Crossroads International Church Dr. Rick Griffith

25 January 2015 Message 1 of 12

NLT 40 Minutes

**Better than Prophets**

Title

***Hebrews 1:1-3***

**Topic:** Truth

**Subject:** Why keep running after Jesus?

**Complement:** Jesus is the ultimate truth.

**Purpose:** The listeners will embrace Christ as the ultimate truth.

**Meditation:** God is our Revealer

**Reading:** Hebrews 1:1-3

**Song:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZlXWp6vFdE

# Introduction

### Interest: Some people just love running.

Love of running

#### One of my graduate school colleagues recently told me that can’t gain weight. He weighs only 123 pounds, or 55 kilos. I told him, “You want to gain weight? That’s easy. Stop your running every day and enjoy more desserts!”

#### He is among several colleagues who run every day, but I’m not much of a runner. I figure that running is silly because you exert all that energy and still end up tired and right where you started!

Christian race

Some quit

### But, seriously speaking, the Christian life is a race where many drop out.

Christians run well

#### Some believers run well for a time…but then they quit.

Christians quit

#### In the USA, about 2 or every 3 teenagers quits the race and stops attending church in their 20s. It’s as high as 88% who quit!

88%

#### The last major study of new believers in Singapore in the 1980s shows that one third of Buddhists who become Christians then return to Buddhism (Keith Hinton, *Growing Churches, Singapore-Style*).

Singapore returns

#### As I think about those who used to attend here, I think of one woman who divorced her husband, youth who abandoned the Lord in college, people living together apart from marriage, and others who found the race too difficult—so they quit.

Used to be here

How long you run?

### Need: How long will *you* run with Christ?

Temptation to quit

#### Some aspects of quitting seem nice. I often ask students what their previous religion was and what tempts them to go back.

Quitting seems nice

##### Time: If you don’t attend church on Sunday, the whole day can be an adventure.

Time

##### Money: Giving 10% of your money to God is costly—most spend it on stuff.

• Money

##### Family: Many of my relatives want me to quit the race to be closer to them.

• Family

#### What makes you think that you will press on in the Christian race? Will you cross the finish line?

Why keep running

Keep running

Cross finish line?

### Subject: Why keep running after Jesus? I assume that you think this race is worth running, but *why is it?*

Hebrews

### Background: The readers of the letter to the Hebrews were tempted to abandon Christ’s race to go back to Judaism. So the author exhorting them repeatedly in his letter to press on, so I’m calling this new series on Hebrews “Press On!”

Press On!

#### Recipients: Now some background. How do we know the readers were Jews?

Bkgrd

Jews?

##### The letter has many allusions to and quotes from the Old Testament that would have needed explanation if it was sent to Gentiles. This finds support in that “To the Hebrews” is the oldest and most reliable title.

• To the Hebrews

OT Quotes

##### Contrary to the placement of Hebrews as first of the General Epistles in the NT (like Romans heads up the Pauline letters), many lines of evidence indicate that the letter is not a general address; instead, it appears that these Jewish Christians composed a specific community:

NT Building
• Rom
• Hebrews

Hebrews

###### The author already visited them once and wanted to revisit them (13:19, 23). The readers apparently had a concern for Timothy as well (13:18).

Covenant & Revisit 13:19

###### They have a definite history to which the author is acquainted, including their conversion (2:3), ministry to other Christians (6:10), sufferings for the gospel (10:32-34), and present state of spiritual maturity (5:11ff.).

Suffering 10:34

• Cities

###### The readers may have been the leaders of a larger community since it is unlikely that the writer would expect the entire church to be teachers (5:12).

#### Destination: The Jewish Christians who first read the letter lived in a specific geographical location that probably was away from Jerusalem (i.e., in a mission field) since they were not among those who personally saw the Lord (2:3).

Map

##### Many destinations have been suggested: Asia Minor, Rome, Cyprus, Cyrene, and Israel.

##### No one really knows the origin or destination, but Jewish Christians in the Diaspora mixed with Gentile believers, as in Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome—but the recipients of this letter were all Jews, so a location in Israel is most likely.

• Rome

13:24

• Israel

#### Origin: The letter seems to be sent from Italy (13:24) to another locale. Italy itself may have been the destination since the Italians here may have been with the author sending their greetings to their countrymen in Italy, but Jewish believers there lived with Gentiles, so that’s why Israel is more likely the destination.

Review
(2 slides)

#### So, to review [explain]. Whatever their location and situation, Hebrews 2:1 says that they were tempted to stop running the race.

“Should I go back?”

### Preview: Today we will see why the first readers should keep their faith in Jesus—and why we should too.

Runner

### Text: We will study only the first three verses of Hebrews today.

Better
Text

(The reason the original readers were exhorted to keep their faith in Jesus was because of the word “better”…)

# I. Christ is better than any prophet (1:1-3).

MP

[Jesus best reveals God, so he’s greater than any limited spokesman for God.]

