



Jesus for Beat-Up People

SERIES: *Hebrews: Jesus for Beat-Up People*

Have you ever been beat up? Have you ever been punched in the face? I have. The hardest I've ever been punched was by younger brother. In high school the most beat up I felt was my senior year in football. We started the season with 17 guys and by the middle of the season we only had 13 guys left due to injuries. I came off the field only once and that was when I broke my hand. My coach put dirt on it and told me to go back in and play.

Have you ever been beat up by life? Has life ever punched you in the face? Have the difficulties of your life ever left you feeling beat-up, exhausted, worn down, tired, tempted to just give up? What about right now? June 2008, are you in beat-up condition right now?

I know this is the case for many of you. If not now, you've been there or you will be there. What do you do when you're beat-up by life? Where do you turn for help? How do you heal up, get back on your feet, and get moving forward again?

I've been pretty beat-up these last few months of life and where I've been turning for help and where I'm going to direct all of us for help these next four weeks is to one of the most neglected, yet one of the most eye-opening, life-transforming books of the Bible: Hebrews. Hebrews was written to 1st century urban Christians who were beat-up by life, discouraged and afraid—people who were facing an uncertain future and on the verge of giving up. Hebrews was written to real people with real problems...beat-up people who needed real help and real hope. Hebrews was written to people who felt like their world was falling apart.

But most of us don't know this because most of us have never spent much time with Hebrews. Most of us are intimidated by this book of the Bible. Many Christians think this book is too difficult, too different, too distant for us to understand and apply today. Hebrews has lots of talk about animal sacrifices and blood and, well, that's *illegal* in the Bay Area, so we ignore the book.

I can't think of a more relevant and helpful document for beat-up Bay Area people than the book of Hebrews. As far as I can tell, in our 40-year history as a church, Hebrews has never been preached. So, before we get to the heart of today's message, let me quickly hold up for you the basic blueprint of this book so you can get a preliminary image in your head of what this book of the Bible is all about.

It's 13 chapters long so it's a good sized book. It's really a sermon, not a letter, not an epistle. It lacks a formal greeting. Hebrews 13:22 calls it a "**word of exhortation.**" It can be read aloud in English in 42

minutes, the average length of a sermon at CPC. The author is unknown—the great riddle of the New Testament. Some of the names thought to be the author are Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, Luke. Whoever the author was, he had an intimate relationship with his audience. It's clear that he loves the people he's writing to. What's said in this book isn't classroom lecture, it's not textbook truths; it's biblical truth that has traveled through the heart of a leader who treasures the people he's writing to. Whoever wrote Hebrews was highly educated—lofty language, the best Greek in the New Testament. The date was mid-60's A.D. Hebrews was written to a mixed community of mature and immature Christians who were living in an urban area, most likely the city of Rome during the violent reign of emperor Nero. These people were beat-up, facing many difficulties, persecution was on the horizon for them, their futures were uncertain, their lives were hard, they were tempted to just give up. They were tempted to give up on Jesus...tempted to believe that Jesus had given up on them.

Isn't that the temptation, the thought, many of us have faced when life gets hard, when life beats us up? So what the author of Hebrews does in this book, in this sermon, is provide the people that he loves with a fresh vision of Jesus, an enlarged, high-definition portrait of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. That's what beat-up people need. Whether you're a Christian or a non-Christian here today, the only way you're going to truly, deeply heal up and get put back together again is by beholding a fresh vision of Jesus that cracks open your head and your heart and your imagination in new ways.

That's what the book of Hebrews, that's what this sermon series, is about: coming to see and savor and be transformed by a fresh vision of Jesus and his supremacy over all things—over your life, over this church, over the Bay Area, over the Universe.

Hebrews gives us this fresh vision of Jesus by exploring three questions:

- Who is Jesus?
- What has Jesus done?
- How should we respond to Jesus?

