faith” (12:2, NRSV). Progressive Christian scholars, such as Diana Butler Bass, see this imagery as a call to communal resilience, where faith is not a solitary endeavour but a shared journey toward justice and wholeness.

The author reframes suffering as divine discipline in 12:4–11, a concept that Liberal theologians like Jürgen Moltmann interpret as God’s transformative work in the midst of struggle. This perspective encourages believers to view hardship not as punishment but as an opportunity for growth and solidarity with the suffering. The contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion in 12:18–29 further underscores the shift from fear to grace, emphasising love over legalism.

The letter concludes in chapter 13 with practical exhortations: showing hospitality (13:2), remembering prisoners (13:3), and honouring marriage (13:4). These commands reflect the social gospel tradition, championed by figures like Walter Rauschenbusch, which sees faith as inherently tied to ethical action. The warning against the “love of money” (13:5) and the call to “do good and share what you have” (13:16) resonate with Liberation Theology’s critique of economic injustice. The benediction in 13:20–21 leaves readers with a vision of Christ’s peace, equipping them for lives of holiness and service.

For us, this passage is a powerful reminder that faith is dynamic—rooted in perseverance, expressed in love, and oriented toward justice. It challenges both individuals and communities to live out their convictions with courage and compassion.

Hebrews 12:1–13:25 is a profound call to action, blending exhortation with encouragement. It challenges believers to run the race of faith with endurance, to embrace God's discipline, and to live lives marked by love, holiness, and devotion to Christ. The passage reminds readers that their faith is not merely intellectual assent but a transformative journey—one that requires perseverance, community, and an unwavering focus on Jesus.

Monday 23 March

Hebrews 12:1-11

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary in your souls or lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children—

“My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when you are punished by him, for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves and chastises every child whom he accepts.”

Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children, for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them.

Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

We are surrounded by a “great cloud of witnesses”—those who have run the race of faith before us. Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, calls us to lay aside every weight and sin, running with endurance the race set before us. Discipline, though painful, is a sign of God’s love, shaping us into His likeness and producing a harvest of righteousness.

Lord Jesus, thank You for the example of those who have gone before us and for Your perfect leadership. Give us the strength to endure, to embrace Your discipline, and to run our race with faith and perseverance. May we grow in holiness through Your loving correction.

Tuesday 24 March

Hebrews 12:12-29

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

Pursue peace with everyone and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble and through it many become defiled. See to it that no one becomes an immoral and godless person, as Esau was, who sold his birthright for a single meal. You know that later, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, even though he sought the blessing with tears.

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a

trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.”) Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking, for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe, for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

This passage calls us to strengthen our feeble arms and weak knees, pursuing peace and holiness. We are reminded that we have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, where we receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Let us worship God with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire, yet also the source of grace and eternal life.

Holy God, help us to pursue peace, holiness, and strength in our walk with You.

May we never take Your grace for granted but worship You with reverence and gratitude.

Thank You for the unshakable kingdom we inherit through Christ.

Wednesday 25 March

Hebrews 13:1-6

Let mutual affection continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them, those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he himself has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” So we can say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper;

I will not be afraid.

What can anyone do to me?”

We are called to love one another as brothers and sisters, showing hospitality, remembering those in prison, and honouring marriage. Contentment comes not from possessions but from trusting in God’s promise: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” This assurance frees us from fear and empowers us to live generously and boldly.

Loving Father, teach us to love others selflessly, to show hospitality, and to trust in Your unfailing presence.

Help us to find contentment in You alone and to live lives marked by generosity and faith.

Thursday 26 March

Hebrews 13:7-19

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them. We have

an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing, for that would be harmful to you.

Pray for us; we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things. I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you very soon.

We are urged to remember our leaders, imitate their faith, and hold fast to the teachings of Christ. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever—our unchanging anchor. The call to offer sacrifices of praise, do good, and share with others reminds us that our lives are to be lived in worship and service.

*Faithful God, thank You for the leaders who guide us in faith.
Help us to remain steadfast in Your truth,
to worship You continually, and to serve others with joy.
May our lives reflect Your unchanging love and grace.*

Friday 27 March

Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, as he works among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever. Amen.

This benediction is a prayer for God to equip us with everything good for doing His will. Through the blood of the eternal covenant, Jesus works in us to bring about what is pleasing to God. It is a reminder that our lives are shaped by His grace, for His glory.

*Gracious God, equip us with everything we need to do Your will.
May Jesus, our Great Shepherd,
work in us to bring about Your purposes,
and may we live lives that honour and please You.*

Saturday 28 March

Hebrews 13:22-25

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been set free, and if he comes in time he will be with me when I see you. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with all of you.

The letter closes with a call to bear with the word of exhortation and a prayer for peace and grace. The writer expresses confidence in the recipients' faith and extends greetings, reminding us that we are part of a larger community of believers, united in Christ.

*Lord, help us to receive Your word with open hearts
and to extend grace and peace to one another.
May we live in unity as Your people,
encouraged by the fellowship of believers
and the hope we share in Christ.*

Sunday 29 March

Lectionary at Bromley URC:

Hebrews 13:18-21

John Matthew 21:1-11

Sermon available online