

Jesus Christ: God's Gift of Revelation

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[0 : 00] Well, please do turn to your Bibles, and we are looking this week and next at the start of the letter to the Hebrews. You'll find it on page 1001.

And we're looking at the first four verses this week and next, and particularly this morning we're looking at verse 1 and the start of verse 2. But I'll read the whole paragraph.

So Hebrews chapter 1 and starting verse 1. 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. Through 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.

[1 : 15] 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.

This is the word of the Lord. And we'll be thinking together about this in a moment. Good.

Well, please do have Hebrews chapter 1 open there in front of you as we spend a few moments thinking about these things together. Now, Christmas is upon us.

I hate to break it to you, but we are now in December and it is full steam ahead. Much as I was tempted to resist, I'm embracing it. But the Christmas music playlist has made its debut.

And if, like me, you're a little fed up with Michael Buble, I can recommend Diana Corral's Christmas album, its first class. Christmas is coming. And perhaps through the haze of Christmas shopping, menu planning, the lights, mince pies, and Michael Buble, you wonder, why are we doing this?

[2 : 39] Why do we make such a fuss about Christmas at church? Perhaps you think of a neighbor or a friend. What do they make of Christmas and Christianity?

Perhaps for them it's all about warm, nostalgic feelings. Maybe it's about loving community. Maybe it's just a quaint tradition.

Perhaps you are even a little hazy on what it's all about. Perhaps you are tempted to drift away, unconvinced that Christianity is really worth persevering with.

Maybe you're just a little weary as we turn our attention yet again to that first nativity scene 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem. Isn't there something more to it than this?

Well, what are we to say? What are you to say to your neighbor when you want to tell them about the meaning of Christmas? What do we tell ourselves as perhaps we feel weary about our faith, particularly in the coming weeks and the lead up to Christmas?

[3 : 52] Well, the answer is fundamental. We are to point ourselves and our friends to Jesus Christ because he is God's gift of revelation.

Don't point your friends to anyone or anything else. Don't let yourself be moved on to something else that looks better or more impressive or more exciting.

You see, the first readers of this letter, they were tempted to move away from Jesus. They were tempted to move on.

It was written to a group of Jewish Christians who for various reasons were wanting to move away. They were tempted to go back to their old ways, weary of pressing on in the Christian walk, neglecting to meet together, in danger of unbelief and facing pressures and persecutions from outside.

These folk that this letter was written to were hugely tempted to walk away from following Jesus. And perhaps this morning, that's you.

[5 : 09] Maybe even this morning, you're wondering, why do I bother to carry on? The writer of this letter to the Hebrews wrote to stop that happening.

And right off from the very start, he sets out how central Jesus is to everything. And in particular, how central he is to God's revelation.

It's quite an astonishing opening, isn't it? It grabs your attention. No messing about. He's straight in there. Here's who Jesus is. And front and center is the God who speaks.

And in particular, God has spoken through his son, Jesus Christ. You see, Jesus Christ is God's gift of revelation.

God makes himself known through his son. That is why Christmas is such a major moment in the Christian calendar. That is why we rejoice at this time of year.

[6 : 12] At the heart of Christmas, at the heart of Christianity, is Jesus Christ. He is at the center because it is through him and nothing else and no one else that God has fully and finally spoken to you and I, to all mankind.

It is through Jesus. And so the implication is clear. If we want to make sense of Christmas, we must pay attention to the God who speaks through his son, whose entrance into the world we celebrate in a few weeks' time.

Listen to him and keep listening to him. That's the message. Keep listening to Jesus. You see, we need revelation from God, don't we?

On our own, we're spiritually blind. On our own, we're confused, utterly unable to make sense of the world as it actually is.

We can't do that on our own. We need revelation. We need God to speak because on our own, we can't. We're blind.

[7 : 27] That is the devastating consequence of our sin. Not only has man been excluded from the Garden of Eden, excluded from the place of fellowship with the speaking God.

Not only that, but each and every one of us is spiritually blind. We cannot make proper sense of the world that we live in because all of us, without exception, is tainted by sin.

On our own, despite our inclinations to spirituality, the last thing we really want to do is to know God as he truly is.

Gary Williams has a great illustration about our spiritual blindness. He says this, surrounded by the natural revelation of God, but ever suppressing it.

We are like a man on the dance floor of a nightclub amid the pulsating lights and the pounding music. Standing with his hands over his eyes and ears, shouting, not looking, not listening.

[8 : 39] That is what we are on our own. Each and every one of us is like that.

We need God to make himself known to us. Without that, we are lost. We need him to reveal himself. And in his grace, he does.

As we approach this Christmas time, we are presented with the opportunity to listen in. To listen in on our creator speaking to man.

