

# Hebrews 1

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[ 0 : 00 ] I have a real longing to get hold of what is real and true in this world.! And I need to tell you it's not just intellectual.

I feel this deep hunger inside me to be connected to something greater than me. There's something bigger, someone bigger out there, and I feel like I want to be connected to it or to them.

I have to tell you that I have an insatiable hunger, it feels like, to feel satisfaction in the depths of my being in this messed up world that we live in.

Sitting across the table in the London cafe where I had that conversation with a friend, I said in reply, you've come to the right place.

I know a man who can help. And we've known each other for quite a while, me and this chap, and he said, I don't need you to tell me about your Jesus again.

[ 1 : 14 ] He's not the answer. And I said, how can you be so sure? And he said, I think when it comes down to it, for me, he's just not that impressive.

And he went on to tell me that he'd tried a number of churches and he said, I know that you've got different traditions.

I know that you do things differently in different churches. One church I went to a few times, the truth is the way they talked about Jesus there was the way I feel like he gets talked about in a romantic novel.

He said, in another church, I went to a kind of different tradition and there Jesus was presented a bit like a get out of jail free card. You've done all these bad things.

Everything's terrible. You deserve to be locked up. But if you get Jesus, he said, it felt like a get out of jail free card. And he said, I went to another church, the local parish church, and he said, there, Jesus' name was almost completely absent.

[ 2 : 24 ] I heard his name mentioned at the end of a prayer, the Lord's Prayer that we learned when we were at school, but nothing more than that. And I've come to the conclusion, he's just not that impressive.

And I said, well, I take your point. Everything you've just described isn't that impressive. And if that is all there is, I would agree with you.

But I need to tell you, you've been misled. That's not the real Jesus. And of course, I go away from a meeting like that and it's very, very frustrating.

Because the reality is, that's what happens when the church holds out a Jesus who doesn't captivate our wonder. When the church holds out a Jesus that we can't fear.

A Jesus that is so domesticated that he's really just not that impressive. And so it's no surprise when people like my friend aren't that taken with him.

[ 3 : 35 ] Now, I was quoting what he said in each of those church experiences that he had. I can't verify the reality of that in each of those cases, obviously.

But that was the impression that he was left with when he went to these different church traditions in our land. We, as a church, need to be careful that we're not doing the same. I'm not saying that with my frustration to bag on those other churches.

It is to say that we need to be careful that we're not doing some version of each one of those ourselves. And the one thing that will help us is the book of Hebrews.

You see, the book of Hebrews will not let us reduce Jesus to a Jesus that doesn't captivate our wonder, to a Jesus that we can't fear, or a Jesus that is too domesticated, that he's just not that impressive.

And it begins right there in chapter 1, verse 1. Do open up Hebrews 1 again, if you've closed it, page 1001.

[ 4 : 52 ] We're going to be in the first four verses. God, we're told right up at the very beginning, is a speaking God. He spoke creation into being. Right back at the beginning, let there be, and there was.

And from Adam all the way to Christ, God was speaking. God is not silent. And long ago, the writer to the Hebrews says, on different occasions and in different ways, that is, through visions and dreams, through physical manifestations, like the angel of the Lord with Abraham and Isaac, through his word in thunder to Moses, his word to Joshua and to David, and all that he said through the written prophets, God spoke to the people of Israel.

But the writer to the Hebrews is saying, there is now a new stage of divine revelation. A fuller revelation of God in these last days, these concluding days in the old order of Israel, before the judgment that fell in AD 70, God has spoken in a new way through his Son.

He has spoken by his Son. It is not the private word to a single individual, but the public revelation to all of the saving actions, the life, the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus Christ, which he has interpreted and explained so his people understand.

So we now have a final word from God, and that word is a person. Christ has been spoken by God as his last word.

[ 6 : 24 ] We don't need any further revelation to know what God is like. We don't need any further revelation to know what God is doing in the world, or even what he requires of us. God is speaking today because he has spoken finally in Christ, and the words he spoke in Scripture, he speaks now in the full light of the finished work of his supreme and glorious Son.

But starting here, Hebrews 1 verse 1, as the author continues, we might expect the author to lay out some things that Jesus has said. Instead, God is a speaking God, what has Jesus said?

But instead, the rest of this opening sentence, do you notice, focuses on the Son's identity and his work. And we have seven affirmations that I want us to walk through here.

Seven affirmations about the Son. So far from being unimpressive, Jesus is held out as supreme for seven reasons. Number one, it's there in verse 2, he is the heir.

