

God Speaks

Hebrews 1:1-3

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Good morning, welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny and I'm the senior pastor here and it is great to be with you. If you're a guest or visitor, welcome. We're glad that you're with us, glad that you would join with us this morning. I'm glad that the snow has held off, right? I have friends in other parts of the country who are canceling church this morning and so I'm glad that we can join together and we didn't even have to worry about it, think about it, right? The kids will get school off for days and days, but we can be together. So, but it is good for us to join together and this morning we're starting a new sermon series in the book of Hebrews, in the book of Hebrews. So, Hebrews is a New Testament book. It's kind of in the second half of the New Testament, kind of in that part, after Philemon, after Titus, before James and 1 and 2 Peter. So, it's in the kind of back half of the New Testament. And so, if you have a Bible, you can turn to Hebrews chapter 1.

But I imagine that as we're getting started with this book of Hebrews, this book maybe is familiar to some of you. Maybe you've read through it and as you're reading through it, you are very confused because Hebrews is pretty confusing. It can be very confusing. There's lots and lots of Old Testament. Or maybe you read through it and you just, you know, it was your Bible reading plan, you read through it and you haven't thought about it again, right? Or maybe you've never tackled it before. But regardless of what your posture is towards this book, there's actually a lot that we don't know about it. And so, before we jump into this first sermon, it's probably good for us to have a little bit of awareness of what's going on, who the author is, that sort of thing. And what we're going to see is that there's actually a lot of, there's a lot hidden. There's a lot that we don't know. For instance, we don't know who wrote the book of Hebrews. It's anonymous. And there has been speculation throughout church history as to who maybe wrote it, right? Some people have thought the Apostle Paul. I think that that's probably not accurate. In fact, most modern scholars don't think it was the Apostle Paul. Others have speculated like Tertullian, he thought it was Barnabas. Luther thought it was Apollos. There have been others who have thought maybe it was Luke or Clement or Silas. Origen, he thought that it was Priscilla that wrote the book of Hebrews. But at the end of the day, we really don't know. We don't know who the author is. We also don't know the exact time when it was written. We do know it was written in the first century AD, probably right around 70 AD. That's when most scholars think. But there's debate as to whether it was written before or after the destruction of the temple. So that's when the destruction of the temple was, was in 70 AD. So some think it was written before because of all the priestly, cultic temple language that we're going to experience. Others think it was written shortly thereafter. We're not really sure.

We're confident it was in the first century though. We do know that the audience, the people who received this book were believers in Rome. Many of them would have been Jewish converts, but there would have also been Greeks. So what you're seeing here is in, in all these background, all this background information, right? What you heard me say was, we think it's this, maybe it's that, right? There's, there's a lot of vagueness to it. But what we do know is this, what we do know is this, is that the people that are receiving the letter are undergoing persecution and they're undergoing difficulty and they're undergoing hardship. And we know that because of the content of the book itself. And so as they're experiencing this persecution,

as they're experiencing this difficulty, they received this letter that, that some people think was actually a sermon. Okay? Some, some scholars think this was a sermon. So this would have been a very long sermon. You can be thankful that, that mine aren't quite this long, right? We're not doing it all in one sitting, but, but they received this letter, this sermon, and, and they received it because they seemingly in the midst of their persecution are asking and considering, is following Jesus worth it? We're being persecuted for our faith. We're experiencing difficulty. Is it worth following Jesus if this is what we face? And the answer that the author of Hebrews gives is absolutely.

The author of Hebrews presents Jesus as being worth it by showing how Jesus is better than all the other options. Throughout the book, we're going to see that Jesus is superior to the angels, he's more significant than Moses, the great prophet, he is greater than the priests. Following Christ is worth it because Christ is better than anything else. Okay, now that we've got a little bit of background, let's jump in with Hebrews 1, and we're just going to read the first three verses.

“ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. [3] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,”

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Father, we ask that you would meet with us now, and that you would show us that Jesus is worth following, he's worth listening to, he's worth giving our lives to. And so, I pray that you would help us open our eyes and unplug our ears, soften our hearts, and enlighten our minds, that we would behold the beauty and wonder of Jesus. And it's in his name that we pray. Amen.

