

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

Commentary by Michael Sigler

December 7, 2014

No Turning Back

Read Hebrews 1:1-9

Key verse: “The Son is the light of God’s glory and the imprint of God’s being. He maintains everything with his powerful message” (Hebrews 1:3).

Have you ever sung the worship chorus that includes these words:

I have decided to follow Jesus

I have decided to follow Jesus

I have decided to follow Jesus

No turning back, no turning back.

If you have followed Jesus for any length of time, you have probably sometimes felt like turning back. Discouragement, doubt, temptation, persecution—any number of things can at times cause us to become disheartened and want to quit following Jesus.

The Letter to the Hebrews was written to encourage a group of Christians who felt like turning back. They were Jewish people who had come to believe that Jesus is the long-promised Messiah. But now they were being tempted to “turn back” from following Jesus and return to Judaism. Hebrews 1:1-9 gives a number of reasons to hold on to faith in Christ, including the following:

Jesus is God’s full and final revelation. Even the inspired words of the Old Testament prophets lacked the fullness and finality of God’s revelation in Christ. “In the past, God spoke through the prophets to our ancestors in many times and many ways. In these final days, though, he spoke to us through a Son” (vv. 1-2a).

God created and sustains the world through Jesus. “God made his Son the heir of everything and created the world through him” (v. 2b). Jesus “maintains everything with his powerful message” (v. 3a). Or, as the New International Version (NIV) puts it, Jesus is “sustaining all things through his powerful word.”

These two truths regarding the creating and sustaining work of Jesus are echoed in Colossians 1:16-17: “For by him [Christ] all things were created; things in heaven and earth; visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together.”

Jesus reveals what God is like because Jesus, by his very nature, is God. Verse 3a says, “The Son is the light of God’s glory and the imprint of God’s being.” Or as the NIV puts it: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”

The NIV Study Bible offers this commentary on verse 3a: Re. “radiance of God’s glory” – “As the brilliance of the sun is inseparable from the sun itself, so the Son’s radiance is inseparable from deity, for he himself is God, the second person of the Trinity” (John 1:14,18). Re. “exact representation of his being” - “Jesus is not merely an image or reflection of God. Because the Son himself is God, he is the absolutely authentic representation of God’s being” (cf. John 14:9; Colossians 1:15).

Jesus is our Savior, who through his death on the cross provides forgiveness of sins for all who receive him. The writer of Hebrews refers to Jesus as the one who “carried out the cleansing of people from their sins” (v. 3).

In a world that often opposes Christ and those who follow him, it’s easy to get discouraged and even want to “turn back” from following Jesus. In those times, we can encourage ourselves in faith by remembering why Jesus is worthy of our allegiance:

Jesus is God’s full and final revelation. All other revelations are, at best, fragmentary and incomplete and, at worst, completely false and untrue.

The world was created through Christ and is sustained by Christ.

Jesus shows us what God is like because Jesus is God.

Jesus is our Savior. Through faith in him, we are forgiven and given life abundant and eternal.

Reason enough to keep following Jesus!

John’s gospel tells us that, when Jesus began to teach about the costs of discipleship, many who had followed him “turned back and no longer followed him” (John 6:66).

At this, Jesus asked his 12 disciples, “You do not want to leave too, do you?”

“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God’” (John 6:67-69).

As we follow Christ, there may be times when we want to “turn back.” But as we remind ourselves of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ, of all that he is and all that he’s done for us, our faith will rise up and help us to sing:

I have decided to follow Jesus

I have decided to follow Jesus

I have decided to follow Jesus

No turning back, no turning back!

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