

The Final Word on Belief

1. Intro

- In the 2002 Olympics Australia won its first Winter Olympics gold medal
 - Guess who? Steven Bradbury [SLIDE]
 - Men's short track 1000m
 - In the final, Bradbury realised he didn't have the pace to stick with his younger and faster rivals
 - So he hung back hoping they would make a mistake as they jostled for the lead
 - Sure enough coming into the final corner of the race ... all three of them went down [SLIDE]
 - Bradbury who was about 15m behind ... coasted through for victory
 - Arms raised > look of amazement on his face
 - Went from last position to gold medal winner in about 2 seconds!
- Such an iconic and ironic victory
 - So much so ... that anyone who comes from behind to snatch a sporting victory from the jaws of defeat these days is said to have done a 'Steven Bradbury'
- But how would feel if you were one of the other competitors in that race?
 - Do all that training?
 - Get all the way through the elimination races
 - Get to within 50m of the finish line ... and you stumble
 - You fail to finish the race
 - Everything you trained for ... seemingly wasted
- Well that's the notion of what's going on here in Hebrews 3
 - The author is writing to Christians ... not to stumble in their faith when they're so close to the finish
 - He wants people to keep standing firm in their faith right to the end
 - He wants all Christians to be Steven Bradburys ... hanging tough right to the end

[SLIDE]

2. Keep your thoughts fixed on Jesus (1-6)

- Starts with v1 ...
 - *Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. v1*
- Therefore ... reflecting back on 2:5-18 looked at last week
- In light of the fact that

- Jesus is the son who rules over the eternal future
- Jesus is the son who secures our eternal future
 - He's the author of our salvation
 - Who calls us into God's family
 - He does this through his death
- In light of who Jesus is and what he has done for you ... do this ...
 - Keep your thoughts fixed on Jesus
- Through his sacrificial death of atonement ... he's
 - Made you holy
 - Guaranteed you a share in the heavenly calling
- Therefore ... keep your thoughts fixed on him

- v2-6 he continues to lay down the credentials of Jesus by showing how faithful Jesus was as a high priest ...
- He does this by comparing the faithfulness of Jesus to the faithfulness of Moses
- Moses was
 - Faithful to God (v2) > called by him > burning bush > go and save God's ppl out of slavery under the Egyptians¹
 - Stood up to Pharaoh > lead them through the Red Sea > interceded between God and the ppl of Israel
 - Faithful in all God's house ... i.e. in and amongst God's people
- But he goes on in v3 to say, even as honourable and as great as Moses was ... Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses
 - While Moses was a faithful servant **in** God's house
 - Jesus deserves more honour because he **built** God's house
- In 4-5 he adds
 - While Moses was a faithful **servant** in God's house
 - Jesus deserves more honour because he was a faithful **son** over God's house
 - Sons have more honour than servants in a masters house
- What is this house he's talking about?
 - It's the people of God
 - v6 – *And we are his house*
 - 'Christians' are the house that Jesus rules over as a son

¹ Exodus 3:1-10

- *If we hold on to our courage / confidence and the hope of which we boast*
- Christians need to keep a tight grip on the one thing that gives them courage, confidence and hope
 - That's Jesus
 - Reason he gives Christians courage, confidence and hope is because he's secured their eternal future through his suffering and death
- So they're too hang on to that
 - Continue believing in that
 - Keep fixing their thoughts on Jesus
- **Application**
- What's it mean to fix your eyes on Jesus
 - Keep remembering who he is, what he's done for you
 - Keep remembering that when you trust in him ... you can have complete confidence and a certain hope that
 - He's given you a share in the heavenly calling
 - He's bringing you to glory
 - He's the author of your salvation
- Therefore
 - Keep remembering and treasuring the gospel
 - Don't let go of that
 - Don't stop believing that
- How do you do that? How do you keep fixing your eyes on Jesus
 - Goes on to explain that in v7-19

[SLIDE]

3. Keep encouraging one another in faith (7-19)

- In v7-19 the writer encourages his reader to keep holding on to the confidence and hope they have in Jesus
- He does this by moving from the positive examples of faithfulness of Jesus and Moses
 - to the negative example of the Israelites who because of their disobedience died in the desert and therefore failed to reach the Promised Land
- He does this by once again going back to the OT > this time he uses Psalm 95

