

Part 1: New Change

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We have been looking at the book of Matthew for a while now, but we are going to take a break from that until after the New Year for our series called New Birth/New Life. What we are going to do is spend our Christmas and our New Year season in a book of the Bible called Hebrews.

Now Hebrews is unique book in the New Testament because we don't know who wrote it. But we do know a lot about the people to whom he is writing. The author is writing to a group of people who know what it's like to be disappointed, and let down. They know the pain of a longing or an anxious anticipation that just never seems to go away.

We've all been let down by something or someone. But we also know that there are different levels of disappointment, and they have to do with the amount of hope we put in that person or product.

For instance if you buy a cheap lunch or cheap pair of socks, you're disappointed, but not crushed when it doesn't taste as good as you wanted, or they don't last as long as the more expensive ones.

But we can hold these small disappointments in contrast with some larger ones. Like one summer where we were driving to Michigan with my family, and our GPS started malfunctioning in the middle of Wisconsin. Soon we were off the highway, on dirt back-roads, pulling up to strangers driveways. When this happened there was a different level of anxiety, fear and disappointment than what would have come cheap socks.

Because for me, this GPS was my only hope of getting to where we were going. It had never let me down and I didn't expect it to. So when it did, we were left with a car full of tension and confusion.

While we've all had minor disappointments, I'm sure most of us have encountered some major ones too. The surgery didn't go as expected, the marriage isn't as blissful as I imagined, the job didn't pan out like you thought it would. Where in your life have you felt the aching emptiness of being let down?

And have you ever wondered why this pain is such a common human experience? In fact it can't be put much better than how the Irish poet W.B. Yeats puts it, "Life is a long preparation for something that never happens."

Maybe that is you today. Maybe you are here in church because it is a hail-Mary pass of desperation just hoping there here is something new. Or maybe you are one who is accustom to patterns and traditions, but in your heart you keep them because you know you ought to, but you don't really expect anything new to happen because to them.

In one sense Christmas stands in the opposite corner of this common experience. Advent and Christmas mark the promise of something changing, something happening.

That's why our Christmas series is called New Birth/New Life. What we are going to look at for the next four weeks is the way in which the birth of Jesus is not only a needed change in the course of history, but that this birth actually brings something new into your life.

The birth of Jesus changed the things we longed to be changed, but most importantly, it changes you. This is why the book of Hebrews is important to us. It helps us change by pointing out the drastic difference the birth of Jesus makes. The author of Hebrews is presenting Jesus as the great hope that lies in all of our hearts. Eleven times in this book the author makes the point that Jesus is better.

The truth is that humans are creatures of hope. And what we hope in is always something outside of ourselves. This might seem strange in a world where the individual is ultimate. But have you noticed how even the most individualistic hope is tied to something outside.

We hope in our politics, yet at the head of that identity is one individual. If that figure is good, we feel vindicated, if he is bad, we feel defiled. We do the same with our sports teams, and trends. Even in the individualistic pursuits of glamor or minimalism, it is ultimately up to someone else to recognize our extravagance or our simplicity. And because of this, we are inevitably influenced by whatever or whoever it is we put our hope into.

We are always changed by what we hope in. The question is what kind of change does that hope bring us? We always hope for change. But what the Bible makes clear is that it is the nature of the object of our hope which determines the change we experience.

Alexander Dumas closes his book the count of Monte Cristo by saying this, "All human wisdom is summed up in these two words, -'Wait and hope.'" In light of this and our Christmas season this is the main point I want us to consider today: **What is it that you are hoping for?** To help us answer this question we are going to look at three things today: What Jesus brings, Why Jesus brings it, and Where Jesus brings it.

Let's start by looking at our first point today which is **What Jesus Brings: Something New.** Now this is where it is important to understand who the book of Hebrews is written to. It is written to Hebrews, Jewish people. These were the people that God had promised to make into a mighty nation, they were his chosen people.

But their history was checkered with disappointments. Despite God's promise to make them mighty, they failed to live how God called them to live, and that brought problems. They were constantly being conquered by other nations, and they themselves were wildly unfaithful in their worship of God. There were feelings of dissatisfaction on the outside, and constant disappointment on the inside. They had angels fight battles for them, and it didn't fix anything. They had prophet's speak God's very word to them, but it didn't stick in their hearts. And they had Kings to rule over them, but they didn't secure a kingdom.

And here came Jesus, the man who was billed as God's savior-messiah for his people. He wasn't born in a palace like the rest of their kings, he was born in a manger. He wasn't killed in battle and buried in a royal grave. He was crucified like a criminal and laid in a borrowed tomb. And then he supposedly rose again, ascended up into heaven. So now even if there was a messiah-savior, they couldn't see him or take confidence in what it was they could observe. How is this guy any different?

I imagine there are many of you in here with similar doubts. If this Jesus really is the savior, then why isn't this world different? Why is it still so hard? Why can't we see this kingdom? What makes Jesus any different?

