**It’s All About Jesus**

1917 was a tumultuous year in Russia It was a year of revolution. In what is called the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks led an armed insurrection by workers and soldiers in Petrograd that successfully overthrew the Provisional Government.

All of the government’s authority was transferred to the Soviets with the capital being relocated to Moscow. The Bolsheviks had secured a strong base of support within the Soviets and, as the now supreme governing party, established a federal government dedicated to reorganizing the former empire into the world's first socialist republic, practicing Soviet democracy on a national and international scale.

This historic uprising of the underclass toppled the Czars and planted the seeds of Communism.

This was a challenge for the Russian Orthodox Church. Should they support the revolution or the divine right of kings? How does the church try to meet the needs of the poor without overlooking its responsibility to respect appointed leaders?

With all this change going on the church was concerned with one all-consuming issue that almost divided the church. The state church of Mother Russia was in a divisive argument over…robes.

You heard me right. While the country was sinking into a political philosophy that would result in 70 years of oppression and millions of deaths, the church was fighting over the style and color of the robes the priests should wear.

Is it any wonder why the church was totally ineffective in bringing a Christian witness to Russia’s challenges and now has little or no influence in the nation.

**I believe the greatest sin hindering the church, including in America, is the sin of discord.** Churches are very creative in finding things to fight over.

* The process of collecting offerings
* The times of worship services
* The style of songs used in worship, even the number of cups in the communion trays.
* Brothers and sisters in Christ have been known to cuss each other out over the design of the cross displayed in the front of the sanctuary.
* My mother told me of a church near where she grew up that split over including a coat rack in their new building. They never had a coat rack before. They became two churches known as the Coat Rack Baptist Church and the Anti-Coat Rack Baptist Church.

Why do you suppose that is? Why do people charged by Jesus to love one another demonstrate such selfish hate?

Maybe it’s natural. Whoever had to teach a child to be selfish or to demand her own way? Have you ever heard a mother say,

* “*I’m worried about Mandy. She’s too nice. She’s always thinking of other children first*.”
* “*Something’s wrong with Aaron. I constantly have to tell him to tease other kids or to be greedy*.”

We’re born with a self-serving bent that must be overcome in order to love one another as Jesus loves us.

Unless we learn to love one another as Jesus loves us we will forever find ourselves guilty of the sin of discord, fighting over trivial matters that have no bearing on salvation and frustrate our purpose of making disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded. (Matthew 28:19f)

**The reason churches fall into the sin of discord**, effectuating a spirit of competition instead of a spirit of love, **is because too many church people are focused on something other than Jesus.**

Churches fight because Christians pursue their own desires and agendas rather than seeking to truly know Jesus. What possible difference could it make to a dying world what color robes the priests wear? What we know and believe about Jesus does make a difference. In fact it makes all the difference in the world.

Ben and I are beginning a sermon series from the book of Hebrews because it’s all about Jesus.

* It’s not about religion although there is a lot of religious stuff.
* It’s not about a generic undefined Jesus described in nebulous terms.
* It’s not about a Jesus each man creates for himself.

It’s about the Jesus through whom God spoke to reveal Himself.

The Christians to whom the letter was sent were at risk of falling away from the true Jesus because they were seeing Him through the eyes of their existing religious constructs. They wanted Him to fit into their long-held beliefs about God.

This is important for Christians today because we’re quite like the original recipients of the letter. Many Christians today create their own Jesus. One who they find comfortable and who fits their ideas of what He should be, a Jesus who allows them to accept Him as Savior yet not change their ways of thinking and behaving. They want to come to Him “*just as I am*” but go on “*just as they were*”.

Hebrews is about Jesus. Jesus who is the Son of God, the absolute image of God, the creator of all things, the perfect human, the eternal Lord of righteousness. It’s about Jesus who is above all of our religious structures, above all of the earthly things we hold so dearly, superior to anything that we might revere other than God, including angels and prophets and priests.

When you read Hebrews it’s easy to get bored. The author writes about things we might not fully understand because the original readers came primarily from a Jewish background. Like us they had traditions and the comfort of long-held religion. We’ll try to make it more contemporary as we work through the issues.

The author wrote to nurture these Jesus followers into mature disciples of Christ. He wanted them to get over their personal ideas of what the Savior should be and get to know Jesus. By knowing Jesus they could overcome the issues that divide. Instead of arguing over the color of robes they could witness to the way the truth and the life.

Hebrews was written probably to a congregation like ours, filled with people who accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior but who struggled with making it about themselves.

They needed to get everything focused on Jesus. We need to get everything focused on Jesus. When we know Jesus as He truly is we’ll no longer fall to the sin of discord.

*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word.* Hebrews 1:1-3a

God didn’t reveal Himself all at once. Rather he revealed Himself at many times and in various ways. He revealed Himself in His creative power, in His moral demands, in His judgments and in His forgiveness. He revealed Himself in His covenant making with Noah and Abraham and Jacob.

He revealed Himself continually and ever-increasingly until His final revelation of Himself in Jesus. There will be no more or new revelation. Jesus is the final revelation.

The last book in the Bible, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, is not new stuff about what’s going to happen. It’s about what God has already decided and set in motion. It’s a done deal.

