

Sermon notes for 15th March 2026

DAVID JEWELL Sun 15 Mar, 16:13 (5 days ago)

to DAVID

Hebrews 6 v 1-12 'Keep moving'

This is a sermon with three headings: Firstly, I want to spend a few minutes speaking about the book which is still the best selling in the world and sales of which grew eleven percent last year. What is the Bible? Yes, it is God's Word and yes, it is an ancient scholarly record.

There are 66 books in the Bible, 39 in the Old, 27 in the New. Many Christians ignore the Old and it contains much that is rather embarrassing to the 21st century Westerner. Yes, we can cope with the Psalms maybe, although we struggle over the plans David had for his enemies...Proverbs, Job, bits from Isaiah and one or two verses in Jeremiah, but why do we bother with the rest? Stories of failure and injustice, histories of long forgotten people, ancient laws and Commandments made which were never kept, animal sacrifice and the intervention of the supernatural through talking donkeys, jars of oil and barrels of water.

The Old Testament is not in strict chronological order, probably the first written was the book of Job. It is made into separate libraries...the books of the Law, Torah the Jews call them, the first five books. Then the history of a nascent Israel over several books, the books which cover individuals such as Ruth and Esther, some poetical books-Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs amongst them-and then the major and minor prophets.

Why do we read these books? Why not just concentrate on the Gospels with a little Pauline exposition to flesh up the bare bones of our theology?

Firstly, we must remember that, apart from the occasional pastoral letter from an apostle, Christians in the years from Christ's ascension until the first written Gospel, some twenty years or so

later, had nothing else to go by apart from oral tradition. Secondly, Jesus quoted freely from the Old Testament, some seventy-eight times. If we do include the Old in our studies of the Sacred book, then we must learn to ask ourselves different questions. As I said we were never intended to see the Bible as chronologically ordered and I would recommend to any new Christian or interested enquirer that they read first the four Gospels, then the Psalms and Proverbs, then the rest of the New Testament. It means that every genuine seeker after the truth starts with Jesus and the cross, the person through whom God worked and spoke fully and the ultimate demonstration of God's love. It is in the light of this that we should begin reading the Old Testament and we will discover far more of God's way with men and women.

It is perfectly OK to ask yourself questions, to look up queries, or as some of you have done, to email or text me with questions; the Bible is God's Word, yes, but I think the Bible encourages us to ask, ask, ask. God is perfectly capable of dealing with our issues. We are not like adherents of some other religions, who can't put their holy book on the floor and must learn an ancient language in order to read about God. I love that we have lots of different versions and I encourage you to find which version works for you best. A website like Bible gateway is especially useful in finding out how the versions differ. I use New Living Translation for my study Bible, I find that it flows better than the NIV. Anyway, use whichever suits your style of reading best. Some people find it easier to listen and I would recommend David Suchet's reading of the NIV.

Talk about growing up living near to the river Thames in London, of many walks along its towpath, my retreat one year which consisted of walking from its beginnings to beyond Oxford when it becomes a large river, combining with the Isis, always flowing towards the sea, the vastness of it in East London, the barriers that have had to be erected to prevent it flooding London. We are moving through Hebrews and as we go, we move into deeper theology-the understanding of God. Just as in life our

understanding of Him has grown and with it our love for the Almighty. We are believers on a pilgrimage, and we are at different places along that pilgrim way. We have experienced many beautiful moments with God, and we know that this will only get better as we walk with Jesus. Unlike so many elderly who don't believe, believing Christians grow and glow more heartily as they advance in years. The writer of this letter is fully assertive in that the old covenant was good, but what we have now is so much better. So, don't go back! We must go where the river is taking us even though it may be travelling into countryside we hadn't been expecting!

The writer here has built from initial statements about Jesus Christ's supremacy over angels and humans, but who has become our High Priest. And he has used OT passages to show this! In God's Kingdom, Jesus becomes larger and more glorious as we grow in our understanding of Him. It is essential that we 'go with the flow.' I remember my one and only fishing trip which was with a friend who knew a little more about fishing than me, but not by much! We cycled to the Grand Union Canal. In those days much of it was an oil slick and we sat beside it with fumes belching out of the factories alongside, the water stagnant and any fish in it long dead. Nothing caught! However, and if you have watched Bob Mortimer's fishing excursions on BBC-which I heartily recommend-then you will have observed that it is in the fastest flowing rivers where the fish are most plentiful.

It is also essential that we dig deep of one well rather than a shallow dig of many wells. We have committed to following the way of Jesus and in a sense, we have put all our eggs in one basket! However, if Jesus is truly the Way, the Truth, and the Life, where else can we go as the apostle Peter exclaimed? The writer here supports that view by reminding us that God has done and is

doing His work too. He has placed things in our heart which cause us to direct our thoughts heavenward.

Secondly: The upward momentum of the Christian life. The passage read to us this morning from Hebrews reminds us that there must be progress in our Christian lives. At no point, can we sit back and think that we have made it! The warning in this passage which we will study more closely in a moment is directed at those who take their Christian faith and God for granted. I would say that death and dying is all part of that progress: it is rare when someone reaches the point of death and recognises that they have accomplished all that they needed to. The writer to the Hebrews encourages us to move on. Perhaps not all of you, but many of you here know the basics of Christian belief, but you know there is more; there are fresh delights to be experienced.

Thirdly: what about those who fall by the wayside? This is one of the tough questions we face as we study God's Word. As we observe what God does in peoples' lives, for some there are periods of great growth and moving forward in the Christian life which may often be halted by personal disaster or addiction. What happens to the person whose spiritual closeness to God reached a depth in middle age only to peter out? I heed the warnings from such as the writer to the Hebrews, but I also recognise both the glorious mercy of God and men and women's innate ability to mess up! We have the example of Jonah and the Ninevites. The reason why Jonah runs away from his responsibilities is because he says he knew that God wouldn't do what He warned He would do to the Ninevites. He complains: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to anger and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people." So much of my questions about these warnings are answered by reminding myself of the parable of the prodigal son. The young man, recognising at last what dire straits he found himself in, went back to his father with a half-baked apology in his head. BUT, when the father saw him, he ran to him, embraced him, put the signet ring back on his finger, gave him new robes and celebrated with a party. This is the God who knows how faulty, indolent and prone

to going the wrong way we are, but He loves us, He embraces us, He welcomes us in! He is an inclusive God, not exclusive. He stands at the door and knocks. Yes, we can refuse to answer the door. He never takes away our free will, but He waits patiently and with perseverance.

We will always need to keep loving others. One of my treasures as a young adult was a video of Jackie Pullinger's work in the walled city and this was titled, 'The law of love'. How do we continue to love others? What can we do when our resources and energy are emptied? Mother Teresa said, "I have found the paradox, that if you love until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only love." As we study these stories in the coming weeks, may you discover the power of God in a new and fresh way!