But as we read Hebrews 1 we are going to see three ways in which Jesus is distinct from what has come before. Look with me at **Hebrews 1:1-4**.

Here we see that Jesus was better than the Old Testament prophets. These prophets were men who spoke God's word to them. They were faithful middle men to God's people. God spoke to them, they went and spoke God's words to God's people.

But here is Jesus, he is the very radiance of God's glory, the exact imprint of God's nature. This Jesus is not another prophet, this Jesus is God himself. He is not another middle man, he is fully-God and fully-man. Have you ever wanted to hear from God? Often times we can become fanatical about hearing a word from God, but here God himself is saying, "I have spoken loudly in the gospel of Jesus." Jesus is something distinct.

Did you notice what the author said at the end? He said that Jesus is superior even to angels because the name he inherited is more excellent than their name. What does that mean? Well during this time, you inherited the name of your father and that name also determined your vocation. If you were the son of a mason, you were a mason. If you were the son of a baker, you were a baker.

Look at what this means in relation to Jesus: **Hebrews 1:5-6**. Jesus is better than the prophets because he is the very radiance of God, and here we see that Jesus is better than angels because he is the son of God. Which means that the name Jesus inherited when he took on flesh was God himself. Jesus was God.

Jesus is distinct because he is not another spiritual being. He is not like an angel, or a spirit. He is not like Buddha or Mohammed. He is the son of God. We sing at Christmas the song, "O' Come Let Us Adore Him." And in that song we sing this truth "begotten not created."

Jesus was eternally begotten as God's son. Meaning he wasn't created, he always was. He always participated in the same nature and essence of God the Father. And because of that he is due worship. Angels, who struck wonder into the hearts of the Israelites, worship this man. Jesus is distinct from the angels because he is God's son. But that's not all.

Look at **Hebrews 1:7-12**. Jesus is not only distinct from the angles by nature of his sonship, but Jesus' role is distinct. Angels are God's servants, but Jesus is God's forever king. He is the one who is served.

His throne endures forever, he rules with a righteous and perfect scepter.

I'm not sure what your background is with Christianity. But I can guarantee you that you have never encountered anything like Jesus. Not only is he God's son, but he is the King who is perfect to rule all things. Which means that when God made you, he made you to be ruled by this king.

Now we, especially in a democratic republic, do not appreciate the idea of being ruled by anyone. We love singing about Jesus as king, and watching movies about kings, but we don't like being the subject of any specific king. But doesn't this idea of a glorious ruling King make sense of our human experience of

waiting and hoping? If all of our hopes ultimately rely on something outside of us, then wouldn't it make sense that this kind of hope is what we were made for?

The idea of king is often foreign to us because of our culture. But that's because we know the limits of our humanity. We know that putting our hope in another king, or another person, or another spouse, or another job, ultimately is just another potential let down. Another aspect of unneeded vulnerability.

I spoke a few weeks ago about a Superhero movie preview where one of the characters said, "We need something better than a king, we need a hero." That line strikes at the heart because that's what we all long for. But in scripture, the king is always meant to be the hero. This Jesus is the hero-king who fixes everything.

Why does it matter that we see Jesus as distinct from everything else? Because as our hero-king he is going to do what no one else could. Here is where we see our second point today: **Why Jesus Brings Something New: We need change.**

God has made us to be ruled by a king. A king solved all the problems we faced. A king was the hero we needed. In the gospel of Matthew we have been looking at the Kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is where we experience all the benefits of God himself. We have peace with God, we have the removal of threats and enemies, we have peace with one another, and we are made clean from the world. This is what God's kings were supposed to do: shepherd God's people into a greater reality of this kingdom.

While we don't use the same language, we all are looking for this kind of kingdom, and we all find pseudo-kings in all sorts of different spheres. We want our finances to bring us kingdom peace, we want our adventures to bring us kingdom satisfaction, we want our jobs to bring us kingdom purpose.

And so we actually give king-level hope to all these various stand-ins. But they always seem to fail us. Why? Because they don't change what needed to be changed.

Now look back at the eternal distinction that the author of Hebrews is making in this text: **Hebrews 1:8, 12.** Jesus was, is and will forever be this supreme king. He will not change. He will continue to be this beautiful, righteous, ruling, reigning, radiant God.

But for many of us this might seem like a bad thing. Why? Well in one sense we live in a world where every year we get the new release of whatever the better product is. A new car, a new phone, a new house. And yet we find that despite its newness, it never really satisfies. It needs to be replaced. How do we know Jesus isn't like this as well?

Or perhaps you have something and it has met your fullest expectations. Maybe your job is exactly what you hoped for, your degree is perfectly suited for what you wanted it to do, your relational life is bearing the exact results you wanted it to. Yet it doesn't actually satisfy you. In all reality you agree that there is nothing wrong with whatever it is you are holding onto but it doesn't satisfy you.

