

Hebrews 1
2 Samuel 7
Psalm 2

“But in These Last Days”

December 27, 2020

“I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.”

God is teaching David – and us –
what it means to be a child of God.
David wanted to build a house for God –
but God says, no, it’s the other way around:
I will build *your* house.

The throne of David will be established forever.
The son of David will become the Son of God.

Little did David realize how true that would be!

Perhaps he realized it in some way –
after all, many Psalms reflect different aspects of this.
Psalm 2 has four stanzas –
the first stanza speaks of the plot of the nations who conspire against the Messiah;
the second speaks of God’s response – as he laughs at their conspiracy,
because he has established the King on Zion;
the third stanza comes in the voice of the King –
“the LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you,’”
as he speaks of how the inheritance of David extends to the whole earth!
And the fourth stanza concludes with a warning to the rulers of the earth –
urging them to submit to the Son –
and proclaiming a blessing on all who take refuge in him.

Sing Psalm 2
Read Hebrews 1

Larry Wilson has helpfully set up our Hebrews series with his discussion of the “grinch”
who kept trying to steal Christmas.

All throughout history, Satan was trying to stop the coming of Christmas.
But no matter how hard he tried,
Satan’s most triumphant victories turned out to be key moments
in the history of redemption.

Remember that – when you are feeling particularly downcast!
Has it felt at times as though 2020 has been wandering in the wilderness?

Each Sunday that we had to stay home, it has felt very much like a wilderness.

Because there is a way in which this building is a picture of the promised land.
It is a place where we meet with God – together.
But remember the point of the land:
the land was never an end in itself.

God promised Abraham the land,
but Paul tells us in Romans 4 that the promise pointed to the bigger picture,
that he would inherit the whole earth –
a point previously made in Psalm 2!
The true inheritance was never a piece of real estate,
the true inheritance is God himself.

Hebrews was written as an exhortation to Christians to press on toward maturity.
We need to grow up and become the people that Christ calls us to be.

And the most basic question for Christian maturity is simply this:
who is Jesus?

This is where the book of Hebrews begins.
It very much picks up where the gospel of John left off.

Indeed, the book of Hebrews is all about who Jesus is.
The Christian life is structured around Jesus.

The exhortations that punctuate the book are interwoven with expositions of who Jesus is.
Because Jesus is the Son of God, therefore “pay attention” to what you have heard (2:1)
Because Jesus is a Son, faithful in all God’s house, therefore let us strive to enter his rest
(4:11)
Because Jesus is our great high priest, “let us hold fast our confession.” (4:14)
And so on.

If you would live as a faithful Christian,
then Hebrews calls you to look to Jesus.

1. God Has Spoken by His Son (1:1-2a)

a. Long Ago – the Prophets (v1)

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.”

In the evening service we are going through the book of Isaiah.
Tonight we will look at Isaiah 9 – how Isaiah had spoken of the coming of the son–
the one who would reign on the throne of David, his father, forever.

Sometimes we envy the prophets.

Wouldn't it be wonderful for God to speak to us the way that he spoke to them?
God spoke in dreams, by visions, through angels, and in rare occasions, like to Moses,
he spoke with an audible voice.

He spoke in many ways.

He often spoke by prophets and sometimes by the casting of the lot.

He even spoke through the lips of a donkey.

And he spoke at many times.

He spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden.

He spoke to Noah before the flood.

He spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to reveal his covenant.

He spoke to Moses in order to bring his people out of Egypt.

He spoke to Joshua, to Samson's parents, to Samuel, to David,
and to many others.

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets."

The Old Testament was written over a span of perhaps 1,000 years.

It recounts a long narrative of God's dealings with his people,
in which the story changes direction often:

the cycles of covenanting, rebellion, judgment, repentance and blessing
start getting a bit repetitious at times.

But the point is clear:

in the past God has spoken through many voices at many times.

b. But Now – the Son (v2)

"But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."