If you ever get lost in the book of Hebrews, that's your compass. As you navigate this book, if you ever lose your way, you can regain your bearings simply by keeping these three large questions in mind. These three questions serve as the broad outline to this whole book as well as the outline to today's text. I spent nine months in Hebrews with the twenties group and I only get four weeks with you!

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making 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” (Hebrews 1:1–4).

“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Hebrews 2:1–4).

This passage answers three questions for us:

1. Who is Jesus?
2. What has Jesus done?
3. How should we respond to Jesus?

1. Who is Jesus?

First, who is Jesus? Why does this question even matter? Why should you care about this question? If what this passage says about Jesus is true, then there’s no thing, no person, no movement, no political party, no discovery, no idea, no truth, no revelation, that can more significantly and beautifully shape your beat-up life and our beat-up world than Jesus, the Son of God.

This passage tells us that Jesus is The Sixth Sense, God for Dummies, Final Revelation of God. Here’s what I mean. Jesus is the Sixth Sense revelation of God. Have you seen the movie *The Sixth Sense*? Verse 1 tells us that long ago God spoke, God revealed himself, “**at many times and in many ways.**” What this means, what the Greek literally says, is that before Jesus, God spoke in pieces and fragments. Formerly, God revealed pieces of himself, fragments of who he is. He did this through the prophets, through the Old Testament. You read the Old Testament and you can get a decent picture of who God is, but you can’t get a full picture...it’s in fragments. But now, God has done something different. Verse 2 tells us God has spoken, God has revealed himself *fully* through his Son Jesus. No more pieces. The puzzle has been put together.

You know that scene at the end of *The Sixth Sense* where Bruce Willis’ character figures it all out: it all comes together, the mystery’s unlocked, the pieces fit

together, everything clicks and all of the sudden you understand what the whole movie has been about. After viewing that scene, you can never watch the movie the same way ever again. That’s Jesus. These opening verses of Hebrews are that mystery-unlocking scene in *The Sixth Sense*. All the pieces and fragments that God had formerly revealed in the Old Testament about himself and this world in which we live now come together in Jesus. When you encounter Jesus it all begins to click, it all begins to make sense, the “aha moments” are triggered and you can never again look at God or look at the story of your life, especially all the beat-up parts, the same way.

Jesus changes everything. Jesus changes how you understand God and how you make sense out of your life. These verses teach us that Jesus is not only the full revelation of God, he’s also the clear and understandable revelation of God—he’s God for Dummies. You know the “For Dummies” books? These books take a truth, an art, a concept that is out of your league, that’s difficult to understand, and explain it to you in your own language.

That’s who Jesus is—God explained to us in our own language. Verse 3 says that Jesus is “**the radiance of the glory of God.**” This is incredible. Actually, everything this third verse says is incredible and it can change your life if you let it sink in. The Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, talks a lot about God’s glory and radiance. But throughout the Old Testament we see that people couldn’t handle an encounter with God’s glory—God’s glorious, radiant presence was too bright, too hot, too brilliant, too wonderful, too pure for a human to come into contact with. It’s like staring at the sun. You can’t handle it. The sun is too powerful, too bright, too stunning for you—if you stare at for too long you’ll burn out your eyes.

This is why in the Hebrew Bible God showed forth his glory in bits and pieces. Through the appearance of a fire, a cloud, Moses got a one-second look at God’s backside and that left him undone.