Overview (4 slides)

## OT prophets gave only *partial revelations* of God (1:1).

1:1

### The prophets were amazing men of God. No messages were deemed more respected or powerful or urgent than those from the prophets of Israel.

#### Imagine being Elijah standing up to the entire northern nation of Israel! He told king Ahab the *truth* that there would be no rain for 3.5 years!

Prophets

#### Jeremiah stood up to Judah’s last kings and preached the *truth* of Jerusalem’s fall, even though it wasn’t popular.

#### Jonah preached the unpopular *truth* that God would even spare wicked Nineveh.

### However, they still only spoke part of God’s truth.

#### Each was God’s voice only in his own era—giving only part of the truth of God.

#### The point is not to think lower of the prophets, but higher of Jesus!

1:1-2

## Christ is the *final revelation* of God greater than any prophet (1:2-3).

1:3

### Jesus is *God’s Son* speaking—while prophets were mere men (1:2a).

### Jesus is *heir* of the universe—but no prophet was ever appointed to rule the world (1:2b).

### Jesus is the *Creator* of the universe—while all prophets were created (1:2c).

### Jesus is *God* since he exactly represents the Father—but no prophet was deity (1:3a).

### Jesus is *Sustainer* of the universe by his word—but no prophet sustained creation (1:3b).

### Jesus is *Atonement* for mankind’s sins—while prophets *need* his atonement (1:3c).

### Jesus *completed* his ministry in a manner pleasing to the Father—while prophets needed to supplement each other (1:3d).

MPI

Why
run?

 (But why should *you* keep following Christ?)

# II. Christ is God’s final revelation to you also.

MP

[Truth isn’t found anywhere better than Jesus!]

Wrong Places

## We seek truth in all the wrong places.

### Some think science has the final answers—but it is constantly being revised every day!

### Others are addicted to the latest interesting teaching that tickles the ear—these YouTube clips or TED talks might be interesting, but they don’t provide ultimate truth.

## Jesus is the best source of truth.

Better

### Why wouldn’t he be?

John 14:6

### Jesus claimed to be “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

Why run?

(So why should we keep running after Jesus?)

# Conclusion

### Jesus is the ultimate truth (MI). Christ is far better than any human messenger.

MI

### Why stay in the race? (MPs)

#### Christ is better than any prophet (1:1-3).

MPI

#### Christ is God’s final revelation to you also.

MPII

### Are you trusting Christ for truth?

Are you?

# Preliminary Questions

**Verses Questions**

# Context: What did the author record just prior to this passage?

### This is the beginning of the letter.

### Yet the context of this letter is that by the time it was written, the Jewish synagogues had kicked out the Christians.

# Purpose: Why is this passage in the Bible?

### We tend to idolize people instead of God.

### The readers in this case had a higher view of OT prophets than they had of Jesus, showing their ignorance of Christ.

# Background: What historical context helps us understand this passage?

### Recipients: How do we know the readers were Jews? The letter has many allusions to and quotes from the Old Testament that would have needed explanation if it was sent to Gentiles. This finds support in that “To the Hebrews” is the oldest and most reliable title.

#### BLUE MEANS USE LATER: These Jews, however, were second-generation (2:1-4) believers (3:1; 4:14-16; 10:19-22, 32-34; 12:7; 13:1, 20-22) who should have matured beyond their present immature state in Christ (5:11-14). They were immature, but they were true believers, not simply professing Christians. They were in danger of lapsing back into Judaism, perhaps due to persecution for Christ (although the precise nature of their temptation is not explicitly stated). A problem with dabbling in Old Testament rites is hinted at in 7:11, 26-28; 8:4-5; 9:1–10:18.

#### Several lines of evidence indicate that the letter is not a general address; instead, it appears that these Jewish Christians composed a specific community:

##### They have a definite history to which the author is acquainted, including their conversion (2:3), ministry to other Christians (6:10), sufferings for the gospel (10:32-34), and present state of spiritual maturity (5:11ff.).

##### The author had already visited them once and desired to revisit them (13:19, 23). The readers apparently had a concern for Timothy as well (13:18).

##### The readers may have been the leadership section of a larger community since it is unlikely that the writer would expect the entire church to be teachers (5:12).

### Origin: The letter apparently was sent from Italy (13:24) to its recipients in another locale. However, Italy itself may also have been the destination since the Italians here may have been with the author sending their greetings to their countrymen in Italy.

### Destination: The Jewish Christians who first read the letter lived in a specific geographical location that probably was away from Jerusalem (i.e., in a mission field) since they were not among those who personally saw the Lord (2:3).