The heir, the heir. He has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things. That's an echo of Psalm 2 verse 8, which is addressed to the Lord's anointed, the Lord's Son, and he has given the nations as his inheritance.

[ 7 : 43 ] Here, the Lord Jesus has been given not just the nations, but all things. He is the heir of all things. 2 verse 5 and following tells us that everything has been put in subjection to the Lord Jesus.

Christ is Lord and King over everything. He owns it all, and he owns it all now. He is the heir of all things.

Now, when we know that, that should affect the way we think about all kinds of things. When it comes to our evangelism, we are not on an election campaign hoping that Jesus gets enough votes to be given a place of honor.

He has already been given that place of honor. It is an accomplished fact. So we proclaim him as such. When he commissions the church, when Jesus commissions the church at the end of Matthew's gospel to go and disciple the nations, do you remember what he says?

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go. When we tell people about Jesus, we need to be clear that as heir, he owns all things, including them.

[ 8 : 54 ] It should also affect the way we think more widely about our mission as a church. And it should give us confidence, especially in these days where opposition is around every corner.

If Jesus is the heir of all things, his inheritance includes all things. Every street around here, every street across this city, every house in your street, it all belongs to him and he will take it.

Maybe not in our lifetime, but it has been given to him by his Father and he will take it. Now, what does that mean for us? It means that we don't worry. It means that we don't panic in the face of opposition.

It means that we're faithful. We're faithful now with what God has given us to do, where he has given us to do it, and we're confident that one day Christ will take back all that belongs to him. Part of the reason Jesus possesses these things is because of what the author says next. He is the heir because, verse 2, also he is the creator through whom also he created the world.

[ 10 : 00 ] As God's agent in creation, all things, the universe, time, space, all of it came into being through Christ. The Son of God is heir of everything because it all has always belonged to him.

It's always been his. You see, although the incarnation, the coming of God in the person of his Son that we celebrate at Christmas, although that happens in history, the eternal Son did not begin in history.

He is part of creation. He is not part of creation. He is the creator. Here's John Owen. He says this, By the Son he made the worlds in the beginning of time, that in the fullness of time he might be the just heir and Lord of all.

By the Son he made the worlds in the beginning of time, that in the fullness of time he might be the just heir and Lord of all. The created world belongs to Jesus.

When he speaks, he speaks as the source of reality. And so he tells us what truth is. He determines what good is and what bad is.

[11:07] He tells us what is right and what is wrong. And he does that in an objective sense. It's not an opinion. It is fact. When we are awed by creation's vastness, we have someone to praise.

When we enjoy it, we have someone to thank. When we are doing whatever it is that we do, we recognize that all that we have at our disposal is a gift from him and not a right.

Do you remember Ecclesiastes? It is gift, not gain. And so whatever he has given us, we recognize that it is his for us to steward for his glory and we treat it with care.

All that you see, all that you have, all that is, belongs to Jesus. Our author continues.

The Son is also, verse 3, revealer. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. The apostle John tells us that the person who has seen Christ has seen the Father.

[12:18] Jesus reveals God to us because he is the exact imprint, the exact representation of God's very being. Here's John Owen again. All the glorious perfections of the nature of God do belong unto and dwell in the person of the Son.

As is the Father, so is the Son. Here is the scriptural basis. One example of the scriptural basis for the Nicene Creed.

The Son is very God of very God. One commentator puts it this way, everything God was, the Son was also. And so he radiates the brightness of the glory of God.

This concept is kind of, at one level it's simple to understand. It's not hard to kind of understand the concept that as is the Father, so is the Son.

However, what does that actually look like? And one of the ways that the church has talked about this historically or illustrated this has been the relationship between a light and the beams that flow from the light.

[13:31] One commentator says this, Christ is to the Father what light beams are to a light source. He streams from the Father eternally. The Father is the light source.

The Son is the light shining. And there never was a time when the light was off. The Father is the light source. The Son is the light shining. And there never was a time when the light was off.

In the Old Testament, the appearance of God was veiled. No one could see God and live. But in Christ, God has visited us and we can see Him. And know Him.

And have a personal relationship with Him. Do you ever stop to think about that? If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you can kind of take that for granted. The fact that you can know and experience the radiant glory of the living God.

And you can immediately receive all of His grace and mercy through faith in Jesus Christ. That is a truly remarkable thing. You can know and experience the radiant glory of the One who made the heavens and the earth.

[14:45] Not only was the Son of God the agent of creation, but our author continues. Verse 3.

