

# Hebrews 1

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's good to be with you tonight, IBC. Very good to be here. As I said earlier, I spend most of my year teaching teenage boys religion, theology, philosophy, and one time I gave them this assignment that they had to find a few lines of a text, whether it was the Bible, another religious text, or philosophy of some sort.

And they had to present it to the class and spend about two minutes telling us how it related to what we were talking about. So I got all sorts of lines of text coming from certain boys, and then a quieter boy comes up to the class, so he's maybe 15 years old, and he walks up, and he reads three passages from the Bible.

And one of them is from Leviticus, talking about the punishment for homosexuality. If any man or woman has a sexual act with another man or woman, their sin is upon their heads, they shall be stoned.

Then he proceeds to read from Joshua, and talk about God commanding the Israelites to kill the Canaanites. And then he goes on to a New Testament verse, making various comments about slaves and women.

And he says, based on these passages, I conclude that God, or the people who wrote the Bible, is a racist, bigot, homophobe.

[ 1 : 34 ] A racist, bigot, homophobe. Now the whole class looks at me, sort of stunned, a little bit like you're looking at me now. I'm just going to stare at me thinking, what are you going to say to that? And then I, I think to their disappointment, said, well he makes a fair point, and we have to consider this.

Now, this boy had taken a few select passages from the Bible as his source for knowledge about God. His vision of God, what he saw of that person or that idea, was based on these few select passages.

He didn't see God as a nice person, a caring father, a shepherd of the sheep. As a kind king.

And certainly not as someone who walked among us to cleanse us of our sin. And restore the world from evil. No, he overlooked certain parts of the Bible and focused on these.

Misprioritizing certain sources. Selecting certain sources at the expense of others. Now, as a church, I don't know that that's always our problem.

[ 2 : 45 ] That we're sort of overlooking. If anything, we're overlooking those passages that he's quoting. And we need to take those seriously. But, our problem is slightly different. But in the same kind of way, we're misprioritizing certain texts or certain sources.

Sort of streams of information about God. About how we get to know who God is. What we listen to. What we decide not to listen to. And the author to the Hebrews is very aware of this issue.

He's very aware of how we get to know who God is. Of how the church is learning about God. How their vision of God is changed or distorted by prioritizing different sources.

Hebrews, as many of you will know, is probably written to a heavily Jewish audience. And so, or people, I'm sorry, that at least were formerly Jews and now have become Christians.

So, they were formerly Jews, now have become Christians. And the unique thing about them is they're quite tempted to return to their Judaism. Right? It's sort of like you've changed jobs.

[ 3 : 52 ] And you're thinking, well, this new job doesn't give me the privileges or the prestiges I had at that other job. And some things I don't really like about it. It's not as comfortable. And I'm thinking about going back, actually.

I'm thinking about going back. And so, that's why Hebrews deals with things like apostasy. That's a theme that's going on here. And that's why the author is drawing on the Old Testament so much.

And not just drawing on Old Testament imagery to help people make sense of Jesus or God in his current work. It's drawing on the Old Testament almost as a necessary framework for understanding who Christ is and what God is doing now.

But it would have carried a lot of weight with that audience. So, the first verse says, Long ago, at many times, and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

Long ago, at many times, and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. And any formerly Jewish audience would have readily agreed with this statement.

[ 5 : 00 ] That's right, the prophets. They spoke to our fathers, to our ancestors. When we think about the prophets, we can think about the sort of prophets who have a book named after them.

But there are many other people functioning as prophets. And Moses was one of the first prophets. God spoke to Moses and gave him the law in Sinai. And Moses speaks to the people.

Oftentimes, Christians think of David as sort of the main man of the Old Testament. As sort of the leading figure. But Jews often think of someone else. Jews often think of someone else as the main man.

The main kind of prophet. I was chatting with someone. I don't think he's a Jew. But he was a university professor in Old Testament. And I'm sitting in his office.

And we're chatting. And I gradually start to kind of look through his head. And then I start to kind of draw my attention up his bookshelf. And in his bookshelf, there was a small toy that's still in its package.

[ 6 : 05 ] And it's an action figure. It's an action figure of Moses. It's a Moses action figure. And he's standing there probably with a staff and a small robe. So, Moses.

Moses is the main man. Main man for Jews. Because he received Torah on Sinai. And he gave God's people the law. It's not to say that other people aren't very important.

Or all Jews would say that. But Moses is a prophet. And God spoke so definitively on Sinai to Moses. That was one way in which he spoke.