#### Many destinations have been suggested: the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor, Rome, Cyprus, Cyrene, and the Qumran Community near the Dead Sea (see “Occasion” below).

#### If Barnabas authored it, evidence may point to Cyrene (his home area) as the destination. He evidently ministered in Rome at the time of writing and a relationship may have existed between Italian Christians and believers at Cyrene through Barnabas' contact with Simeon called Niger (a black) and Lucius of Cyrene (cf. Acts 13:1).

#### No one really knows the origin or destination, but Jewish Christians in the Diaspora mixed with Gentile believers, as in Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome; however, the recipients of this letter were all Jews, so a location in Israel is most likely.

### Occasion: The admonishment not to stop meeting together (10:25) may show that the readers had sectarian tendencies, possibly separating themselves from their original, larger group. Perhaps they were believers saved from the Jewish Qumran Community who identified with a church, experienced persecution from unbelieving Jews, and then separated with the thought of a possible return to the Community and Judaism. The Dead Sea Scrolls note that the Qumran Community believed that Michael and his angels would be the rulers of the coming age.

#### If the recipients were saved out of this background, persecution may have tempted them to again emphasize angels—so the writer began by showing how Jesus surpassed angels (1:4–2:18). No one knows the exact historical situation, but the writer had clear prophetic knowledge that the temple and sacrificial system would soon be destroyed (8:13), which happened in AD 70.

#### He warned these believers that returning to Judaism would inflict the fires of Rome upon all involved in the Jewish revolt—believer or unbeliever alike. Thus the “raging fire that will consume the enemies of God” (10:27; cf. 6:8) refers not to eternal hellfire but to the fires that burned Qumran, Jerusalem and all other cities resistant to the Romans (p. 266c). See the excellent support of this view by Randall C. Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” *Bib Sac* 155 (Jan-Mar 1998): 62-91; idem., “The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7-4:11,” *Bib Sac* 157 (July-Sep 2000): 281-303.

#### Whoever these Jewish Christians were, the writer saw them in a very serious situation. Five severe warnings (2:1-4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:8; 10:19-39; 12:18-29) admonish them not to reject Christianity for Judaism. The recipients had suffered persecution (10:30-32), though perhaps not to the point of actual martyrdom (12:4). They desperately needed endurance (10:36), for they had become dull of hearing (5:11) and were in danger of drifting away from their moorings in Christ (2:1; 3:12).

# Questions

# Tentative Subject/Complement Statements

Don't give up!

Press on!

# Possible Illustrations

### Text

# Possible Applications

### Text

# The readers should not return to Judaism because Christ is superior to Judaism’s prophets, angels, and Moses in *His person* (1:1–4:13).

## Since Christ is *superior to the OT prophets*, the readers should follow Christ (1:1-3).

### OT prophets ministered to Jews repeatedly and only as partial revelations of God (1:1).

### Christ is the *final revelation* of God as His person exceeds that of the prophets (1:2-3).

#### Jesus is *God’s Son* speaking—which was never said of a prophet (1:2a).

#### Jesus is *heir* of the universe—but no prophet was ever appointed to rule the world (1:2b).

#### Jesus is the *Creator* of the universe—but all prophets are created beings (1:2c).

#### Jesus is *God* since he exactly represents the Father—said of no prophet (1:3a).

#### Jesus is *Sustainer* of the universe by his word—but prophets don’t sustain the world (1:3b).

#### Jesus is *Atonement* for mankind’s sins—while prophets need his atonement (1:3c).

#### Jesus *completed* his ministry in a manner pleasing to the Father (1:3d).

**Better than Prophets**

***Hebrews 1:1-3***

**Exegetical Outline (Steps 2-3)**

# *Exegetical Idea*: The reason the Hebrew readers should continue to follow Jesus is because Christ is superior to the OT prophets.

# I. The nature of the OT prophets is that they ministered to Jews repeatedly and only as partial revelations of God (1:1).

# II. The reason the Hebrew readers should continue to follow Jesus is because Christ is the *final revelation* of God as His person exceeds that of the prophets (1:2-3).

## Jesus is *God’s Son* speaking—while prophets were mere men (1:2a).

## Jesus is *heir* of the universe—but no prophet was ever appointed to rule the world (1:2b).

## Jesus is the *Creator* of the universe—while all prophets were created (1:2c).

## Jesus is *God* since he exactly represents the Father—but no prophet was deity (1:3a).

## Jesus is *Sustainer* of the universe by his word—but no prophet sustained creation (1:3b).

## Jesus is *Atonement* for mankind’s sins—while prophets *need* his atonement (1:3c).

## Jesus *completed* his ministry in a manner pleasing to the Father—while prophets needed to supplement each other (1:3d).

**Purpose or Desired Listener Response (Step 4)**

The listeners will embrace Christ as the ultimate truth.