He also upholds the universe that He has made. He's not just the creator, but He's also, next one, sustainer. Verse 3. Verse 3.

He's the heir. He's the creator. He's the revealer. He's the sustainer. He upholds the universe by the word of His power. Christ is not like the gods of the deists who might start the world spinning and then step away and leave it to it.

No, He created us and He is personally and continually sustaining us. He created countless galaxies and He sustains them as well.

Without Christ, everything around us would simply dissolve, vaporize, and snuff out like a candle that burns to the end.

[15:51] He sustains it all. That means that you open your eyes in the morning or not because Christ sustained you through the night or chose not to.

Think about your breathing right now. Breathing in. Breathing out. You're taking those breaths because Christ is sustaining you.

At His command, the material universe is sustained. You might say, well, no, look, it's the diaphragm. It kind of opens up and closes up and whatever.

Yes. But Christ decides that it works that way. And we must remember that He does this because He is bringing creation towards its intended goal.

Our world is headed somewhere. We are headed somewhere. We are headed to a renewed cosmos. And moment by moment by moment by moment, Jesus is getting us there. But the truth is, we don't need to look too far to see that the reality of this creation and this providence don't bring people to acknowledge God.

[17:06] One of the difficulties we have is our sin. And in our sin, we suppress the truth. And so we stare at the wonder and the beauty of creation and are blind to the divine glory that it reveals.

That's the condition of the human heart. In a debate a few years ago, the late, great Christopher Hitchens illustrated this perfectly. Christopher Hitchens was a very outspoken atheist. He says this, quote, If you want to be awe-inspired, let me tell you that those of us who do not believe we are divinely created, let alone divinely supervised, not just created but sustained, we're not immune to the idea of awe and beauty and the transcendent.

Let me invite you to look for a moment at the pictures taken by the Hubble telescope, the extraordinary revelations of swirling yet somehow beautiful, new galaxies in color and depth, in majesty like nothing I think the human eye has ever seen.

Stephen Hawking has a colleague who looks at the event horizon of a black hole. If you could travel towards a black hole and get to the lip of that event horizon and fall in, you could, in theory, see the past and the future stretching before you and in front of you.

You would see time, except you wouldn't have the time to do it, of course. If you were a mere primate as we are. End quote. Here's a man who doesn't believe in blind faith, by the way.

[18:34] Anyway, he goes on, quote, So, it's in the natural world, it's in the world of science and the world of innovation and discovery and doubt, we wouldn't have discovered any of these things if we'd taken the religious story for granted to begin with.

Now, what does all that tell us? It tells us that experiencing majesty and the grandeur of God's world is possible, and we can do that while still refusing to acknowledge Him, still speculating, making up ideas about it all.

We will, left to ourselves, invent all kinds of theories and ideas to avoid the truth about God. And so there's the problem. But we read on.

Because actually, later in the verse, we discover that it's a problem that Christ fixes. Christ lays aside His creational glory and embraces a greater glory altogether, and that is the glory of redemption.

And verse 3 tells us He is also our Redeemer. After, verse 3, after making purification for sins.

[19:48] There's the greatest problem we all face, the problem of every human heart, and that is our refusal to allow God to be God in His world and to pursue our own glory in His place. It is the problem of our sin, and the Son dealt with that problem.

Christ is the Savior of the world. Under the Old Covenant, that is the backdrop for the letter to Hebrews, the priests made purification for sin, but they did it by offering the blood of sacrificed bulls and goats.

And so their ceremonies were always only external and representative of the internal and the real which was to come. When Christ came, when the Son took on flesh and dwelt among us, his birth at Christmas always had this goal in mind.

Christmas had Good Friday in view. He was born in flesh at Christmas in order that he could die.

God cannot die, but the punishment for sin is death.

So if God would uphold both His love and His justice, punish sin as it deserved to be, but not do that in another person, He would have to bear the punishment Himself.

[20:57] He would have to take to Himself a body which was capable of dying. And that's what He did in His Son. And Christ's death was not just any death.

It was a sacrificial death that fulfilled all that the Old Covenant sacrifices pointed towards. It was a death that brought purification for sins. It was sufficiently powerful so as to reach to the heart and so to redeem all who put their faith in Him.

This is the greatest glory. It is a glory that was beaten and nailed to a cross. A glory that reached down from heaven in order to lift up the broken.

A glory that reached down in order to break the chains of slaves, in order that you and I, who are as undeserving as can be. We deserve to be cast off from God forever.

