

Introduction (Part 1)

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[0 : 00] We're trying to come up with an approximate age of fat boys.

! I've been saying 25 years, but maybe older.! It was the catalyst that launched this Bible study. Fat Boys is his legacy. I was privileged to attend some seminars put on by Dr. Steve Farrar, who was an authority on men's leadership in the church.

He wrote several books, many of them. Regrettably, for us, it is now the late Dr. Steve Farrar. He passed away earlier this year, right around springtime.

Probably the most famous book he wrote was his first book, Point Man. It was an excellent book. My favorite was Anchorman, how you can anchor your family for a hundred years.

[1 : 18] A hundred years from now, someone in Wes' family will be talking about it. I had a great-great-grandfather. I never met him, but Dr. Farrar pointed out that in the church today, we have ministries from cradle to grave.

We have all kinds of ministries, but it was no small irony that the one missing the most in most churches was that of ministries designed for the men of the church, the very ones whom God had chosen to be the leaders of His church on earth.

And Dr. Farrar went on to say that if you are a church that has a ministry designed specifically for men, you are one in 500 churches in the United States.

That makes fat boys in our church very unique. Very unique indeed. And I have to be honest when I say that I've struggled for a number of months as to what direction we should go in our study in fat boys.

I've also considered a variety of topics over the last several months, even going back into our time of teaching last spring.

[2 : 46] But I've come up with a plan, and my plan is this, that we're going to launch a study tonight, and this is the preliminary introduction to the introduction.

So we're just going to be here a few minutes because of the dinner we had and all that. But we're going to examine in detail the epistle to the Hebrews.

And when I use that word in detail, I mean we're going to look at it word for word, verse by verse through that fantastic book. I expect this study to take the full year of fat boys, and maybe more than that.

Could well be more. And again, our lesson tonight will be brief. It's become a tradition that we first feed the ladies in the women's group.

This is fun to do, but it restricts our kickoff time a little bit. And as to the title, the full title, I appropriately called this the epistle to the Hebrews, and then I added a subtitle to this study, The Superiority of Christ in All Things.

[4 : 10] That's what Hebrews is all about, Superiority of Christ. It would have been very easy for me to have subtitled this study, The Preeminence of Christ.

And by preeminence and superiority, I'm basically meaning the same thing there. And I'm going to be using those phrases, superiority and preeminence, many times throughout the entire study. Christ, of course, is obviously superior to all humans. He's superior to all angels. He's superior to all holy angels.

He's superior, obviously, to all fallen angels. Jesus is superior to all things throughout the entire universe.

In fact, He created the entire universe. At this very moment, according to Scripture, He is holding the universe together by the power of His Word.

[5 : 16] I remember a number of years ago, some astronomers that had been struggling with an issue came up with a resolution.

They said, there's something out there. We can't see it, but it's like glue. And it's holding everything together.

Everything should fly off. But it's holding it all together. And it's like glue, and we can't see it. So we're going to call it dark matter. And I remember I was talking to the TV screen and said, no, call it Jesus Christ, who holds it all together by the power of His Word.

He speaks, and it is held together. Now, this does not mean that every living being in the universe is willing to declare the superiority of Christ.

Far from it, the vast majority of people do not acknowledge that Christ is superior. Only those in the church, the body of Christ, that have been born from above, declare His superiority.

[6 : 35] and His preeminence. Now, remember, humans are not the only intelligent, rational beings in the universe.

And aren't we glad, given how some act? God also created angels. The chief created angel was an angel by the name of Lucifer.

He rejected the superiority of Christ. He wanted that position for himself. He wanted to be preeminent.

And it led to his expulsion from heaven along with millions and perhaps even billions of angels.

We call them now fallen angels or demons. And amazingly, they cast their lot in with Lucifer.

[7 : 36] You know, somewhere in the universe there's got to be a couple angels right now that fell that are saying, how did we do this? Why did we cast our lot with Lucifer?

We had Jesus, the God of the universe, the Creator, and we put our lot with Lucifer? That's bound to be happening somewhere.

But Lucifer wanted to be preeminent or supreme, superior. Well, we know that Lucifer became Satan.

His fallen angels became demons. They were cast out. We don't know how many, but there's a gaggle of them. None of them hold the superiority of Christ in the way a follower of the Lord Jesus would.

This is not to say, however, that demons don't know who Jesus is. They know very clearly who Jesus is. There's an instructive passage in the 8th chapter of Dr. Luke's Gospel.

[8 : 48] I say Dr. Luke. He was a physician. In Luke 8, beginning in verse 26, then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.

When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met Him a man from the city who had demons. Plural.

For a long time He had worn no clothes, and He had not lived in a house, but among the tombs.

When He saw Jesus, He cried out and fell down before Him and said with a loud voice, He said, What have you to do with Me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment Me.

For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For many a time it had seized Him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but He would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.

