

Keeping Going with Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] why we are looking at it this morning, I want us to start by thinking of one of the most joyful things about being a church and also one of the saddest things about being a part of a church. Let me start with the best, with one of the most joyful things that we should celebrate as a church, and that is this, old Christians. Old Christians. I spent a while this week trying to think of a more appealing name for that, of senior saints or bus pass believers, or you know, you can choose your own. I'm just going to stick with old Christians, but one of the greatest joys of the church, one of the greatest encouragements to us, whatever age we are, is to be able to look at those who have lived the life of faith and who have stuck with Jesus over many, many years, who can bear testimony through the good times and through the hard times that they will all have experienced, to the fact that

God will not let his people down. So if you're in that category of old or older Christian, this morning I'll let you choose if that's you or not, or you can ask me later, I'll tell you.

But if that's you, I do want to say as we begin this morning just how much we appreciate you. We often speak about how grateful we are for the number of young people we have as a church, and that's true, but we are equally grateful, equally blessed, value every bit as much those through who their much greater number of years have been marked by a faithfulness to Jesus and who can bear witness to the fact that the Christian life is one that can be lived for the long haul. So older Christians are one of the great joys of the church. What then is one of the greatest sorrows?

Well, it's the counter to that, isn't it? It's those who have been part of the church, those who appear to have been following Jesus, sometimes with great enthusiasm, and yet who have fallen away from that and who are no longer walking with Jesus. And as I mentioned that, there will be people who come to mind. We're not talking about hypotheticals here.

That's true for us here in Haddington. I think that's true for probably every church. The Apostle Paul writes about the very same thing in the Christians, in the churches where he served, the real sadness of people falling away from their faith and letting go of Jesus. And actually, as we'll see in this passage, that's a danger that we all need to be aware of and take seriously for ourselves as well as for others. And really, that's the big idea then of what we are looking at this morning. It's one of the big ideas in the letter to the Hebrews as a whole to encourage us and to give us the resources to keep on going with Jesus. Now, whatever age and stage we are, not to let go of Jesus, because that is not always easy. There are plenty of temptations inviting us and enticing us just to put Christianity to one side and just to go with the flow. It'd just be easier to do this. It's so easy to think. But God, through his word this morning, is wanting to teach us and help us so that we can keep on going with him, that we would see that great joy of old Christians, that we would reach that stage, being those who have persevered in their faith through thick and thin. So let's get stuck in. How does this particular passage in Hebrews help us with that? We're going to split it into two halves. The first half really is an encouragement, the second half more of a warning, but all to that same end of helping us keep on going with Jesus through thick and thin all of our days. And one more thing, just let me say before we get stuck in, if you're here and you're not a Christian, if you haven't yet started that walk of following Jesus, just to say, as always, we are delighted that you're here. This is a passage that's addressed to

[4 : 11] Christians. We'll see that. But please, please don't feel that you're in the wrong place, that you shouldn't be here. We're going to see how that message lands and what it says to those who aren't yet following Jesus as well. So please do stick with us as we work through this passage. Okay, first half then, Hebrews chapter 3, verses 1 to 6, an encouragement to God's people to think on Jesus.

An encouragement to God's people to think on Jesus. Verse 1, As we just said, this is spoken to Christians, those who are holy. That does not mean those who are perfect, who never do anything wrong. It means those who are set apart by God, who are made holy by him in the gospel through Jesus. Holy brothers, it says, or brothers and sisters. That word can include both in this context. We don't know who wrote the book of Hebrews, but we do know that it was written to a collective, to a community of people brought together by God. And really significantly, not just brothers with each other, but brothers with Jesus himself. You can look back up in chapter 2, verse 11. It says, he, that is Jesus Christ, is not ashamed to call them brothers. They are connected to Christ and to one another as holy brothers. And lastly, in this introduction, who he's speaking to, they are those who share in a heavenly calling. This is a people whose trajectory is not focused on more of the same here on earth. Not a people who are kind of aimless and wondering or not sure where they're heading, but those who have this heavenly calling, who are on their way to their ultimate heavenly home. Again, not because of anything they've done, not because of anything they deserve, but because of what Jesus has done for them. So God's people have, straight away, we see these incredible privileges, these incredible blessings. As we mentioned earlier, if you're not yet a Christian, please, please see a passage like this as an invitation that you are invited to share in this heavenly calling. That you're invited through Jesus into this family of those who are Christian brothers and sisters with Jesus as our elder brother. There's this open invitation to become God's people. And what is it that God's people here are to do? What does the writer of