The New Testament Gospels are framing the whole story of Jesus in the promises of the prophets. You can't get very far in Matthew without Isaiah saying something that Jesus is now fulfilling.

And this is why Jesus causes so much religious turmoil. Well, one of the reasons. Because he's acting like a prophet. And then he's acting like more than a prophet. And he's taking the teachings of the prophets that the Pharisees would have known.

[ 7 : 14 ] And he's challenging them. And he's talking with the Pharisees about them. There's a nice passage in Luke 7. Jesus is talking to a Pharisee at the Pharisee's house.

He's having dinner, actually. And this woman, this sinful woman, comes over. And she starts anointing Jesus with oil. And visibly and physically showing her affection for him.

And this Pharisee leans over. And you can imagine him kind of whispering to someone else at the table. If this Jesus guy really knew what kind of woman that was, he wouldn't be a prophet.

A real prophet would know what kind of woman she is. A real prophet would know what kind of woman she is. And you may know what Jesus said then.

Those who are forgiven little love little. Those who are forgiven much love much. This woman is a sinner and she knows it. This woman is a sinner and she knows it.

[ 8 : 21 ] Jesus was a challenge to the sources of authority that these people in the first century were accepting.

That the Jews particularly. And Jesus is saying, you have got to take me seriously. You've got to take me seriously. Because I'm not just a prophet. I'm acting like a prophet. But I am more than a prophet.

I am more than a prophet. And that is the point that we get in Hebrews. Long ago, at many times, and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But, in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son.

Whom he appointed the heir of all things. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. What the author is saying, if you want to get to know God, don't not look at the prophets.

Don't not read the Old Testament. But if you want to get to know God, you've got to look at Jesus. You've got to look to Christ. That's what I'm going to be unpacking.

[ 9 : 22 ] There are quite a few phrases here that explain that. You'll see he's the radiance and the glory of God. The exact imprint of his nature. One more example that's maybe a little more relatable.

Parents are a source of knowledge about God. We acquire our view, maybe initially, first and foremost, many of us from our parents. We almost can't quite completely get away from that for much of our life.

Dad may have said God hates Roman Catholics. Mom said they're not Christians. They're not real Christians. So we need a Roman Catholic. I think you're not really a Christian.

I mean, you do a kind of church-like thing, and you're a little more serious about that than I am. I don't really know. Dad said you're not really a Christian.

I'm not going to take up the whole Roman Catholic thing and unpack that at the moment. But you get the point, right? Our parents are very, very informative in terms of how we see God for both good and bad. And we've got to at least put that to question.

[10:33] And we've got to remember that often we might misprioritize certain sources of knowledge about God and how we view Him. I wanted to give an example from Christian blogs, from the blogosphere, but I'm really not that plugged in.

And when I did go to visit some blogs, I was impressed, actually, with quite a bit of balance. It's sort of the main impression I got from the articles. It wasn't really one-sided.

It was saying, well, maybe we need a little bit more of this or some of this at this time. But maybe you all can come up with an example. You would know how blogs can be both nourishing but also slightly dangerous if we put too much weight on the message.

So God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself most clearly. He speaks in the loudest way through Jesus.

In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son. And we get about four or five descriptions here.

[11:45] So I'm just preaching the first four verses of this chapter. He appointed Christ the heir of all things. He appointed Christ the heir of all things.

So the heir implies inheritance. Christ has inherited at God's appointment. He's been given all things. They are His. He is the firstborn.

That's the language that is related to this, that the Bible uses. He's the firstborn. He is, in the way, the firstfruits. In this way, He sort of sets a model for what His followers will experience.

He's the firstfruits of the resurrection from the dead. So as Christ was raised from the dead, so shall His followers be raised. He's over all creation.

There's no one like this. None of the prophets in the Old Testament were the heirs of all creation in this way. Only Christ receives that sort of description.

[12:42] God appointed Him the heir of all things through whom He also created the world. Jesus was working with the Father in the creation of the world.

The Son and the Father were co-creating. They were working together in the creation of the world. And the Son took part. What's the implication of this?

If you create everything, then you're not created. If you created everything, you are not created. You're not like the prophets. You're not like the angels. You're not like these other things and aspects in creation.

Christ is above those things. He is one with the Creator. The Greek word is actually worlds.

I don't know how much stock to put in this, but it could be a sense of worlds accentuating kind of all things. It's just the world that you see, but all things. The other things that you don't see. I don't know if you're into a multiverse theory.

[13:46] I'm particularly not. I think I would find it interesting if I knew more about it. But if you are, then this would be an interesting passage to look at. He also created the worlds. The point is that Christ created them and he created all things.