We can listen in on the conversation. You see, God, the God of the Bible, is not silent. He has made himself known. And that in itself is just astonishing, isn't it?

That God should speak to us to make himself known. And the evidence is plain and straightforward, as our reading from the letter to the Hebrews clearly sets out.

[9 : 41] Jesus Christ is God's gift of revelation. It is through Jesus Christ that God communicates to mankind. It is how he has spoken. It's not mystical.

No weird procedure or ritual is required if we are to hear from God. Hearing from God does not depend on our efforts or our strivings or special technique. We have something better.

We have something clearer. Look again at verse 1. 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.

Isn't that just astonishing? Here is the claim being made. God speaks to us. The mighty, all-powerful creator of the entire cosmos speaks in a way that is understandable to us.

Had God just remained silent, our plight would have been hopeless. But he has spoken. And the writer to the Hebrews details two stages in this speaking.

[10 : 54] First, God spoke in the past by his prophets. God spoke in the past by his prophets. Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

Now, the first readers of this letter would have known immediately that the writer was referring here to the scriptures, what we now call the Old Testament.

The letter to the Hebrews is absolutely jam-packed, full of references to the Old Testament. Those who read this letter would have known it well. This is God's speech to people, specifically his chosen people of Israel, the nation that was to shine forth in the world as a beacon pointing people to the creator God.

His words were brought to his people by his prophets, all those who spoke God's word from Moses through to Malachi. God spoke through the prophets by their spoken words, both in public and in private, both their written words and by their actions.

But what has God said? What was the content of that speech in the Old Testament? Well, the scriptures tell a story.

[12:16] The story of the world, of the God who made the world, of the people he created and who turned their back on him. It's the story of God's just punishment, of those who refused to turn back to him.

It's the story of how God provides a rescue for a rebellious people, a way for them to know him. It's the story of his special people, the descendants of Abraham, through whom he would bless the world, a people who would make him and his rescue known to others.

It contains the instructions for the way of life of those who have been rescued. That is the story of the Old Testament. And yet, the Old Testament scriptures on their own are not the full revelation of God to man.

The scriptures, the Old Testament, pointed forward to a full and final rescue. The scriptures spoke of promises not yet fulfilled. There was more to come as God revealed himself ultimately in one man.

Look on to verse 2. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. The revelation of God in his son is the theme of the letter of Hebrews.

[13:40] This revelation promised in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the new. Here's our second point. God has spoken fully and finally in his son.

God has spoken fully and finally in his son. The astonishing, seismic, huge, eternal reality expressed in these few words at the start of this letter is this.

God has spoken to us through a man, his son. This is God's supreme, full and final revelation to mankind. His name is Jesus Christ.

He lived and breathed. He spoke to people face to face. He touched people. He laughed. He cried. He spoke the words of God because he is God.

He lived the perfect life. He died on a cross, the death of a criminal. He was the fulfillment of all Israel's hopes. He was the one they had been waiting for.

[14:49] In fact, he is the one that all humanity was waiting for. The one who would once and for all restore the broken relationship between God and man. Jesus is the one who has spoken God's exact words.

He spoke them in history. And we have these words right here in the New Testament. Accounts of what he said, what he did, and what those words and events mean.

God's revelation is not the subject of speculation. God has spoken fully and finally in his Son who walked this earth. In Jesus, we perfectly see the Father, what he is like, his love, his justice, his holiness, his goodness, his grace, and we perfectly hear his words.

That is why Christmas is more remarkable, more significant than the latest John Lewis advert. That is why Christmas is far more real and substantial than even the best gift you can buy in the shops. That is why Christmas is a far more rewarding and satisfying thing than even the best turkey and trimmings. What Christmas really offers us, what Christmas really offers your neighbors, your friends, your family, is the chance to listen to Jesus Christ, God's gift of revelation to you, to me, to all mankind.

[16:30] Ultimate knowledge of God is offered. And we need that, don't we? man's desire for knowledge of the divine, it's insatiable for revelation about the truths of life and the universe.

We look for it everywhere and it's not to be found in the latest spiritual fad. Man's desire for meaning and truth is not to be found in the latest Louise Hay self-help book.

It's not to be found anywhere but in Jesus Christ. You see, the story of divine revelation is a story of progression up to Christ but there is no progression beyond him.

We are not to look for fresh and new revelation from God. We already have it all. We have it. It's been written down for us in the New Testament. Notice that little phrase at the start of verse 2.

in these last days. That refers to the time when the Old Testament promises would find their fulfillment and it is through Jesus God's son that the time of fulfillment has come.

[17 : 51] The time of fulfillment has been inaugurated by Christ's work here on earth but it's not yet consummated. We await for Jesus' return.

We still live in the last days but notice it is only through Jesus that God has spoken to us in these last days. The last days in which we are still living.