Hebrews say to each one of us here this morning who are Christians? He says, still in verse one here, therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus. Consider Jesus. God's people are to go on considering Jesus. Perhaps consider can feel like a slightly weak word, can't it? If someone gives you a suggestion and gives you a suggestion and you say, oh, thanks, I'll consider that, tends to mean I'll never think about that again. That's a terrible idea. That's not the meaning of the word here. That word translated consider, it really means kind of think fully about or really think on. Other translations have fix your thoughts on or set your focus on. The Christian life in mind is to be deliberately directed toward Jesus. An encouragement for God's people to think on Jesus. We continue to walk with Jesus, which as we said, is that the big idea of this passage, how do we do that? By continuing to consider, by continuing to fix our thoughts on him.

I have been watching some of the Olympics last week. I'm sure I'm not the only one. Again, how do those athletes get to that stage? How do they keep on going through the rigors and the hard work of training and all the sacrifices that that involves? Well, it's because, isn't it, they are completely focused on their goal. They have to be. They have been for the last however many years.

Their sport is not just something that crosses their mind now and then or that they go to a weekly practice of. It is what they are fixated on. Their whole life is geared around it.

[8 : 40] That is the idea here. That as Christians, as people concerned with heavenly things, people with that heavenly calling, that we should be fixated with Jesus.

And so straight away here, a good kind of question for us to ask, perhaps to challenge ourselves with. I found this challenging this week. How much am I considering Jesus day by day? How much of my energy, of my thoughts does he get? Or am I considering a thousand other things, jobs to do around the house, work pressures and deadlines, hobbies and kind of news and things going on that I look to distract myself with? Here's a call to train our minds to consider, to think on Jesus, on that which is of ultimate importance to God's people. An encouragement for God's people to think on Jesus. So if we accept that then, if we accept that importance, to consider Jesus, the question then comes, well, what about Jesus is it that we're supposed to be considering? What is it that we're supposed to be thinking deeply on? And we could answer that question in countless different ways, but we are given some specific aspects of

Christ and his work here in these verses that help us. Who is it that we're considering? What has Jesus done that he would have this central place in our thinking? Well, again, have a look down to verse one, where it says, consider Jesus the apostle and high priest of our confession. And there's two roles there really highlighted, the apostle and high priest. And apostle literally means one who is sent.

This is continuing ideas from the opening of Hebrews, where God, it says, has appointed his son, appoints Jesus to be the one through whom he definitively speaks to reveal himself to us.

As the apostle who has been sent for that purpose, Jesus shows God to us. And as the high priest is kind of the other side of the coin, if you like, Jesus represents us to God.

[10 : 55] As the high priest, Jesus can stand in God's presence where we are unable to stand by ourselves. And through his priestly work, and again, that's a big focus on the book of Hebrews as a whole, through Jesus's priestly work on our behalf, he represents us to God so that we can come into his presence through Jesus.

And then verse two, we see that he carries out those two roles faithfully to God who appointed him. That Jesus properly fulfills this task of apostle and priest, of revealing God to us and connecting us to God.

And you'll see here, he's compared here to Moses in the Old Testament, who also carried out these roles faithfully. And yet we're told, verses three to five really, the point here is that Jesus is even more glorious than Moses.

While Moses testifies to that which is to come, it says Jesus is that which is to come. While Moses, we read, was a servant in God's house, Jesus is the son over the house, the son who will inherit it all, it all belongs to him.

Why is Moses used as a comparison here? Well, it's because the particular temptation to the original recipients of this letter to the Hebrews that they were going through, the particular temptation to let go of Jesus was because there was that call for them to go back to the Old Testament religion and all that they knew about Moses.

[12 : 31] Rather than trusting in Jesus, their temptation was to trust again in the law, in their own efforts, in the Old Testament sacrificial system, to simply go back to how things had used to be, how they'd been used to living, how so many of their peers would have continued to live.

The thing which they would have been getting at a hard time for leaving, for moving on from. And so this letter is reminding them, can you not see that what you have in Jesus is better?

What you have in Jesus is more glorious. Not because Moses was rubbish, that the letter to the Hebrews will never kind of downplay the Old Testament at all. Not because it should be rejected, but because Moses was pointing and was preparing people for the real thing, which is Jesus himself.

So stick with him. Stick with the real thing, the writer to the Hebrews is saying. And the message to us then really follows that same line, doesn't it? Whatever the world is offering us, whatever that pull is that we feel, well actually rather than Jesus, I'm going to hope in this instead.