Then it was throughout "many times."

Now it is "in these last days"—this *one* time!

Then it was "in many ways."

Now it is in *one* way.

Then it was through various servants—many prophets—

now it is through one person.

And this one person is not merely a prophet—he is not "like" the others.

"But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."

Notice that he does not say simply "this time he has spoken to us by his Son."

There is a certain finality in the way Hebrews says it:

"In these last days."

This is God's eschatological speech.

This is the final word.

This is the speech that brings all of God's previous revelation together
and resolves it into a grand and glorious climax.

That's why the NT was written in less than a century.

God's final Word has been spoken in Jesus.

All that we need to know for salvation has been revealed in Jesus.

And that's also why Hebrews is written the way it is.
Every time Hebrews makes a point about Jesus,
the author will back it up with a selection of quotes from the OT.
All that God spoke through the prophets –
has come to its fulfillment in this speech – by his Son.
All that the prophets had said has come to pass in Jesus.
So if you would understand the OT,
you must understand Jesus.
And if you would understand Jesus,
you must understand the OT!
And so Hebrews 1:1-4 sets forth very simply who Jesus is.
Everything else in the book of Hebrews is rooted in this.
Jesus is the Son of God.

But when we speak of Jesus as the Son of God,
we must distinguish between at least two senses in which this is true.
And here in Hebrews 1:1-4 we see this distinction.
Jesus is the Son of God from all eternity.
But there is a different sense in which he also becomes the Son of God
when he is exalted to the right hand of God.

2. His Eternal Sonship (1:2b-3b)

a. Through Whom He Created the World (v2)

We see the eternal sonship of Christ in verses 2-3.
Who is this Son by whom God has spoken to us?

He is the Son –
*whom he appointed the heir of all things,
through whom also he created the world.*

Now we begin to see why Jesus is the eschatological Word.
He is the last Word, because he was the first Word.
The heir of all things is the one through whom God created the ages.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
John tells us that God made all things *through* his Word –
and without him was not anything made that was made.

Hebrews now says the same thing.
Back then his name was not yet Jesus.
He had not yet come in our flesh – but he was with the Father –

and the Father created the world *through him*.

b. The Radiance of the Glory of God (v3)

Long before the incarnation, he was the Son of God.

A son looks like his father.

Adam, created in the image of God, is called “the Son of God” by Luke,
and Hebrews uses the same language of the “Son.”

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

Isaiah had said that God would not share his glory with another (Is 42:8).

But the Son is said to be the very “shining” of the glory of God.

What does it mean for the Son to be the “radiance” of the glory of God?

What do you see when you see the radiance of God’s glory?

You see the Son.

How can you tell what God’s nature is?

Look at the Son.

The shining of God’s glory *is* the Son of God –

whatever it is that is visible in God is seen in the Son.

c. The Exact Imprint of His Nature (v3)

And he is the exact imprint of his nature.

He is the precise image of his Father.

When you see the Son you see the Father –

as Jesus said, whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

Colossians 1:15-20 says the same sort of thing:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation.

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,

that in everything he might be preeminent.”

The word choice is different,

but the basic idea is identical.

The Son was the one through whom God created the world.

The Son is the member of the Trinity who makes God visible to us.

And when we see the Son, we see God.

And as Hebrews will say shortly in chapter 2 –

we do not yet see everything under his feet –

but we see Jesus!

By faith, we see Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father!

d. Who Upholds the World by the Word of His Power (v3)

At the heart of the Christian faith is that the Creator of the world
is also its Redeemer.

And the Son is the one through whom God has redeemed the world.

Paul had said in Colossians, “in him all things hold together.”

Hebrews says, “he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”

The Son of God is involved in creation and in providence.

As John tells us, “in the beginning was the Word.

And the Word was with God. And the Word was God.” (John 1:1)

Without him, nothing was made that has been made.