But He did this so that we can be redeemed. What kind of king would do that? What kind of king would humble himself like this? His name is Jesus.

[ 22 : 09 ] He did this. But as we know, death wasn't the end of the story. And our author reminds us that after making purification, verse 3, He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

After making purification for sins, as our Redeemer, He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. And so He is our victor. He is victor.

Because three days after this execution, where our sins were paid for, He was raised. He defeated death. Christ ascended then back to heaven and is now seated at the right hand of His Father.

The right hand is the place of honor and favor and victory, Psalm 20, verse 6, tells us. The Son is exalted to the highest place. And when it says He sat down, He doesn't do that because He's tired, but because it symbolizes a completed work.

Every sin of every one of His people has been purged. His death achieved the redemption of His people. It didn't just make it possible. It achieved the redemption of His people.

[ 23 : 17 ] So He doesn't sit for a rest. He sits in order to rule. Here the allusion is to Psalm 110, verse 1, where the exalted Son must sit at the Father's right hand until His enemies are made His footstool.

When times are hard, and when we see wickedness and evil, the great wickedness and evil that we see that humanity is capable of perpetrating, whether we see it in our own hearts or we see it expressed in the culture around us, and we want to wonder, why does the Lord not just come back and sort this all out once and for all?

The answer is that all His enemies have not yet been subdued. There are more men and women, more boys and girls, who have yet to bow the knee to Him and receive the salvation and eternal life that Christ has purchased on the cross.

His grace still has a way to go. If you're here this evening and you're not a Christian, and you ask that question, the why has your God, you Christians, why has your God not fixed this, the mess that we're in?

If you're asking those kind of questions, it is because He is giving you time to respond to His grace. He is giving you a chance to turn from your sins and to know Christ as your Redeemer and so to receive the salvation that He has purchased for us.

[ 24 : 42 ] And just look at this Christ as He has laid out here in these four verses. Just look at Him. Would you not want to belong to one so glorious and so powerful and so beautiful?

Why has Christ not yet returned? Because He hasn't yet claimed His inheritance. He has more people to bring in. So if you need to come in, come in.

Come now. Come now. And then when the last of those that He has redeemed comes in, then He will return to destroy the final enemy, death itself.

Here is the Supreme Son, the heir of all things, because as Creator, He owns it all. As the Eternal Son, He reveals God to us and sustains His creation by His powerful Word.

And then He deploys all of that authority and power in the cross where His death redeems us from sin. Every sin on Him was laid and we are free. And because death could not hold Him, He is raised, He ascends to the Father's right hand and from there He now rules and reigns from heaven.

[ 26 : 00 ] That is where He is this evening. We are here. He is at the Father's right hand and He is ruling over everything. He is no small Christ. Remember Harry, when he preached at Christmas, talked about pity Jesus.

So easy to diminish Him and to think about Him in that way. He is no small Christ. He is supreme. And because of this, verse 4, finally we see that He is superior.

Superior. Having become as much superior to angels as the name that He has inherited is more excellent than theirs. More on this next week. No, it won't be next week.

I'm an exeter next week. It'll be the week after, Lord willing. But part of the author's concern here in Hebrews was to address an unduly high view of angels among the hearers. But our Lord's name is far above all angels, all authorities, all powers.

The prophet Isaiah told us that His name is a most excellent name. His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His name will be praised all the way to the ends of the earth.

[ 27 : 06 ] Because of the increase of His government and peace, there will be no end. His name is Jesus because He will sit on the throne of His father David until the consummation of all things.

And what Isaiah looked forward to, we have seen come to pass. Can you see? It's like our author is saying, look, here's the Son.

And let me tell you about Him. This is what He's like. And another thing. And another thing. And by the way, another thing.

So that we go away with our minds blown wide open at the unparalleled supremacy of Christ. If you're tempted to think Jesus is just not that impressive, you can be certain, dead certain, that you've totally missed Him.

You've totally misunderstood Him. But if you are a Christian, I expect most of us are this evening, look again. Isn't He wonderful?

[ 28 : 15 ] Isn't He wonderful? Let none of us ever be guilty of holding out a diminished and unimpressive Christ. And remind ourselves again and again of the wonder, the supremacy, the unrivaled greatness of the One who is our Lord and Savior.

And if you're a Christian, He is yours. And you are His. So whatever's going on in your life, lean in. Trust Him when things are tough.

Trust Him when things are great. Trust Him when you're anxious. Trust Him when life is just super fine. Trust Him. Trust Him.

Because He's worthy. Let's pray together. Thank you.