Actually rather than stick with Jesus, I'm going to follow this path. Or wherever we feel on the outside, because everyone else is doing something different and it will be easier to just go with the flow.

[13 : 51] Again, the book of Hebrews says to us, directly consider Jesus. Because what he has done is better. What he offers is better. He has truly revealed God to us.

We cannot know God any other way than through his son through whom he has spoken finally. He has truly enabled us to come into the presence of God.

That is not possible any other way, but only through Jesus and what he has done in the gospel. He has done that fully and faithfully. And so as God's people, we continue to consider, to think on, to fix our focus on him.

Because he is greater. And it says we focus on him that we keep on going in the Christian life, recognizing what we have in Jesus. And we see the incredible encouragement.

This first section finishes with verse six. We are his house, it says. It means we really are God's people, where he dwells. We have that real confidence if we continue to hope in him.

[14 : 58] And I'll say again, if you're not yet a Christian, that invitation to come in, to hope in Jesus, is there for each and every one of us. This encouragement for God's people to think on Jesus because he is the foundation of our faith.

He is greater than anything else. He has revealed God to us and brought us into his presence through his sacrifice on the cross. What greater thing is there for us to be fixing our thoughts upon as his people?

So there's the first half of our passage, an encouragement to God's people to think on Jesus. Let's move on into the second half. This is verse seven of chapter three down to the end here.

And really the first verse of chapter four as well. And having seen this encouragement first, look at what you have in Jesus. Keep thinking on him. We see secondly, a warning to God's people about falling away from Jesus.

That's our second point, a warning to God's people about falling away from Jesus. What God's people have in Christ is so good, but this letter says, make sure that we don't get complacent about that.

[16 : 13] And the second half of this chapter is based around quotations from Psalm 95. You'll see them there, verses seven down to 11, verse 15 as well.

And Psalm 95 refers back to events even earlier in the Bible. Verse seven, therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, and here is Psalm 95, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness.

Psalm 95, and through that, Hebrews chapter three here, is a lesson, is a warning from history to us, to the church today.

It's referring back what is the rebellion it speaks of, what is the wilderness it's talking about? It's referring back to God's people in the Old Testament after the Exodus.

So a little bit of kind of Bible history for us. The Exodus was the great rescue of the Old Testament. God bringing his people out of slavery in Egypt through incredible, wondrous, miraculous acts.

[17 : 26] The plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, many other things. God's people saw incredible things. And kind of the point here is, well, what was their response?

And if we were to turn back to the book of Exodus, we would find that within two chapters of crossing the Red Sea, the most incredible thing probably any human had ever seen, they were grumbling and they were complaining about God.

If we were to turn to the book of Numbers, where that kind of journey continues later on, when God has rescued them from Egypt, defeating the military superpower of the day and God then shows them the land that he has promised for them, the land he's going to give them.

Again, what do the people, these people who have seen the Exodus rescue, what do they do? Well, they doubt. They disbelieve that God will actually be able to give it to them.

Their past experience and knowledge of God's power and rescue has no impact on their actions and their trust in him in the present.

[18 : 37] And because of that, that generation, that generation brought out of Egypt never entered the promised land, never entered that promised rest that God had for them.

We see that verse 11, God speaking, I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. Because of their failure to keep on believing, they did not receive that blessing that God had in store for them.

And the point here that the warning, I think is really clear to us, isn't it? For the first readers of Hebrews and for us this morning, this is a letter, this is a chapter to say don't be naive, don't be so careless as to think that disbelief, that hard-heartedness, that falling away from the living God, as it says in verse 12, don't be so casual as to think that that could never happen to you.

Think of what those guys coming out of Egypt saw, that unbelievably miraculous rescue. And yet they failed to stick with God and to reach the rest that he had in store for them.

Now for us, that promised rest is not a geographical location, it's the eternal rest that we are promised in the new heavens and the new earth, a perfect, restored creation for God's people.

[20 : 08] But we're reminded here, and it's really stark, we're reminded here of the very real danger of falling away from that, not just for others, but for us.

And as we said at the start, that is perhaps the saddest thing that we can see as a church, and that is something incredibly serious. Now this isn't supposed to be a passage to make us really worried, and this is not supposed to be a passage to take away our assurance.

Remember, we've already seen that encouragement that we are part of God's house if we trust in Jesus, that nothing can take us out of his hands. The Bible's incredibly clear on that, that he will not let us down, but it is a call for us to keep on taking that seriously, not to take that for granted, and to keep on having that trust in Jesus.