- In Ps 95 ... the psalmist (King David) is reflecting on the generation of Israelites whom Moses led out of Egypt through the Red Sea towards the Promised Land of Canaan
 - **Illustration – Six Foot Track [SLIDE x3]**
 - Last New Year > Six Foot Track with Jordan
 - 3 day, 2 night walk
 - Follows track built late 1800's for people to travel directly from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves
 - Megalong Valley > Cox's River > nice hike
 - Jordan was very excited > all the gear, map, emergency beacon etc
 - Set out from Jenolan Caves to walk back to Katoomba > only problem is the track climbs very steeply
 - We had full pack, all our food and water
 - Adding to the difficulty, we were walking into a howling wind which made it really hard going
 - Wasn't long before Jordan's enthusiasm for the hike plummeted and
 - he thought this was a dumb idea
 - was grumbling and wondering why in the world he'd agreed to go on this stupid walk in the first place!
 - He was having serious doubts about my judgment of
 - What was fun
 - What he was able to handle
 - Whether I'd just bought him out in the bush to die!
 - This cycle of enthusiastic beginning ... followed by grumbling when things get tough ... describes the way things panned out for the Israelites when they came out of Egypt and spent some time wandering in the desert
- [SLIDE]**
- We know from the account of this journey in the OT book of Numbers that the Israelites failed to trust God and his promises
 - Left Egypt ... full of excitement, trusting in God, keen to see his promises come to fruition
 - Not long after ... they were on the verge of entering the Promised Land and receiving the inheritance that God had promised
 - Spies sent into Canaan to check it out
 - Spies returned > said land was good > but people too big and powerful for them to conquer
 - So people chickened out

- They stopped trusting that God would take them into the Promised Land
- They didn't believe that God would do what he said he would do
- Instead they grumbled, disobeyed and rebelled against God
- Just like Jordan stopped believing the hike was a good thing to be doing

- The consequence for their failure to trust God and his promises was that entire generation would die in the desert before they reached Canaan
 - Their lack of trust in him meant they never got to share in the rest and peace of that promised inheritance

- Psalm 95 is written some 400yrs after that time
- And King David is urging the people of his generation ... not to make the same mistake as their ancestors
 - Don't harden your hearts to God
 - Don't give up believing in Him
 - Don't be like your forefathers who did this and lost their inheritance

- v12 onwards ... the writer of Hebrews does exactly the same thing as King David ... except for the Christians he's writing to
- He's saying to these Christians ...
 - Your pilgrimage is nearly over ... and you're on the verge of receiving your inheritance > all that God has promised you
 - v12 – *See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.*
 - Don't give up on God now
 - Don't stop believing in him
 - Don't throw away your heavenly inheritance
- In v16-19 he ups the ante with a series of rhetorical questions
 - v16 – *Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?*
 - It wasn't pagans ... it was the Israelites ... God's ppl no less
 - In other words ... those who failed to trust God were the ones who had
 - Seen God's mighty acts of power in the 10 plagues he had sent up Pharaoh and the Egyptians
 - Seen how God had rescued them out of Egypt > through the Red Sea
 - Saved them from the marauding Egyptian army
 - That generation of Israelites were privileged to see God's power and might in action and share in the blessing of his salvation
 - Yet ... they rebelled and refused to trust him

- Goes on in v17-18
 - v17 – *And with whom was he angry for forty years?*
 - v18 – *And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?*
 - Those who rebelled against him were unable to enter the rest of the Promised Land
- The point the writer of Hebrews is wanting to make is ... he wants his readers to heed the warning of this past generation and not make the same mistake
 - Because like the Israelites of Moses generation ...
 - The Christians he's writing to had experienced the saving power of God
 - not in rescue from the Egyptians through the Red Sea ...
 - but rescue from sin and death through the cross
- He's warning them ...
 - don't turn your back on God now that you know all that he has done for you in Christ
 - don't harden your hearts to the truth about God that you've heard
 - don't disqualify yourself from your heavenly inheritance because you fail to trust him
- **Application**
- The writer of Hebrews was obviously a good pastor ...
 - All the way through the letter ... mixes warning with exhortation
 - He wants people to understand the consequences of not taking Jesus seriously
 - But at the same time ... he wants to give practical advice to his flock as to how to keep persevering faithfully to the end
- **Warning is this ...**
- Don't hear the word of God and ignore it
- Don't hear the good news of Jesus and his death for the forgiveness of sins ... and think that it's
 - not important
 - you don't need to take it seriously
 - you can put off thinking about it for a few years
 - you can ignore it

- Like the those who fell in the desert ... those who do this will be excluded from his heavenly rest
- May you be here today and you're not a believer (you're welcome) ...
 - But I want to urge you heed this warning
 - Because there is one thing that historians around the world will agree on ... is that Jesus was a real man of history
 - He existed ... we know enough from non-biblical sources to know that he was a real man who lived in Palestine 2000 years ago
 - We also know from Jesus made some pretty big claims about himself and eternal life and how people can have eternal life in him
 - So surely those claims are worth checking out and investigating and not dismissing
 - If they're true ... they have massive implications
- I understand you may have questions / doubts / skeptical
 - Good! Better to be a critical thinker rather than blindly believe
 - Even better is to be a critical thinker who doesn't harden their heart to something without seeing if it's true or not
- If that's you ... I want to encourage you to
 - Keep coming to church
 - Keep asking questions
 - Christianity Explored
- But don't harden your hearts to the truth about Jesus and just dismiss it
 - Don't dismiss it
 - Don't just leave it there
 - Don't walk away without seeking out answers to your questions
 - Tell someone your objections
 - Ask me, read a book, listen to a talk
- Of course ... the warning is not just for the un-believer ... it's for the whole church
 - Because who was it that fell in the desert?
 - Unbelieving Israelites > people from within the community of God
- So this warning is also for the church
 - Don't hear the word of God and ignore it
 - Don't hear the good news of Jesus and his death for the forgiveness of sins ... and fail to take it seriously
 - Don't allow the deceitfulness of sin to lead you away from Jesus