Jesus then asked Him, What is your name? And this voice inside the man said, Legion. For many demons had entered Him.

[10 : 07] And they begged Him. This is real instructive. These legion of demons begged Jesus, Do not command us to depart into the abyss at this time.

Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on a hillside and they begged Him to let us enter into them. So He gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

Very instructive information in this passage. For example, that word legion, the use of that word to describe the name or names of the demons is quite telling.

A legion of Roman soldiers numbered 6,000. This guy may have been indwelt by 6,000 demons. Can you imagine?

And these demons begged Jesus, Don't cast us into the abyss. Number one, they knew Jesus had the authority to do that. Number two, they knew that the Bible says someday they're going to be cast into the abyss.

[11 : 20] And so they're saying, please not at this time. In the 19th chapter of the book of Acts, there's another passage about demons knowing who Jesus is.

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.

Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?

Now I've got to tell you, maybe this is wrong, Pastor, I think that's funny. I've always found this section funny. The evil spirits looked at these brothers, you know, and said, who are you?

And the man whom was the evil spirit, this evil spirit comes out, he used the man, the human, and leaped on them, mastered all of them, overpowered them, and they fled out of the house naked and wounded.

[12:38] I just find that humorous. I may have to repent of that, I don't know. This demon acknowledged that he knew Jesus, he'd heard of Paul, but he did not know these false prophets, and this is who they were, false teachers and false prophets.

And the demon through this possessed man leaps on all seven, beats them up, strips them naked, and costs them out of the house naked and wounded.

I just could see that in my head and always thought, wow, I can imagine by the next day all of these boys were down at the unemployment office because they're going to sign up for welfare.

They're going to make it as prophets. The word went out, I'm sure. If we allow it, I believe our study of the book of Hebrews will be an adventure.

I really do. I also believe along with Romans it is the most significant book in the New Testament. If not the Bible.

[13:56] But we need to be warned. It's not an easy book. It wasn't intended to be an easy book to study, to read, to contemplate on.

The great Puritan, Dr. John Owen, said, a serious study of the book of Hebrews takes people willing to consume meat and not merely drink milk.

You remember when Paul talked about that and said, you know, you're not ready for meat yet.

You've got to consume some milk. You're a baby. Well, this is not for babies. Now, if that scares you off or something, don't be afraid.

If you struggle with it, we've got guys in here that will walk you through it. They'll walk you through it. We're here to help. This book, though, is a feast.

And to be successful, we need the instruction of the Spirit of God. As we camp out in the Word of God, it will take diligence and faithfulness. I'm going to be mentioning a number of people throughout the course of the study.

[15:10] Some in the Bible, some not in the Bible. One such was a great professor of theology in the United States, the late Dr. Charles Feinberg.

Really interesting guy. You can probably tell from his name he was a Messianic Jew. Feinberg is a very Jewish name.

His two sons, who became theologians, were Messianic Jews. Dr. Feinberg, the father, Charles, well, all of them actually, but we'll focus on Charles, he was a brilliant scholar.

He held a doctorate from Dallas Theological Seminary. He held a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University in archaeology and in Semitic languages.

He was fluent in Hebrew and some 30 other languages. 30. And it was Dr. Feinberg who gave us some wonderful advice.

[16:19] He said, you're not going to understand the book of Hebrews without understanding the book of Leviticus. I've even heard it said that Hebrews is a New Testament commentary on the Old Testament book of Leviticus.

And I used to joke about Leviticus. That's that book, you know, when you're reading and you're in bed and you get a nosebleed because you fall asleep and the Bible hits you. It's a fantastic book. It's a fantastic book.

And we're going to be in Leviticus. The book of Hebrews is based upon the principles of the Levitical priesthood. Now, don't panic.

By the time we are through, we'll have a basic understanding of both books and some of you probably will be in the Levitical priesthood by then. We're going to understand all this.

I'm compelled, though, to tell a story about Dr. Feinberg. I apologize if I've told it before. Probably the only chance I'll ever have and never be able to do it again.

[17:25] In his career, he instructed thousands of men in the deep truths of Scripture. And one of his most famous students, perhaps his most famous student, was Dr. John MacArthur when Dr. MacArthur was at Talbot Theological Seminary in Southern California.

And I'm going to allow Dr. MacArthur to tell this story in his own words because it's... all of it's very true and very, very interesting. It's a little lengthy, but that's okay. The dean of the... This is Dr. MacArthur. The dean of the seminary I attended was Dr. Charles Feinberg, one of the most brilliant and respected men I have ever known.

He was Jewish. And after studying for 14 years to be a rabbi, he was converted to Christ.

[18:38] He knew more than 30 languages. He even told me once that he taught himself Dutch because he wanted to read Dutch Reformed theology.

He also read through the Bible four times a year. Needless to say, he was exceptional and intense. All of us in seminary were rightly in awe of him and I loved him at the same time.