But Jesus is God come down to earth in human form and in Jesus we can handle the radiance of the glory of God. Jesus explains God’s glory to us in a way we “dummies” can understand and digest. When we stare at the glory of God in Jesus our eyes don’t burn out; our eyes are opened, we understand, we behold the very glory of God and we are changed. 2 Corinthians 4:6, “**For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**”

Verse 3 also says that Jesus is the “**exact imprint**” of God’s nature. “Exact imprint,” this is the Greek word *charakter*, which is where we get our English word “character” from. We get this word from how engraving was done in the ancient world. The emperor employed an engraver who had a stamp of hard metal with his image on it that you could press

into soft metal, into coins, that would then display the character, the “exact imprint” of the emperor. What the author is saying is that the exact imprint of God has been reproduced in the soft metal of Jesus’ human nature. In John 14:9 Jesus said to his disciples, **“He who has seen me has seen the Father.”**

Have you ever asked God to speak to you, to show himself to you? He has. He has spoken to you, he has shown you the exact imprint of his nature in his Son Jesus. In Jesus, God has given you a full revelation (Sixth Sense revelation) of himself, a clear and understandable revelation (God for Dummies revelation) of himself, and he’s given you a final revelation of himself.

Verse 2 says that in these **“last days”** God has spoken to us through Jesus. This little phrase “last days” breaks time in half—one half of human history was the period of time up until the coming of Jesus and the other half of human history is the period of time we’re living in: from when Jesus first came to earth until the time he comes back. We live in the last days and there is no new revelation that we are waiting for God to send us. In these last days God has sent us his complete and final revelation, his final word—he’s sent us Jesus.

What these verses tell us is that there’s a finality to Jesus, there’s a finality to what it looks like to have a relationship with Jesus. Jesus is who he is, he doesn’t change—Hebrews 13:8, **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”** Who Jesus is is final, he cannot fit your mold, he cannot adjust to you...you must adjust to Jesus.

All real, satisfying relationships have finality to them. There’s a little movie that came out last year called *Lars and the Real Girl*. Lars is a lonely 20-something guy who wants a girlfriend; he wants a relationship. But he wants it on his own terms. So he gets on the internet and orders himself a life-size plastic doll and names her Bianca. Lars controls the whole relationship—he dresses her, he takes her to places that he likes to go, and he makes up an identity for her (she’s a missionary from Africa). She can never contradict or challenge Lars. This is not a real relationship.

You can marry a plastic doll that will do everything you tell it to do, that will respond to all your wishes and commands, that will always adjust to you, that will never cross you, contradict you, change you, or call you out—but that’s not a real relationship, you’ll never experience intimacy in a relationship like that.

There’s finality to Jesus. He has sharp edges. He doesn’t change who he is in order to accommodate you. To enter into a relationship with Jesus is to experience his sharp edges and to have him change you.

You’ve got to sort out what you’re going to do with Jesus. If Jesus is who Scripture says he is, he has authority over you. That’s what it means to be a Christian, to be a person under authority, under the Lordship of Jesus. Hebrews 13 says Jesus is Lord of your money, sex, and relationships. This isn’t a popular thing to say in a pluralistic society like ours, that you must come to terms with the finality of Jesus and the exclusive claim that he is

Lord. And this wasn’t a popular thing to say in the first century. Hebrews was written to people just like us, people who lived in a pluralistic society that preferred tolerance over exclusive, final claims about truth and God.

Pew Research Center recently did research of religion in public life: sadly 57% of evangelicals believe there is no finality to Jesus; that there are many other paths to God. That’s not what we believe here in this church.

Here’s the issue: do you trust him? Do you trust Jesus? Do you trust him with your life? I told you verse 3 has the power to forever change you. Look at what it says, **“he [Jesus] upholds the universe by the word of his power.”** Let that sink in. For the past month I’ve been living on this statement.

Someone once put it like this: If the distance between the earth and the sun, 92 million miles, was the thickness of a sheet of paper; then the distance from the earth to the nearest star would be a stack of paper 70 feet high; and the distance from across the galaxy, the diameter of our galaxy, would be a stack of paper 310 miles high; and our galaxy is just one little speck of dust in the Universe; and if there is a person who holds all this together with a “word of his power,” with a whisper, with the tip of his pinky, is this the kind of person you can trust your life to?