It is a warning against a casual Christianity where the good news of the gospel, how God has acted to save us through Jesus in the past, stops having any impact on our lives in the present.

It's a serious warning, and so if that is the warning, what help, what wisdom does this passage give us so that we won't fall into that danger but rather we'll keep on going, rather we'll make it to that joyful status of being an old Christian, keeping on with Jesus all of our days.

[21 : 44] We're going to finish by looking at two Ts that are given here. How do we stick with Jesus? Two Ts, that we do it together and we do it today is what this chapter says.

Verse 12, take care brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God. Again, that point that we all need to be alert to that danger, but it goes on, verse 13, but exhort one another.

We have this key part to play in helping each other. That's why, as we said earlier, this is a letter to a collective holy brothers. Later on in Hebrews, it will famously say, do not give up meeting together.

That's why the church is so vital in the Christian life because it is a community where Christians do the Christian life together and spur one another on in the good times and in the difficult times.

That's why it's so important that our relationships are more than just surface level. That's why we need to be willing to and commit to with God's help put efforts into those relationships.

[23 : 00] That we would be, that we would build a community where we can genuinely be sharing Jesus with one another, keeping people considering him. That's why our attitude toward church can't just be, well, what am I going to get from this or does it suit me or can I be bothered this morning or that's not really how I'd like things done.

But actually our attitude would be, how can I encourage others to keep going in their faith because they need that from me and also I need that from them.

A kind of classic picture here is of a burning ember being taken from a fire that when it sits by itself it cools very quickly but it's only as those embers stay together that they keep one another warm and keep that fire going.

A couple of examples maybe, a number of people here will have been away over summer at Christian camps or at a Christian conference, really great times, really great events, we had the opportunity to help out one of those this year.

I'd really encourage that but the Bible says that the thing that's going to keep us going in our faith over and above that is the church family exhorting and encouraging one another throughout the year.

[24 : 20] That is we're hopefully encouraged by those times away that they are not a substitute for the church but rather we would use that encouragement to be building up others within the church as well.

That in the times when we think our faith is going really well and we're really encouraged that we need then as much as any other time to be part of the church but also perhaps the other end of things.

Perhaps you're struggling with your faith. Perhaps it just seems a bit mundane or it's just difficult to keep on going. Maybe at that time we think some kind of dramatic experience of God or a lightning bolt moment a once for all thing well that is what we need and then that would just keep us going from here on in.

But again the people of the Exodus saw more than we could ever imagine and yet it wasn't enough to keep them going. What they needed what we need the way God has structured things is that we need one another we need the church family we need Christians we can trust involved in our lives as we need to be involved in theirs as well that we can exhort one another that is how we keep on going with Jesus and particularly to say that is why when faith is hard and when we are struggling to keep on going that is the time that we need to lean into church all the more rather than pull back and drop away so the first T is together the second T in this passage is today but exhort one another every day as long as it is called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin the point here again it's pretty clear that this is an ongoing this is a day to day process to continue with Jesus and to continue helping each other with that

I remember when I passed my driving test I was delighted I was really delighted just because it was done and I never had to think about it again it was just a one-off thing I didn't worry about hands at 10 to 2 and mirror signal manoeuvre and all those other boring learner driver things it was over it was finished not long after that I drove my mum's car into a lamppost and then while that car was in the garage being fixed I reversed a courtesy car into someone else's car so it wasn't a great start I'm slightly better now at driving but the point is that my attitude of that's done I don't need to think about that stuff anymore was not a good one it was a fairly expensive dangerous attitude to have and yet that is the same with the Christian life and yet it is far more serious yes there is a point where we become a Christian and in so many ways that is a binary thing we are a Christian or we're not but that cannot just be something in the past a box ticked that has no bearing on our present rather this passage tells us as long as it is called today so that means every day every day is today when we get there every day we need to be aware of the deceitfulness of sin it says the empty promises of the world that would drag us away from

[27 : 53] Jesus and rather keep on considering him keep on keeping our trust in him this passage gives us a warning not to be lax about our faith but rather together and today in the ongoing community that is the church family that we would be encouraging each other with the incredible certain hope that Jesus the faithful apostle and high priest if our trust is in him has brought us into God's house where we can look forward to that eternal rest that he has promised as we continue together to exhort to encourage to spur one another on to consider Jesus and to fix our thoughts on him let's pray together through