So, I imagine that most of us are familiar with that great movie, *The Lion King*, right? There is a prequel out now, I've been told, right? *Mufasa*. I haven't seen the prequel. I'm sure it's about *Mufasa*. That's what it's named. But I know nothing else about it. But *The Lion King*, I bet many of you have seen, right? The story of Simba and Mufasa. Simba is this prince to be, right? He's going to one day be the king over the Pride Lands. But Simba is far away from home. He has fled from his home, and he is living in self-imposed exile because he believes wrongfully, but he believes that he participated and contributed to his father's death. And so, he's exiled himself. In his fear, in his guilt, he has fled to a distant country. And this young lion, right, grows up, and he becomes an adult lion, right? He's a full-fledged man now. He's ready to be king, but he's off in a distant land, unaware of what's happening in his home. Until he gets word, right? You know the story. He gets word. The country is in ruins.

Scar, his uncle, has destroyed the land and has fallen into ill repair. And so, hearing this, Simba is worried, and he's unsure, and he doesn't know what to do. Should he remain or return? Should he stay or should he go? And there's confusion. Do you remember who comes to him? That little funny monkey, Rafiki, right? That's who shows up. And he's got the stick, and he hits him over the head, and he's kind of a funny character. He's a strange character, and he encourages Simba to return, to go back, right, to reclaim the throne. But Rafiki's words aren't powerful enough, because Simba's still afraid. He's still unsure. And then this

scene occurs, right, where the clouds, they gather, they form, and the thunder rolls, and out of the sky comes the voice of Simba's father. His father speaks to him, and his father reminds him of who he is and his responsibilities. And when Simba hears his father's voice, his fear is replaced with courage. His concerns give way to confidence. His worry is set aside, because he's now comforted. What he needed was the voice of his father. What he needed was his father to speak to him.

God Had Spoken

And that's what the people of Hebrews needed. That's what they needed. Did you notice that that's where the book begins, right? The book begins in an unusual way. If you're familiar with the New Testament and the letters that we come across, we expect them to have these greetings, these welcomes, right, like Paul, the apostle of Jesus, to the saints at whatever church, you know, greetings, and, you know, every time I think of you, I pray for you, and my heart's affection goes out. We expect those sorts of words. But we get none of that with Hebrews, right? The author of Hebrews gets straight into it. Y'all are being persecuted. You're afraid. You're worried. You're concerned. This is what I have to say. God speaks. Listen to God's voice. God speaks. Do not fear. Do not fret. God had spoken, right? God had spoken. Did you see long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

He's reminding them of the past, right? In the past, God's people were not left in the darkness, and they were not left to themselves, but in the midst of the darkness and out of the silence, God spoke to them. He spoke by the prophets. Now, when we think about prophets, we think about the future and prophecy, right? The forth telling, what will happen in the future, and that's absolutely part of the prophetic speech. But, right, if we think about Isaiah, the book of Isaiah, right? The prophet Isaiah speaks of the forecoming of Jesus, right, and of his advent. So, there is this forth telling, but it's not just foretelling. There's also a forth telling, and forth telling for the prophets was speaking God's word to his people in the present. In fact, most of the prophets, that's what they're concerned with. They're not concerned with prophesying future orientation. They're speaking the truth of God's word to the people in the moment, and oftentimes, in the prophets, what we hear is God telling his people, "Repent. Turn from your sin. Don't exploit the poor or the weak. Turn to the Father. Trust in him." That's what God had spoken. He hadn't been silent. He had instructed his people in the way that they were to go and what they were to believe and who he was. In the past, God had spoken.

God Has Spoken

It was then, but God doesn't stop with the prophets because God has spoken. He has spoken through his Son. That's what we see in but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. Now, this phrase, the last days, it's picking up on this Old Testament idea that the last days are the days of the Messiah, the days when the promised one would come. So, when the author invokes this phrase, he's saying that the days that the prophet was speaking of, they have arrived. You're living in the last days because the Messiah has come, and this is the one that God has spoken through. And this should give you comfort. This should give us comfort that God would speak through his Son because look at how the Son is described, right? There are seven descriptors. He's the heir of all things. He's the one who created the world.