Who upholds your life? If anything, if anyone, upholds your life other than Jesus, someday your universe will crash in on itself. Maybe that’s where some of you are at today, maybe that’s why some of you are feeling so beat-up. Here the good news: Jesus upholds the universe with a word of his power. No matter where you’re at today, he can uphold your life, he can beautifully transform it. “He’s got the whole world in his hands.”

2. What has Jesus done?

We’ve answered our first question, “Who is Jesus?” Now, our second question. When you meet somebody new, what’s one of the first questions you ask them? “What do you do?” When you meet Jesus an even more important question to ask, the question the book of Hebrews explores, is not, “What do you do?,” but “What have you done?” “What have you already accomplished?” And if what this passage says is true, what Jesus has done is the best news you’ll ever hear. It’s news that changes everything.

This passage tells us two things that Jesus has done. First, verse 3 again, Jesus has made **“purification for sins.”** Sins. What are sins? It’s all the stuff you feel so guilty about. All the stuff you feel so ashamed about. Your sins are all the dark choices you’ve made and habits you’ve developed that have made you feel dirty, that have alienated you from God, from others, and even from yourself. Your sins—it’s all the guilt you carry on your shoulders, all the shame you feel deep inside, all the stuff that you wish never happened,

that you want to forget about, that you want purification from.

What are your sins?

According to this verse, Jesus has made purification for sins, your sins. Jesus was beat-up for you: his back was whipped, thorns were smashed on his head, his hands, the hands that created the world (v. 2, “through whom he also created the world”) were nailed to a wooden cross where he bled and bore all the guilt, and all the shame, and all the dirt of your sins. On the cross, Jesus made purification for *your* sins! Hebrews 9:26, “...he [Jesus] has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” If you’ve placed your trust in Jesus, he has “put away” your sins, he has purified you.

Some of you have been Christians for a long time and you still get stuck thinking that God might someday love and accept a future version of you. You think, “if only I could improve in this area of my life, if only I could leave these sins behind, if over the summer I could really make some progress in my walk with God, then God will love me and accept me and all will be well.” Is this you? Do you think God might someday love a future version of you?

You need Hebrews 1:3. Look at what else Jesus has done. After making purifications for sins, it says “he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” After his work on the cross, after his resurrection and ascension to heaven, Jesus sat down.

How many of you are in a line of work where you spend most of your day sitting down? How many of you do your work standing up? Throughout most of human history most people have done their work standing up. Before the digital revolution where much of our work became “sitting-down-work,” throughout the Industrial Revolution and in the agricultural society in which the book of Hebrews was written, most people did their work standing up and sitting down was what you did when you finished your work. You sat down when the job was done.

There were no seats in the Jerusalem temple. Day and night the priests offered sacrifices to make purification for the sins of the people. There was no sitting down in the temple because there was always more work to do, purification needed to keep being made for the sins of the people.

Hebrews 10:11-14: “...every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which 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...For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”

Friends, stop your striving. Christianity isn’t about your performance. A relationship with God isn’t based on a future version of you. Yes, God has *sanctifying* work to do in your life. He’s going to mature you and grow you. But the *purifying* work is done. A relationship with God is based on what Jesus has already done for you. He’s made purification for your sins. He’s sat down for your sins. The work is done. Trust in what Jesus has done for you, and let your striving cease.

3. How should we respond to Jesus?

After telling us the good news of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, in chapter 2 we’re told how to respond to Jesus. We’re given our first command as well as a warning. Here it is: go deeper, don’t drift. Chapter 2:1, “**Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.**”

We must pay much closer attention to what we have *heard*. What is the writer talking about? What was it that these 1st century beat-up, tired, and tempted Christians had “heard”? Verse 3 gives us our answer, “**It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard**”—*those who had contact with and heard the Lord, those who listened to the Lord Jesus.” This is the gospel! The author of Hebrews is talking about the gospel message that the Lord Jesus declared and that his followers then declared to these 1st century believers.*

The author’s writing to a group of Christians—just like in any church there were people here who identified themselves as Christians but who really hadn’t experienced that transformation—but he’s writing basically to Christians and he says: pay much closer attention to the gospel. Go deeper! There are more benefits for you, more experiences for you, more discoveries for you, more transformations to take place in you and the world around you by looking deeper into the gospel.