- And cause you to harden your heart to him
- Because your unbelief will result in being excluded from your eternal inheritance

- So ... continue to believe and trust in the promises of God
 - Don't give up on God so close to your eternal rest
 - Don't believe the lies we hear from the secular world
 - that God is dead
 - that God is not trustworthy
 - that what this world has to offer is better than the promises of God
 - that because you are going through hard times God has abandoned you
 - That's to give up on God like the wilderness generation

- Instead ... hold onto your confidence and hope
 - God has proven his love, his plans, his character etc ... in sending Jesus into the world to go to the cross to deal with your sin
 - He's started the process > he'll certainly complete the process
 - He's done the hard bit > becoming human > dying for the sins of the world ...
 - How much more will he do the easy bit of coming back and calling all his people into his eternal kingdom?

- There's the warning > don't harden your hearts in unbelief to the gospel

- But then it moves from the negative to the positive
 - From don't do this ... instead do this
- His exhortation is ... keep encouraging one another
 - v13 – *But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

- He wants Christians to keep encouraging one another in their faith
- Why? ... so that none of you will be hardened by sins deceitfulness
- Without the ongoing encouragement to keep persevering in Christian walk ... sin starts to take hold > take a grip of our hearts

- **Illustration – weeds in garden**
 - If don't get out and pull them out ... they take over the whole garden
 - Two sections of lawn out front of my house > one nice grass > the other weeds

- Sin is like weeds in a lawn
- If left unattended it takes over and destroys us causing us to have hearts that are hard towards Jesus
- But when we encourage one another ... it's like weeding the lawn
- You're
 - strengthening a person in their faith
 - helping them to stand firm in their faith
 - hold off the spreading deceitfulness of sin

- But notice this encouragement in walking the Christian walk is a corporate thing
- It's what you do for one another
 - Care for one another
 - Encourage one another
 - Teach scriptures to one another
 - Call one another up when missing from church
- The exhortation to encourage one another is something we as a church to one another
 - You can't encourage yourself!
 - "How you going?"
 - "Not too good"
 - "Let me encourage you brother"

- Which means ... by definition ... if we are going to encourage others and be encouraged by others ... we need to be a church to do that

- This is not about individual Christians pulling themselves up in their boot straps to keep persevering in their faith
 - Image of team working together to finish a race [SLIDE]
 - Like army platoon helping each other through an obstacle course so they all finish together
 - No point all the fit ones racing ahead to finish leaving the others behind to struggle
 - Aim is for all to finish

- Same is true in the life of the Christian community
 - No good ... those who are mature in faith racing ahead ... going strong in their faith ... leaving behind
 - New Christians
 - Those struggling in their faith

- Others who are asking questions and wrestling with doubt
 - The aim is to see all brothers and sisters standing before the Lord on the last day ... hearing Jesus say to everyone of you ...
 - *"Well done good and faithful servant"*

[SLIDE]

- And so as a church we this responsibility to care for one another ... believer and unbeliever ... so that none will be lost
- How can we do that?
 - Getting alongside a visitor at church and befriending them
 - Including the person who sitting or standing alone
 - Committing to disciple who's a new Christian or youth group kid
 - Following up person who hasn't been at church for a couple of weeks
 - Committing to your growth group week in week out ...
 - Being intentional about what you talk about after church
 - Coming to church with the mindset of seeking to encourage others on Sundays
 - Setting aside time on your weekend to invite over for lunch / catch up for a meal / coffee
 - Pray with people > give thanks for good things > pray for them in their struggles and anxieties
- Because we don't want to see ppl who are gathered here today ...
 - And people that God brings to this church in the future
 - Give up in their faith and walk away from the Lord
- Its one of the blessings of being a Christian
 - You belong to something bigger than yourself
 - You're part of a body
 - You're part of a family

4. Conclusion

- And so as long as it is Today
 - Heed the warning ... don't give up on God and his promises to you in Christ
 - Don't let go of him who saved you when you are on the verge of receiving you eternal inheritance
 - Keep trusting him who was and is and always will be faithful
- And so long as it is Today

- Keep encouraging one another as you walk that path to heaven together
- Encourage one another
- Lift one another up
- Spur one another on
- So that together all may walk arm in arm together and receive their heavenly calling

PRAY

Our gracious God and Father, we praise you for Jesus, your faithful Son who rules over your eternal kingdom. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus as long as it is called 'today'. Please guard our hearts against unbelief. Help us to look back on all you have done for us in Christ and so look forward to an eternal future with certain hope. Help to love and encourage one other in our walk with you so that together we may share in all the blessings and joys of heaven. In Jesus name we pray, **AMEN**