Only through Jesus has God spoken. Jesus is the full and final revelation. don't be tempted to look anywhere else for God's revelation to us.

You won't find it. But that is what people constantly offer. The latest conference with the special speaker who promises to bring you closer to God to enable you to be more awake to the presence of God who promises to enhance your spiritual life with signs and wonders who promises that you'll hear God speaking to you in mysterious ways that you've never experienced before.

Don't fall for it for a second. As Paul says in Colossians, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith just as you are taught abounding with thanksgiving.

[19 : 21] See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world and not according to Christ.

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily and you have been filled in him who is the head of rule and authority.

Jesus Christ is God's last word to man. God's in the sense that nothing more now needs to be said. For in this word, in Christ, God answers all the needs of the human heart.

Beware of things that have the appearance of spirituality and wisdom, but lack the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord, as revealed in the New Testament.

beware of those who claim to teach the Bible, but never open it or refer to it. We must continue to depend solely on what God has said and done through his son Jesus.

[20 : 33] That is why we constantly come back to the scriptures. That is why the Bible is at the center of what we do. If you hear Jesus' words and works, you hear the God who made you.

You find that here in the Bible, the word of God. And what is the content of Jesus' words? What is it that Christmas really points us to?

Well, Jesus' words, his works, they speak of the offer of salvation. They speak of forgiveness from sin. That is man's greatest need, to be freed from the curse that fell on man when Adam and Eve sins.

Separated from God because of sin, there is no way we can earn our way back. We need rescue. We need salvation. We need a perfect man to stand in our place, die the death that we deserve to die, and overcome death, defeating it, so that we might have hope of eternal life.

we'll think a bit more about Jesus' character, his nature next week, but for now, we need to know that all of life's questions, all of life's biggest problems and concerns find their answer in Jesus Christ.

[22 : 01] He is God's Son, and in him, God has spoken to you and me. we, like the original readers of this letter, have no excuse for not listening to his words.

You have no excuse because God has revealed himself to you in the Scriptures. So let's not miss the opportunity this Christmas today to meet God through his Son.

He has stepped into our dark worlds. spoken. This is what my friends, my neighbors, need more than anything else.

They need to know Jesus Christ who offers life. They need to know that. Am I convinced of that? Are you convinced of that? How devastating it is to stick our fingers in our ears and refuse to listen. you see, this gift is of infinitely more value than any offer that you or your friends will find in the shop.

[23 : 18] This is a gift of infinite longevity. This is a gift that won't find itself getting dusty in the attic a few years from now. This is a gift that is unmatched in all of human history.

Gifts do not get any better than this. will you this Christmas listen and continue listening to Jesus Christ?

He is God's full and final revelation. Perhaps you think you've heard it all before.

Perhaps you have heard it before, but never really listened. perhaps you've had the Bible in your hands, but never really read it, never given it a fair hearing.

Have you examined the evidence for yourself as an adult? Have you made that offer to your friend, to that member of the family?

[24 : 20] Have they considered it for themselves? Will you, will they listen to Jesus this Christmas? perhaps you've been a Christian for a long time, many decades perhaps.

Have you lost the wonder, the excitement, the astonishing fact that God speaks? There can be nothing surely more valuable and wonderful than that.

If we lose the excitement and wonder of these opening verses of Hebrews, if we lose the fact that God has spoken to us, why would we ever bring anyone along to church?

Why would you invite anyone next week to the carol service? Unless we believe that God speaks through his son, we wouldn't bother doing that.

This is a wonderful thing to share. Jesus Christ, he is God's gift of revelation to all mankind. We don't need to speculate about spiritual things.

[25 : 25] We don't need to stumble around in uncertainty. You don't need to make assumptions about the content of divine communication. You don't need to sit on the fence, unsure of what is true and what is not.

God has spoken. He has told us. You and I have God's good, full, final words.

God's great message of rescue and of salvation.

It has been made known. So, will we pray for our friends, our colleagues, our family members, that they may know the God who reveals himself through the Lord Jesus Christ.

To hear his words is to hear God. To see his actions is to see the actions of God. God has spoken through his son.

[26 : 42] Will you listen? Will you keep listening? Will you bring your friends to listen? Let me pray. Therefore, we must pay much 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? Father, we thank you so much that you are a God who speaks. Would we not lose the wonder of that truth?

God, God, God, thank you that you have fully and finally revealed yourself in your son, whose coming we celebrate this Christmas.

If we're tempted to walk away, would you help us to keep listening to him? Because in him alone is truth, in him alone is salvation.

[28 : 07] salvation. And so we do pray on for the mission of this church that many, many people might hear the words of Jesus Christ this Christmas because it is through him that you have spoken, and we thank you that you have.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.