

1. Jesus Christ: God's Living Word

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[0 : 00] A moment ago, we were going to be looking at the subject of God's final words to the world. And if you have the Bibles there, if you turn to page 1001, we're going to be looking at Hebrews chapter 1 to chapter 2 verse 4.

We're going to read the whole passage today, although we'll only be looking at verses 1 to 4 of chapter 1. Hebrews chapter 1 verse 1.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. Within these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, for whom also he created the world.

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, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say, You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Or again, I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

[1 : 23] And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, Let all God's angels worship him. Of the angels, he says, he makes his angels' winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.

But of the Son, he says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.

Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions. And you, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment. Like a robe, you will roll them up. Like a garment, they will be changed.

But you are the same, and your years will have no end. And which of the angels has he ever said, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?

[2 : 33] Are they not all ministering spirits sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? Therefore, we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord. It was attested to by those who heard it, while God also bore witness, by signs and wonders, and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.

Amen. That is the word of God, and may he bless it to our hearts, and to our minds. A number of years ago, I worked in Durham, and I particularly worked in a college associated with Durham University.

And one day, a number of years ago, I went into one of the university buildings, and there was a large notice there, Come and hear the Son of God. And the Son of God, apparently, was to be speaking in one of the university common rooms that evening at eight o'clock.

[3 : 56] The Son of God in question was the former sports commentator, David Icke, who among his other intelligent views, believed that the world is governed by a race of reptiles, and who believed we are all in great danger of succumbing to that.

Simply because you call yourself the Son of God, in other words, does not mean that you are the Son of God, and you have something that needs to be said, and something that is worth saying.

Now, not everybody who speaks in the contemporary world is crazy as David Icke, but there are many, many voices which speak with a very confusing and a very misleading voice, and a very misleading accent.

After all, how do we know who to believe? How do we know which words are the true words? And the assertion of the author of Hebrews is that we have a God who speaks, who speaks authoritatively, who speaks fully, and who speaks finally.

Now, we don't know who the author of Hebrews was, but probably he's writing to a number of house churches in the city of Rome, and he's writing probably to a generation of Christians, a second and third generation, who are getting fed up, who are weary of the Christian life.

[5 : 20] And that's why he says in chapter 2, verse 1, we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

They're in danger of falling away. They're finding the going tough. They're finding life hard. It's a very eloquent letter. Indeed, I was tempted to keep on reading.

I did hear about one guy who was asked to preach on Hebrews, and all he did was he came and read the letter, and then sat down. Now, admittedly, of course, the letter was inspired, what he might have said about it wasn't, but I want us particularly to look at these verses over the next weeks, because they tell us three ways in which God speaks.

God speaks by his Son. That's verses 1 to 4. That's our subject just now. He speaks by his Son. God speaks by his written word, verses 5 to 14, and then in chapter 2, 1 to 4, by his spoken word, by his Son, by his written word, and by his spoken word.

Or more exactly, let me put it this way, he speaks fully and finally by his Son. He appears in human form in this world, and that is God's final revelation.

[6 : 41] And the Old Testament, the scriptures, which are quoted extensively in verses 5 to 14, point forward to him. And then the proclaimed word, the spoken word, in chapter 2, 1 to 4, points upwards.

I was going to say backwards, that's not strictly true. It points upwards to him, because if you've read Hebrews, you'll know that Hebrews speaks about the great high priest who has gone into heaven.

So, God's final word, and today, the living word, in 1, 1 to 4. I want to ask two questions. First of all, when are we to listen to this word?

When is this word for? And the short answer is now. Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians.

But, our author says, God spoke, he spoke in the past, and that's what we'll be looking at next week. But, in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son.

[7 : 47] Now, what are the last days? Now, let me tell you this, we are living in the last days. That doesn't mean I've got any special insight into when Christ will come.

That doesn't mean I know the date of the second coming. And believe me, if anyone tells you the date of the second coming, you are listening to a charlatan. They don't know. Because Jesus himself said, no one knows the date of the coming.

How do I know we're living in the last days? We're living in the last days because these began when Christ came into the world, and they'll end when he returns.

In other words, the whole period between now and between the first coming of Christ and his second coming. So this message is for us. You and I are living in the last days, so we need to hear it.

If you get someone coming along saying, I have a special message for the last days, then say to them, good for you. So do we. Here is the message for the last days.

[8 : 46] The word of the apostles and the prophets. The word that speaks of the living Christ. By his death, he is the one foretold back in Genesis.

The one who had crushed the serpent. And by his resurrection, he is shown to be the coming judge. Now that's very important. When we go and share this, if we were Christian, we go and share this message with others.

It's important we don't say things like this. Is your life a mess? Then invite Jesus in and he'll make it better. That's not how the New Testament speaks. Would you like to meet Jesus?

It's not what the New Testament says. The New Testament says you're going to meet Jesus whether you like it or not. One day he is going to be your judge. And the good news is before that

happened he came to die for you so that when you meet him you will be ready.

That's the good news of the New Testament. That's the good news of the Scriptures. You know, if you've never met him before, there can't be a better time than this as we come to him in his word.

[9 : 58] We're in the last days. But these last days fulfill the earlier days. Long ago, at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers.

That will be our subject next week. But just a word on it. Many times means all the way through the Old Testament the pages rustle with expectation.

All the way, all the way through there are prophecies, there are hints, there are pictures of someone who is going to come, sometimes a king, sometimes a messiah, sometimes a suffering servant.

He's going to come and he's going to fulfill these earlier messages. The richness, the variety of the Old Testament, the stories, the poems, all these sorts of things point to the living word.