**Homiletical Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)

# Introduction

### Interest: The Christian life is a race where many drop out.

### Need: How long will you run with Christ?

### Subject: Why keep running after Jesus?

### Background: The readers of the letter to the Hebrews were tempted to abandon Christ’s race to go back to Judaism.

### Preview: Today we will see why the first readers should keep their faith in Jesus—and why we should too.

### Text: We will study only the first three verses of Hebrews today.

(The reason the original readers were exhorted to keep their faith in Jesus was because…)

# I. Christ is better than any prophet (1:1-3).

## OT prophets gave only *partial revelations* of God (1:1).

## Christ is the *final revelation* of God greater than any prophet (1:2-3).

### Jesus is *God’s Son* speaking—while prophets were mere men (1:2a).

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### Jesus *completed* his ministry in a manner pleasing to the Father—while prophets needed to supplement each other (1:3d).

(But why should *you* keep following Christ?)

# II. Christ is God’s final revelation to you also.

## We seek truth in all the wrong places.

## Jesus is the best source of truth.

(So why should we keep running after Jesus?)

# Conclusion

### Jesus is the ultimate truth (MI).

### Why stay in the race? (MPs)

#### Christ is better than any prophet (1:1-3).

#### Christ is God’s final revelation to you also.

### Are you trusting Christ for truth?



**Rick Griffith**

 25 January 2015

Message 1 of 12

**Better than Prophets**

***Hebrews 1:1-3***

# Introduction

### The Christian life is a race where many drop out.

### How long will you run with Christ?

### Why keep running after Jesus?

### The readers of the letter to the Hebrews were tempted to abandon Christ’s race to go back to Judaism.

# I. Christ is better than any \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_prophet (1:1-3).

## OT prophets gave only *partial revelations* of God (1:1).

## Christ is the *final revelation* of God greater than any prophet (1:2-3).

### Jesus is *God’s Son* speaking—while prophets were mere men (1:2a).

### Jesus is *heir* of the universe—but no prophet was appointed to rule the world (1:2b).

### Jesus is the *Creator* of the universe—while all prophets were created (1:2c).

### Jesus is *God* as he exactly represents the Father—but no prophet was deity (1:3a).

### Jesus *sustains* the universe by his word—but no prophet sustained creation (1:3b).

### Jesus is *Atonement* for mankind’s sins—while prophets *need* his atonement (1:3c).

### Jesus *completed* his ministry in a manner pleasing to the Father—while prophets needed to supplement each other (1:3d).

(But why should *you* keep following Christ?)

# II. Christ is God’s final \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_revelation to you also.

## We seek truth in all the wrong places.

## Jesus is the best source of truth.

(So why should we keep running after Jesus?)

# Conclusion

### Jesus is the ultimate \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_truth (Main Idea).

### Are you trusting Christ for truth? How is that visible in your life?

**Thought Questions**

1. Read Hebrews 1:1-3 aloud. Show how each description of Christ was relevant to the original readers and to us.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Description** | **Relevance in 1st Century**  | **Relevance Today** |
| Spoke God’s word to us (2a) | Better representative of God than the OT prophets as he didn’t depend a certain message (instead of “thus says the Lord” it is “I say to you” | We need to hear God’s voice even more than first century or OT believers as we have more distractions and false teachings |
| Last days representative of God (2b) | Jewish believers were beginning the final stage of God’s plan for this age | Since Jesus is the last prophet of God, Islam has identified the wrong last prophet |
| God’s Son (2c) | Sonship was viewed as being equal to the Father (John 5:18) | Sons represent a father’s authority in Indian culture |
| Heir of everything (2d) | Their world didn’t belong to the Romans or the Jews | We didn’t evolve from millions of accidents; we are in his world |
| Created the universe (2e) | OT prophets created nothing | Even some Christians adhere to evolution with Christ as creator |
| Radiates God’s glory (3a) | Jesus is the same presence of God that indwelt the tabernacle and temple | Since “glory” literally means “weight,” we should consider him the most reliable source. |
| Expresses the character of God (3b) | No prophet ever totally showed the image of God | We need to see a human at our level who lives totally consistent with God |
| Sustains all by his word (3c) | Prophets were mere men who didn’t sustain anything | We still don’t know how the atom is held together! |
| Cleanse us of our sins (3d) | No prophet provided forgiveness | We need forgiveness more than counsel |
| Sat down at God’s right hand (3e) | The right hand was the place of honor—how much more so *God’s* right hand of authority | Most people are still right handed and no gift should be accepted with the left hand |

1. What modern counterparts to the OT prophets are you tempted to trust over Christ? In other words, if this letter were written to you, what would the author say is a less reliable source of your trust than Christ?

Believers: people who care for me, doing things that are expedient, doctors, logic

Unbelievers: Scientists, educators, celebrities, actors & actresses, politicians

Text