Yes God continues to reveal Himself through His preachers and teachers, but we don’t offer anything new. We interpret. We present truth, sometimes in new ways but never new information.

Long ago God spoke in these many and various times and ways to reveal Himself. The writer used the verb λαλεω. This is important because there are two words he could have used. He could have used λεγω, the common word for speech: to tell, to say, to speak. That would describe any way of communicating a message.

Λαλεω is a bit more intimate and suggest talking.

The author used an aorist participle in active voice. That means long ago God talked to us, past tense, in a continuous process, in many times and various ways.

Now He spoke one last time through Jesus. This time he used the same verb but in aorist indicative mood. Aorist indicative indicates finality. He’s done speaking to reveal Himself. Jesus is the last revelation of God. That’s the message of Hebrews. Jesus is the revelation of God.

The author was a teacher, the structure of the letter shows that. He was a Jew and a second generation Christian (5:3). He wrote with authority, probably he was a student of one of the Apostles. He was concerned that these believers were not growing in the Lord. Their idleness and lethargy would lead to falling back into their pre-Christian ways.

As he wrote, the author shifted between teaching and exhortation whenever his material reminded him of something that needs improvement among his readers. Thus we find woven into the teaching commands to that we the readers need to respond:

* *We must pay more careful attention to what we have heard*…(2:1)
* *See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily.* (3:12f)
* *Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. (10:22)*
* *Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus (12:1f)*

Hebrews was not written just to teach. He was expecting a response. We’ll present these challenges with the authority of the Word of God. Stick with us. I believe you’ll come to appreciate what it means to get to truly know Jesus.

Please allow me to muse a bit. I grew up in church. I didn’t have a dramatic conversion one day where I gave up my sinful ways and surrendered to Christ. I just sort of assimilated faith. When I got to college I was confronted with the conflict of the day in the church during the 60’s and 70’s.

Should the church be primarily about the individual relationship with Jesus or about the social experience of the Gospel? On one side it manifested in liberation theology in which the church was seen as a proponent of social justice, equality of wealth and resources and opportunity.

The other side manifested in the charismatic movement, Holy Spirit awareness, spiritual gifts, individual worship.

It wasn’t as silly as fighting over the color of robes, but it was just as divisive. It still is. Should the church be about service or about evangelism? What is the responsibility of the church?

How can we be near to God but not concerned with the needs of those around us? The Gospel is weakened if it does not reach the physical needs of men.

How can we spend our energy working to meet physical needs without also serving man’s greatest need through evangelism? The Gospel is weakened if the urgency of physical needs is separated from personal relationship with the Savior.

It doesn’t have to be one or the other. We cannot diminish either service or evangelism without diminishing the Gospel itself. Some congregations will be more concerned with service while others with evangelism. Rather than divide we should celebrate each other and thank God for our different gifts.

Enter the Book of Hebrews. The cure for the sin of discord is to become a truly Jesus centered faith. Whether we call ourselves Christians or Jesus followers or believers or disciples, it’s all weakened without a real theology of Jesus.

It’s all about Jesus. Not a Jesus we make up who is fun and comfortable, but the Jesus revealed in the Bible. Jesus is the way and the truth and the life; He is the focus of reality and hope and faith.

As we understand and focus on Jesus we will overcome our differences and present to the world the message of salvation.

History records that he was a great man. He started life in a small humble village, an ordinary boy. He learned and grew, worked in the family business, did his best to become a good man. Deep inside he knew he had a special purpose.

As he grew people began to notice there was something special about him. He had talent and charisma. He was gifted. He attracted crowds who wanted to listen to him.

He chose a small band of loyal friends who travelled with him. They gave up their jobs to be with him. Some thought he was leading people astray. Some became jealous of him. Some actually plotted against him.

His popularity continued to increase. He touched lives, inspired young and old, brought joy and laughter. They hailed him as king.

He suffered quite a bit in his short life. Many of his followers fell away. Some turned to follow others.

He died alone. Those who loved him were discouraged and confused. They didn’t expect his life to end this way.

Not long after his death there were rumors that he didn’t really die. People claimed to have seen him around. Even today many believe he’s not dead.

By now I’m sure you figured out I’ve been talking about Elvis.

You can show a lot of similarities between Elvis and Jesus. A good wordsmith can make just about anyone sound pretty good. A good wordsmith can make almost any idea of Jesus sound like the real thing.

Christian faith is not about a Jesus created by a good wordsmith. It’s about Jesus in whom God revealed Himself. Not just in our study of Hebrews, but in everything, let’s look for Jesus as He truly is. Not as we want Him to be.

I offer this challenge today: Decide this day whom, you will serve: the Jesus who reveals God or the Jesus who pleases you.

If you create your own Jesus he can be whatever you want him to be. He can serve your feelings and desires. I warn you, you’ll probably be disappointed a lot. If you create your own Jesus he has only the power that you give him.

If you choose to serve the Jesus of the Bible, the Jesus who reveals God it will change your life. It will change the way you think. It will change the way you feel.

One last thought, if you don’t find Jesus has changed your life, you’re looking at the wrong Jesus.

If you decide you want to know the real Jesus, you’re on your way.