We can find people, positions and products which change everything outside of us. They make life better. But the reason we are always in a cycle of disappointment is that we have yet to find something to change what's inside of us.

The Hebrew people heard and saw angels throughout their history. But it didn't satisfy them. They had prophets herald to them the very words of God. But it didn't change them. They even had Kings who sought to lead them into righteousness and obedience. Some of these kings were wicked, and in their wickedness it caused the people to sin.

Some of these kings were beautiful. David was a man after God's own heart. Solomon was full of God's wisdom. Jotham made great headway in restoring the worship of God. Hezekiah discovered God's scriptures and shared it with his people and there was a great season of repentance. These kings built temples where God dwelt, maintained the law for the sake of God's righteousness, tore down the altars of idols which competed with God's worship.

But none of these kings changed their hearts. Our problem is not that we are so easily dissatisfied or disappointed. Our problem is that our hearts are broken with sin. We are enslaved to hope, but our sinful hearts refuse to find their hope in the one place where it would be healed.

We need a king, we need a hope, who is not only good, but who has the ability to change us. This king is the king Hebrews is talking about.

Look with me at **Hebrews 2:5-9**. Here again we see the kingly language of King Jesus. The hero king who will subject all things to himself. And in this passage we encounter our last point: **Where does Jesus Bring Change: In You.**

We are constantly let down because we can almost always find something which changes our circumstances, but we can never find anything which changes our hearts. We cannot find something which satisfied our desires to wait and hope.

But Jesus is that king who finally subjects our hearts in meaningful way. That baby born into a manger was a baby born to rule over your heart. He, wrapped in the ordinariness of the manger, was robed with the great change we all needed.

Israel's worst kings always caused them to sin. Israel's best kings never did enough to stop them from sinning.

The best kings destroyed most of the pagan places of worship, but not all of them. The best kings led great reform, but still were killed in battle like any another soldier. The best kings failed to raise up their own children in righteousness.

The best we have can change our circumstances, but they've never been able to change our hearts. Israel's problem wasn't that they didn't have new kings, or good kings, Israel's problem was that they never had a king good enough to change them.

But this King from Hebrews is not like these other kings. This King is not the son of just another king, he is the son of God. This King does not do evil which causes his people to do evil, he is righteous and causes his people to be righteous.

This King destroyed the high places and Asherah poles by being raised to a high places on the beam of the cross. This King does not die like any other man, he died for every other man. This King doesn't lead us to God, this King is Emmanuel, God with us.

This King solves the problem of the kingdom because he solves the problem of sin. He for the first time is the one who can be trusted to never let us down because he is the first one able to change us. He heals our hearts from false hopes, he restores right worship, he brings us all the way back to God.

Look once more at how the author of Hebrews put it: **Hebrews 2:8b-9**. Jesus is the King who will one day fix all of the external circumstances. He will put away all the evil in our world, and he will reign over a kingdom which has no threat. But we are not in that world right now. We do not see all things in subjection to this king. We see cancer taking young mothers, and hostility towards others. But those were never our greatest problem.

What we do see is him who for a little while was born as a baby in a manger, who died as a criminal on a cross, and who rose to be a new kind of king. Even wicked kings can put external issues in subjection. But it's only this hero king who can subject our hearts to him even in a broken world.

If all we are looking for this Christmas and New Year's is a change of what is external, then we will find ourselves subjected once more to a hope which will always disappoint us.

But when Jesus came he came to put us under his good control. He came to subject us to his own power to change. He came to make us obedient to his rule. He came to fulfill not only the OT passages we have seen in Hebrews, but also one in **Ezekiel 36:26-28**.

How can we break the cycle of disappointment? We must see Jesus not only as the king who will fix what is out in our world. We must see him as the king who for the first time can fix what is in our hearts: the sin which separates us from God. This starts with seeing this Jesus who is made lower than the angels in his birth. But this change, and this seeing of his supremacy continues to change us. Our greatest hope is in continually being changed by and becoming more and more subjected to the only hope which will never leave us empty even in the hardest parts of life.

He is what you have been waiting for and he has come to change you, do you see him. The full quote I mentioned early in the Count of Monte Cristo goes like this: **"There is neither happiness nor misery in the world; there is only the comparison of one state with another, nothing more. He who has felt the deepest grief is best able to experience supreme happiness. We must have felt what it is to die, that we may appreciate the enjoyments of living. Live, then, and be happy, beloved children of my heart, and never forget that until the day when God shall [choose] to reveal the future to man, all human wisdom is summed up in these two words,—'Wait and hope.'"**

At Christmas we celebrate the past event where God chose to reveal the future to men. As the author of Hebrews says, it is in Jesus where the death of everyone is made known, and it is in Jesus that life also is made known. Jesus is what we've been waiting and hoping for. Look to him, and experience his supreme happiness as he changes the one thing no other hero could: your heart.