He's the radiance of God, the imprint of God, the upholder of the universe, the purifier of sin. He's the one who sits at God's right hand. Yeah, we could do a whole sermon series just on

those seven characteristics, right? That'd be really fun. Maybe I'll tuck it away, but not for today, okay? We could spend weeks on those, but for today, let's try and categorize those. And when we do, what we see is that this Son for whom God speaks through is the divine Son. He's the divine Son.

a) The Divine Son

I say the divine Son because the works and characteristics that are attributed to Jesus are similar to ones attributed to God the Father. Look at his relationship with creation. Through whom also he created the world, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. Y'all remember how the Bible begins? In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and he created it all by the word of his power. And we're told in Genesis that the Spirit was hovering over the waters. And so in the very beginning, in creation, there was God the Father and the Spirit who were working to create. But what Hebrews is telling us is that Jesus was as well. That Jesus was creating. That creation is the handiwork of God the Father and the Son and the Spirit. As Amy Peeler, the theologian, puts it, she says, "creation does not have two sets of fingerprints, but only one. God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit." The fingerprints of the Father and the Son are all over creation because Jesus was with the Father creating the world. But Jesus also upholds the universe, right? That's what we're told. And this coincides with what the Apostle Paul says in Colossians 1, when he says, for by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. All things were created through him and for him, and in him all things hold together.

Jesus holds the universe together, right? It's that children's song, right? He's got the whole world in his hands, right? He's got the whole—I won't sing, but you know it, right? He's got the whole world in his hands. And then what that means is that if Jesus—it's great theology in our children's songs, right? I mean, that's so right. Jesus is holding the world, right? And so what that means is he's upholding it. If he were to release it, everything would fall apart. But you know what that also means? He's upholding the universe. It also means he's upholding you, and he's upholding me. In our times of sadness and hurt, he's the one upholding us. In those times when we think that we're alone and no one sees us, he's upholding us. In our times of joy and celebration, he's the one who's got us in his hands. He upholds the universe. Like, these are attributes that are attributed to the Father. And the author of Hebrews attributing them to Jesus is saying that Jesus is God. He is divine. He does the very things that the Father does because Jesus is the divine Son.

But it goes beyond this, beyond his relationship with creation. He also images God exactly, right? Now, humanity is made in God's image, but we know that we're only made in God's image, right? That we are derivative. And that our imaging of God has been marred by sin, and we're having to have that remade in us and renewed in us and recreated in us. But Jesus images the Father exactly, perfectly, right? We're told he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. That phrase, the radiance of the glory of God, this is the only time in the New Testament it's used. And it's getting at the fact that Jesus doesn't reflect God's glory, he radiates it. It's the difference between the sun and the moon, right? We all know, right? We all know the moon doesn't give off any light. It is only bright in the night sky because it reflects the light of the sun. But the sun, it radiates its own light.

Jesus doesn't reflect God's glory. Jesus, as Peeler puts it again, "is the dazzling display of God's glory. He is the radiance of the glory of God. He is the exact imprint of God." Here

again, this is the only time, that word imprint, only time in the New Testament it's used. But this word outside of the New Testament in Greek literature, it's used in reference to making a mark or an impression on an object. So think about a coin, right? And a stamp. So they stamp the coin and they stamp it with the exact same stamp, with the exact same dye every time. So every coin is the exact same, right? The exact imprint. This is what we're being told about Jesus. And so our minds might run to like family relationships, right? So it's lost on none of y'all that Cole is my son, right? You just have to look at him and you know he's mine, right? There was no mix-up in the hospital on this one, right? I've had first-time visitors greet me at the back and they're like, oh, I saw your son. I'm like, did you meet Cole? No, but he had to be your son, right? Like this happens. He's mini me, though he's not mini anymore.

So as much as Cole is like me, and as much as we look similar to one another, he is not the exact same as me. There's differences. There's physical differences. There's similarities, but there's physical differences, right? There's differences in interests and abilities. We're alike, but we're not exact. But Jesus is the exact imprint of the Father. If you want to know what the Father is like, you look to and listen to Jesus. He is the embodiment of who God is. And y'all, that has implication for how we conceive of God himself. Because it is very easy for us, and throughout history, it has been easy for people to kind of put God of the Old Testament versus God of the New Testament, to pit them against one another, right? That the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath and justice and law, but the God of the New Testament is a God of grace and mercy and kindness. And we're thankful we're under the God of the New Testament, right? That's kind of how people perceive of it. But y'all, one, that's a heresy, so don't believe that, okay? Okay? Just so the mic hears me, that's a heresy. We don't believe those things, because actually the way the Bible depicts it and tells us is that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New, that it's one and the same, because Jesus is the exact imprint of the Father. And so the Father is not pitted against the Son, and the Son is not against the Father. No, instead we understand the Father through the Son, because the Son is the exact imprint of the Father.