And it might be just more than the first century audience experienced on a day-to-day basis. He also upholds, related to this, he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

If you're following along in the text, notice I skipped down. We'll come back. But he upholds the universe by the word of his power. So he not only created these things, he not only inherited all things.

He also actively sustains all things. He sustains all things. Jesus is acting like God the Father because he is God. He is God.

He governs with God. He governs for God. He's the heir of all things through whom God created the world and upholds the universe by the word of his power.

[14:47] One very interesting thing here is verse 3. Christ is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. This language for imprint, the imprint of someone's nature, was a word used for stamps.

Like a, yeah, you could stamp like a seal or an engraving upon something, like a coin or stone or something else. You could engrave upon a coin the exact image of something.

You could put a brand on a camel. That's an imprint, a brand on a camel. You could also have, say, an imperial seal. If you had something and you had to put the stamp on there. Now you're thinking, well, that doesn't sound like an exact imprint of something.

That's sort of nothing compared to our digital printer. That really could give you an exact imprint of someone's face. But in the first century, the sense is it's sort of this authoritative mark that is a representation of the person whom it represents.

[16:01] This imprint, this seal, it's engraving. It's engraving. It's representative of that person in an authoritative way, in an individual way.

More abstractly, we get this, in this Greek text, we hear that these two men, so the excellent character of Heracles and Theseus, impressed upon their exploits, so clear a stamp of glory.

The excellent character of Heracles and Theseus, impressed upon their exploits, so clear a stamp of glory. A stamp, that's the imprint.

So clear a stamp of glory. And it was their character that leapt upon their actions, this stamp, this imprint. This imprint of glory in their case.

So when the letter says that Christ is the exact imprint of God's nature, he's this stamp, he's this seal, he's this exact representation of who God is.

[17:12] And the implication is, if you want to know God, you look at Christ. If you want to know who God is, you look at Christ. He is the imprint of his nature. I won't rattle through the alternatives, but the author could have written so many things.

What else is the exact imprint of God's nature? Well, we learn from God all over the place. It seems a little bit simple to say this man from the first century, we really have, you know, he lived 33 years, but if we really have about three years of his life, that's the exact imprint of God's nature?

That's the radiance of God's glory? What about all creation? All creation does speak about God.

What about God's word? God's physical word does speak about God.

We'll question the authority and the scope to which you can speak about God. But the author knows these things. He says, look to Christ. He's the radiance of God's glory.

He's where God really shines. Maybe you get the most reliable. The clearest signal of who God is.

[18:22] This isn't as limited or as strange as you might think. If we think a little bit about how we get to know other people, actually. How we get to know other people. And one way, we often say, so-and-so shines in this activity, or in this role, you really see them shine.

So, I'll give you an example from the athletic world, which isn't really my specialty, but I do enjoy it in different ways.

There's an author called David Foster Wallace, about maybe ten years ago. And Wallace writes, wrote fiction, and a lot of really, really good essays, non-fiction essays.

And he reflects on, he himself actually was a, sort of a novice tennis player, but like a good novice tennis player. Serious. And so, he reflects on how athletes struggle to express themselves verbally in interviews.

They present one way, which we've all seen, an athlete interviewing, sort of after a contest. And then he says, but how do I align that with people playing sports that require a lot of extreme intelligence?

[19:35] How do I compare these things? He doesn't give these examples, but I found some. Here's the first. I owe a lot to my parents, especially my mother and father.

That's golfer Greg Norman. Reflecting on the match to come, this is the English footballer. Well, either side could win it, or it could be a draw.

If you're curious, it's Ron Atkinson. The last one is, I feel like I'm the best, but you're not going to get me to say that.

I feel like I'm the best, but you're not going to get me to say that. That's an American football player, one who catches the ball of the receiver.

Here's what Foster Wallace says. We prefer not to consider closely the shockingly vapid and primitive comments uttered by athletes in post-contest interviews, or to consider what impoverishments in one's mental life would allow people actually to think the way great athletes seem to think.

[ 20 : 57 ] And then he goes on to say, I submit that tennis is the most beautiful sport there is, and also the most demanding. It requires bodily control, hand-eye coordination, quickness, flat-out speed, endurance, and that weird mix of caution and abandon we call courage.

It also requires smarts. Just one single shot in one exchange in one point of a high-level match is a nightmare of mechanical variables.

Given a net that's three feet high at the center and two players in unrealistically fixed positions, the efficacy of one single shot is determined by its angle, depth, pace, and spin.