In those days, every seminary student had to preach in chapel. And when my turn came, I was assigned to preach on 2 Samuel chapter 7, the great text on the Davidic covenant.

My sermon was probably a fine example of structural craftsmanship. I had a zinger for the beginning and a zapper at the end.

He'd been taught for zingers and zappers. And he said, it would have been a great success too if it hadn't been for my lack of biblical content in the middle.

[19:54] I preached a very practical message that was only superficially related to the biblical text in that passage.

Nathan encourages David to build a house for the Lord. And God says, wait a minute. You didn't check in with me.

That's not the plan. So I preached about how important it is not to presume on God. And Dr. MacArthur goes on and he says, when I finished, I felt really good.

He was proud of himself. And the chapel audience seemed to have followed with great interest. And I even thought I heard a few murmurs of approval.

But I really only cared about the opinion of one man. My mentor, Dr. Feinberg. In those days, the faculty sat behind us when we preached in chapel and they had legal size criticism sheets which they filled out during the student's sermon.

[21:10] Can you imagine you're up there preaching and you can hear all this scratching going on. And after we were done preaching, we were instructed, we would stand at the door, the exit, and the faculty would come by without comment, hand us their sheets, and then leave the room.

And some of these were voluminous and some were one page. And he said, I didn't care what anyone else thought, I wanted Dr. Feinberg's. I wanted to be praised by Dr.

Feinberg, my mentor. I kind of looked out of the corner of my eye and MacArthur said, and Dr. Feinberg was at the end of a line.

And I saw he'd taken this one sheet of paper, and that made me feel good, and folded it in half. And then he folded it again and again until it was just this little square, real tight looking piece of paper. And as he filed past me, he reached out and handed it to me, and he never looked at me. He kept his eyes straight down to the floor and walked briskly past me.

[22:33] And he said, I remember thinking to myself, that's not a good sign. You think? At my first opportunity, I enrolled the paper.

I was so eager to read Dr. Feinberg's feedback. I was hoping desperately he would be impressed with my sermon.

After all, this was Dr. MacArthur's chosen vocation. He's going to do this, the rest of the rest of the rest. Still doing it at 83 or 84. 84. Now, to be sure, Dr.

John said, I expected some constructive criticism. But when I got the paper open, there was only a few bold red words written on it staring back at me, and it was much worse than anything I could possibly have prepared myself for.

He had completely ignored all the suggested categories of how you could do better, and he completely ignored giving me a numerical score, which he was supposed to do, but instead there was just a few words in very bold, thick, red letters, and it was like I'd been punched hard in the solar plexus, because the note from Dr.

[24:11] Feinberg said this, you missed the whole point of the passage. This is his mentor. This is the guy that he wants to impress.

He said, this is the worst possible mistake any preacher can make, not understanding the point of the passage.

And he said, and it's doubly so when you do it in front of Dr. Charles Feinberg. Like many young preachers, I had naively concerned myself with just about everything except getting the meaning of the text right.

I had passed over that point. My preparation was focused on delivery, gestures, antidotes, the right mix of humor and illustrative material, the alliteration of my main points.

I had actually approached the big old passage itself almost as an afterthought. That's John MacArthur. Later that day, I received a message instructing me to go to Dr.

[25 : 23] Feinberg's office. That's the last thing he wanted to do was go to Dr. Feinberg's office. But he knew better than to ignore the message. When I got there, he was sitting at his desk, shaking his head in disappointment.

Can you imagine? He walks in, Dr. Feinberg looks up and he goes, and then he says, how could you? How could you?

That passage presents the Davidic covenant culminating in the Messiah and his glorious kingdom.

And you talk about not presuming on God in our personal day-to-day choices?

That would have been a fine admonition to preach from Numbers 15 or Psalm 19, but you can't reduce 2 Samuel 7 to that. You miss the entire point of the passage.

And it's one of the greatest of Old Testament passages. And then John said he never forgot this. He looked at him and he said, don't ever do that again. I mean, can you imagine?

[26 : 39] He never said another word about it to me. And they remained friends until Dr. Feinberg's death. But he never brought that up again. But John said that incident hit me like a sledgehammer.

In fact, it was the deepest single impression I ever received in seminary. Never miss the point of the passage. To this day, when I come to the text each week and begin to study its richness and depth, I can still hear Dr.

Feinberg's heartfelt admonition ringing in my ears. If you don't, this is his admonition, if you don't have the meaning of Scripture, you don't have the Word of God at all.

If you miss the true sense of what God has said, you're not actually preaching God's Word. That reality, according to John, has compelled me for nearly 40 years of preaching to get it right.

That left a permanent mark on him that he would never forget that. He would never forget it. We'll be talking about Dr.

[27 : 54] Feinberg, or quoting from some of his books at least. Fellas, I promise we're going to be brief tonight. Let me close by saying this. Let the adventure begin.