In a European town, I can't remember which one it is, I think it's somewhere in Germany, in a museum there is a statue of Christ surrounded by the Old Testament figures.

[11 : 02] Micah pointing to him and said he is to be born in Bethlehem. Isaiah, the Lord, laid on him the sins of us all. Malachi, the Lord you seek will suddenly come to his temple.

We are in the last days which will fulfill the earlier days and God has spoken to us in his living word. So when is the message for now?

what is the message then? What is the word that's being spoken? And the message is that Jesus shows us God. Jesus is God's good faith in human form.

Jesus is the word. Jesus is what God is saying to us. Now we have to get that right. That's not just saying that Jesus is another messenger who points us to God.

All the way through the Old Testament there were many of these who pointed faithfully to God and what he would do. It's not that Jesus is the head of humanity.

[12 : 01] The most superb and wonderful example there has ever been of a human being. And we hold on to his coat tails as he stretches out across the gulf to touch the Father.

That's not good enough. No. Jesus is the hand of the Father stretching out across the gulf to lift us up to God. See there's no gospel unless that's true.

If God didn't become one of us there is no gospel. We are left to imitate Christ. Now of course if we believe if we have been saved if we have come to know him then of course he is our example.

If you try to follow Christ without the Holy Spirit in your heart one of two things is going to happen. Either you're going to get very very depressed because you can't make it.

Or are you going to get very very conceited and think oh I'm doing rather well. The point is that Christ is not the nearest likeness to God. He's not someone whom we vainly try to imitate.

[13 : 04] Jesus Christ is God himself. One with God who became one of us and is one of us still. That's a huge subject but briefly our author develops it in two ways.

First of all he is the creator. Verse 3 he is the radiance of the glory of God the exact imprint of his nature. He upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Now these words the radiance of the glory of God and the image we'll come back to in a minute.

But the point is this you see what's being said here. At the very heart of the Old Testament faith was the statement my help is in the name of the Lord.

Why is my help in the name of the Lord? Because he made heaven and earth. You see what Hebrews is saying this man Jesus Jesus of Nazareth who died and rose again you can say the same about him as you say about the Lord God himself.

He is the one who made and upholds the universe. He is the radiance of the glory of God. Now the glory of God a very common Old Testament phrase.

[14 : 18] It means first of all that God is real God is solid comes from a verb meaning to be solid to be real. In other words God is the ultimate reality in the universe and without God everything is a puff of wind.

That's what Ecclesiastes said everything is futility the word means a puff of wind. But also glory means brightness. In other words how do we see the glory of God only by the eyes of faith?

As God's light shines in the universe and through the world we see who he is and what he's done. How do we know the sun has risen?

We don't know it very often in Glasgow do we? But on those occasions when the sun does rise in this part of the globe we know the sun is risen not only because we see it in fact we don't see it all that clearly but because we see everything else in its light.

And our author is saying if you want to see who God is what God has done what God is up to if you like where he's going then look at Jesus Christ. The exact imprint.

[15 : 27] Now the old right back at the beginning of the Old Testament we were made in the image of God. We spoiled that image. We've still got it but it's rather like a great ruin overgrown with moss and tumble down but still bearing the mark of its greatness.

If we go to St. Andrews for example and see the great cathedral there last time I used this illustration here somebody thought I was talking about St. Andrews Cathedral in the city and said that's not a ruin.

That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the magnificent cathedral on the shores of the North Sea in St. Andrews. Wonderful building must have been glorious. That's humanity. Humanity still has the image of God but it's spoiled and only in Jesus can that image be restored.

Only as Jesus is in our life can God get his image his picture back. So the first way in which he reveals God is he is the creator. Tell us what creation is about.

It's about God and it's for God. But secondly he is the saviour. Verse the end of verse 3 after making purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

[16 : 38] See it's not enough to say I believe in a creator. Many people do. I believe there is a God that won't save us because that's a rather vague and distant idea. The creator the one who made the world is also the one who became the saviour.

And there are two things one of which deals with the past and the other deals with the present and the future. First of all in the past he made purification for sins.

Now that's going to become a big theme in the letter that he made that sacrifice he died for us once for all. Nothing can be added to that sacrifice that can never be repeated.

And all the Old Testament sacrifices the pictures the acted parables the object lessons point to that. In the past he died for our sins we have to experience it of course in the present.

Many years ago in Edinburgh University there was a famous professor of New Testament called J.S. Stewart who was also a tremendous preacher in the days when people actually used to go and listen to preachers people would queue up at five o'clock to hear him at 6.30 and so on.

[17 : 48] And one rather earnest young American said Professor Stewart when were you converted? And he replied two thousand years ago. That's wonderful because that is absolutely true.

Professor Stewart and everyone else who believes in Jesus was converted at the cross of Calvary but of course it has to come real in the present. So in the past he forgave our sins but in the present and in the future he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high and that of course points to a big theme of the letter we have a great high priest who has gone into heaven Jesus the Son of God is sitting down not because he's doing nothing but because that particular work of salvation is finished.

Rather like in the beginning of the Bible God rested on the seventh day not he did nothing since the sixth day of creation but rather that first stage was over.

And he is above angels we'll keep angels until next week so if you want to hear about angels you'll have to come back. So you see he's not just the final word but he has done the final work.

but that's not simply about the past that's about the present and about the future. God has spoken but are we listening?

[19 : 14] Amen. Let's pray. God our Father how grateful we are that you have spoken and that you are speaking that one day you will speak and bring in the new creation.

Help us now if we know you and love you help us to take great courage and comfort from these words. If we don't know you we pray that we may come to know you we may listen to your word and come to your living word and find purification for our sins find strength for the present and hope for the future.

We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ your living word. Amen.