We must get out of our heads the very silly, unbiblical idea that the gospel is only for non-Christians. That’s not true. I need—you need—the gospel every single day of your Christian life. The intensity of the phrase, “pay much closer attention” (*perissoteros prosechein*) doesn’t come across in our English translations. The force of this phrase is extreme. What we’re being told to do here is to obsess, to obsess over the gospel.

Have you ever obsessed over something? What you eventually found out, what somebody eventually told you or what you found out on your own, was that your obsession was unhealthy. Most obsessions are. Most of the time the objects of our obsession are not worthy, are not big enough, are not beautiful enough for our constant attention. But the gospel is different.

If you’re in a beat-up place right now, odds are that you’re obsessing over your current condition. You’re obsessing over your situation, your fears, your difficulties, how you got to where you are. That’s what these people were doing. That’s why the book of Hebrews was written. The author wants to warn these beat-up people of the danger of getting so caught up in their difficulties that they drift away from Jesus. Chapter 2 verse 1 sounds the warning, “**lest we drift away.**”

Are you drifting?

This word “drift” is a nautical term. The image here is of a ship that’s headed for a straight course but loses sight of its goal and slowly, almost

imperceptibly, begins to drift, and before you know it strange currents have carried the ship miles off course and straight into a storm.

It's not just when life is easy, but maybe it's especially when life has beat us up a bit, that we face the danger, the temptation, of drifting. There are currents in the Bay Area that, if you're not alert, will carry you miles away from Jesus, miles away from where you want to go.

Are you caught in a dangerous current? Are you drifting? Verse 1 protects us from drifting by urging us to pay much closer attention to Jesus, to obsess over the gospel. Hebrews is going to drill this into us over and over again. Hebrews tells us that life is a journey, it's not a sprint; it's a long distance journey, and however beat up we might be, the way to keep course is to have an obsession with Jesus. Again and again Hebrews tells us to look to Jesus, to fix our eyes on Jesus, to consider Jesus, to pay much closer attention to Jesus.

How do you do this? How do you stop drifting and develop an obsession with the gospel that can transform your beat-up life and free you from a thousand unhealthy obsessions?

What is the one thing you tend to think about the most? If I spent a day living inside your head, what would I say you obsess over? What would it look like? How would things begin to change for you and those around you if the gospel became the obsession of your thought life?

There was a sermon preached 200 years ago that changed my life. Thomas Chalmers pastored in Scotland in the early 19th century. His most famous sermon was a sermon called, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection* (Obsession). What Chalmers says in this sermon is that the only way to change, the only way to get rid of an unhealthy obsession that's ruling your life, is to expel it, eclipse it, replace it, with a new, more powerful obsession. He says that the only way to dislodge an unhealthy obsession from your heart is to replace it with a better one. The key isn't to draw your attention *away* from something bad, but to draw your attention *towards* something good and beautiful.

You're never going to be able to chip your way through the icy obsessions that have hardened your heart and made you a slave. The only way to melt the ice that has hardened and enslaved your heart is through regular exposure to the sunlight of the gospel. Only the gospel is hot enough, powerful enough, beautiful enough to melt your unhealthy obsessions and change your life.

What if this summer you experienced the expulsive power of a new obsession? The only way I know of for you to change, for you to heal, for you to live the life you were created to live, is for you to develop an obsession with the gospel of Jesus.

Friends, wherever you're at today, no matter how beat-up you might be, let's not drift, let's pay much closer attention to what we have heard. Obsess over the gospel. Remember who Jesus is. Remember what he has done. Kick start your new obsession with Hebrews 1:3. Memorize this verse, it has the power to melt the ice: **"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."**