And each of these determinants is itself determined by still other variables. I'm not knocking athletes, but I am saying that if you really want to get to know an athlete and you haven't seen them play, then you're missing out on something.

If you just listen to them give a post-contest interview, if you just select a few passages from the Old Testament, if you just listen to what your parents say is scripture, you don't get a whole complete sense of who God is.

[ 22 : 13 ] You don't get a whole sense of who God is. You must look to Christ. The last thing here is this interesting attribute here.

We get all these sort of what I would call like power attributes throughout this passage. He's the heir of all things, created the world, the exact imprint of God's glory and nature.

He upholds the universe by the word of his power. And then what do we read? After making purification for sins, Christ sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Now the right hand of God is a place of authority, but Christ came from a place of making purification for sins. He came from a place of making purification for sins.

These are distinct attributes of God. Distinct attributes of God. These are distinct things even that he does. Their functions, their roles, that no one else, no one else does.

[ 23 : 19 ] No one else makes purification for sins except Christ. In a way, it's not that Jesus, this might sound a little bit cheesy, but it makes the point.

Jesus didn't bring God's message. Jesus was God's message. He didn't just bring and speak on God's behalf like the prophets did. He himself was God's message. He himself was God's message.

Unless we think that the radiance of God's glory is just a good thing, that it's just good in the sense of it's happy news. It's palpable.

We have to remember that Christ had to make purification for sins. Sin is not good news. It doesn't really associate it with radiance, but in this case it does, because purification is good news.

Purification of sins is good news. This is really set Hebrews up. The book is going to go on to talk about further aspects of Christ being greater than things in the Old Testament.

[ 24 : 30 ] He's a greater priest. He's a greater prophet. He's a greater sacrifice. It's going to inform God's people about what that means for their faith, what it means for their faithfulness, especially.

If you're thinking about leaving Christianity, faithfulness is a big issue. In chapter 10, we're going to be looking at chapter 10, verse 11, if you are keeping track.

we get this wonderful image, this wonderful, again, more than an image, this wonderful description of Christ and how he purified sins.

How he purified sins. Again, chapter 10, verse 11, and every priest, that's the Levitical priest, like if you think of an Old Testament priest, like Aaron, stands daily at God's service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

Right? The priest's role, day in and day out, sometimes two sacrifices a day, sacrificing to God repeatedly. Same thing, same sacrifice, an animal of some sort.

[ 25 : 50 ] But this sacrifice couldn't take away sins. Hebrews will tell us that it was to bring about a memory of sins, to remember someone's sins. And I'm sure you would remember sins if you walked up to a priest on this stone altar and you brought some animal and you put your hand on the animal's head and the priest went down with a knife and he cut the animal's throat and the blood would go probably on you.

That would be quite a way to remember, remember your sin before God. Verse 12, but when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, but when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

The picture is that Christ walks up to the temple, to the temple court. Before the temple, you can imagine this big, big area and there would be something higher than your head.

It would be a big stone platform, stairs walking up to it. You can imagine Christ coming in. He presents as a priest. Here is this priest and he walks upon the altar and he realized that he is the priest and he is also the sacrifice and he is coming to lay his life down for the people.

He's coming to lay his life down for the people. And he doesn't have to do that every day. He doesn't have to do that for his own sins.

[ 27 : 14 ] He doesn't have to atone for his own sins. He doesn't need his blood spring upon himself. He comes to lay his life down for the sheep and make a single sacrifice for sins.

And now he's at the right hand of God and he's waiting from that time until his enemy should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And there is the story of the Christian life. Are you perfect or are you in process? You will be perfect.

You are not perfect. You are in process. The perfection is secure. The purification is secure. And we are just getting cleaned up and it's a long, long bath.

It's a long process. It's a lifelong process. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us for after saying this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord.

[ 28 : 17 ] I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds. Then he adds, I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.

For where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. There is no longer any offering. Someone at some point in the last hour said that we don't have to, or maybe in the morning said that we don't have to bring Christ back up upon the cross for him.

Jesus doesn't need to be sacrificed again. Only once. Only once does not Christ need to be sacrificed. And when God says something like, I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more, he is very aware of our sins.

But with a sacrifice like Christ, with a mediator, with a priest like Christ, we can now come in confidence to God. We can now come in confidence to God. And that looks like knowing and being aware of and repentant of our sins.

We have come and we are not perfected. We are being sanctified. But it also comes with a level of confidence to say, I can draw near to God because none of those sins, none of those sins keep me from God.

[ 29 : 36 ] Not one. God. And that's why we hold our heads up in the benediction because we have confidence to approach God, to approach the throne.

Let us pray.