b) The Exalted Son

And this is who God has spoken through, his divine Son, who is also the exalted Son, right? That's what we're told. He's the heir of all things. He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. Jesus has sat down on God's right hand, this majesty on high language, it's speaking of God the Father. And we're told that Jesus sat at his right hand. Now, it would be easy for us to think about this in the ways that we talk about, like my right-hand man, right? We use that phrase, right? My right-hand man. And right-hand man, it refers to someone who's important, reliable, dependable, we need, but they're not as important as the person on the left, right? So it's like the CEO and the assistant to the CEO. Important, but not the CEO. And so when we hear the right hand, we might have that image in our mind, like the author of Hebrews is communicating that Jesus is some way inferior to the Father, because he's at his right hand. But that's actually not what's being communicated.

You see, Chrysostom, one of the church fathers, he put it this way. He said that "Jesus attained even unto the very throne of the Father, as therefore the Father is on high, so also is Jesus. And he intended to, had he intended to signify inferiority, he would not have said on the right hand, but on the left." You see, in the biblical economy, to sit at God's right hand is the place of greatest honor. It's not inferiority, it's greatest privilege. And that's where Jesus sits. It's a place of exaltation. He sits there because his earthly work is complete. He sits because he has made purification for our sins. You see, you don't sit till the job is done, and

Jesus's earthly job is complete. He purified our sins. Now, later in the book of Hebrews, we're going to get to these places where the author is going to contrast Jesus with the priest. So I'm going to just give you like a foretaste of that. But what's going on there is that he's going to say that Jesus is greater than the priest, because the Old Testament priests, they had to keep coming back again and again and again, right? They had to make sacrifice and offering again and again and again, because they didn't have a sacrifice or an offering that was good enough for everyone at all times. So they had to keep coming back. But Jesus, his death and resurrection, his sacrifice of himself is so great that no other sacrifice is needed. He and he alone makes purification for our sins. He is the exalted Son of God, the heir of all things. He alone purifies his people. And this is whom God speaks through.

All right, so what does this mean for us? What does this mean for us? I think what it invites us to do is ask ourselves a question. And the question that we need to ask ourselves is whose voice are we listening to? Whose voice rings loudest in our ears? For the original audience, it was the voice of persecution and difficulty. And those voices were directing them to question if they should remain faithful or not. But what about us? What situation are you confronted with this morning? What are you experiencing in your life? Worry, sadness, concern? Maybe it's these voices. Maybe it's the voices of joblessness or the voice of doubt. Maybe it's the voice of loneliness or of discomfort. Maybe it's the voice of anxiety and worry. Now, let me just say, I'm not dismissing those voices.

Those experiences, they're real. And for some of us, they are powerful, right? Some of you have experienced great, deep sadness. And some of you are going through incredible difficulty. And so, I'm not dismissing those realities. I'm simply asking whose voice is loudest? Is it those things? Those circumstances? Those situations? Or is it the voice of God spoken by His prophets and His Son? Is it the voice of His Son that is shown to us in His Word, that is preserved for us in His Word? Is it that voice? Is that the voice that we listen to? Is that the voice that rings loudest in our ears? Because, friends, that is the voice that is true and good. It is His voice that is the divine and exalted Son, and that is the voice we must listen to. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You. Thank You that You have spoken to Your people, that You have not been silent, but instead that You have revealed Yourself to us through Your Son. And so, we pray that You would help us, help us to listen to His voice and to follow Him. For You, Lord Jesus, declared that Your sheep hear Your voice and they follow after You. And so, I pray that we would hear, and that we would hear Your voice louder than the voices of this world, and we would follow after You, the divine and exalted Son, the One who has given His life and made purification for our sins. Let us listen to Your voice this day. And we pray this in Christ's name, and God's people said together, Amen.