So when Hebrews says that he has spoken to us by his Son,

it means that God has spoken to us by his eternal Son.

Through all those ages

God spoke by the prophets.

He spoke through mediators who only reflected his glory.

Remember Moses—the greatest of the OT prophets?

He came down the mountain with the glory of God shining in his face.

But that was a fading glory—a reflected glory.

But the Son does not have a “reflected” glory,

he is the very “shiningness” of the glory of God.

He is the radiance itself!

Hebrews is not going to talk about the eternal Sonship of Christ again.

But it undergirds the whole book.

It is only because Jesus is the eternal Son

that he can successfully become the eschatological Son.

And that is the point of verses 3-5.

3. His Inherited Sonship (3c-5)

a. The Purification of Sin and the Exaltation on High (v3)

Because there is another sense in which Jesus only becomes the Son of God in his exaltation.

Yes, everything you see was made by the Son of God.

Everything you see is sustained and upheld by the word of his power.

The problem is that humanity is in rebellion against God –

and so we have made a mess of God’s creation.

That’s where verse 3 goes on to speak of his making “purification for sins.”

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

only the eternal Son of God could make purification for sin once for all! –
and so,

⁴ *having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

What does that mean?

“Having *become* as much superior to angels”?

Hebrews has just told us that the Son is the one through whom God created the world.

He made all things, and yet he still has to *become* superior to the angels?

Angels are among the “all things” that he upholds by the word of his power!

What does it mean that he *becomes* superior to angels?

The explanation is found at the end of verse 4:

he has become as much superior to angels,

“as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”

We’ll look more next Sunday at the angels,

but suffice it for now to say that the angels served as mediators of God’s covenant.

They had played an important role in the history of redemption.

Indeed, in the OT, often *they* had spoken.

From time to time throughout the OT we see angels popping up,

speaking of what God was doing for the salvation of his people.

So long ago, at many times and in many ways,
the angels had a pretty good name!

When it comes to God’s revelation of salvation,

there were no names greater than the angels—God’s messengers—

or Moses, his mightiest prophet.

But something happens when Jesus makes purification for sins.

Something happens when Jesus sits down at the right hand of the Majesty.

Something happens that transforms him from “lower than the angels”
to “superior to the angels.”

That something is called an inheritance –

a *name* that he inherits.

When Jesus brings his own blood into the heavenly holy of holies

and makes purification for sins,

sitting down at the right hand of God,

Jesus inherits a name that is far more excellent than the names of the angels.

What name is that?

What name did Jesus inherit?

Was it “King of kings and Lord of lords”?

Was it “Mighty Counselor, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”?

No.

Hebrews is not interested in those names.

b. The Superior Name of “Son” (v4-5)

The name is given in verse 5:

“For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’?”

The eternal Son of God inherited the name of “Son.”

At first, this seems perplexing!

After all, he was the Son of God from all eternity.

And even in the incarnation he was called “son” from the first mention of his coming!

He was called the “Son of God” by the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:35

“The power of the Most High will overshadow you;

therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God”

God himself declared at the baptism of Jesus,

“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22)

So he was the eternal Son of God before the incarnation,

and he was the incarnate Son of God from his birth.

So why does Hebrews say that inherited the name of “Son” in his exaltation?

The quotations in verse 5 comes from Psalm 2, which we sang earlier,

and 2 Samuel 7.

Psalm 2 is speaking of the enthronement of the Son of David.

God had promised to David in 2 Samuel 7

that he would establish David’s son upon his throne forever,

and indeed, that he would adopt David’s son to be his own:

“I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.”

And so now in Psalm 2, God declares:

“I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.” (Psalm 2:6)

And then the Son of David responds:

“The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage,

and the ends of the earth your possession.”

In other words,

Psalm 2 is all about the Son of David becoming the Son of God,
and ruling over the nations –establishing forever the kingdom of God.

And that’s what Jesus does when he ascends to the right hand of God.

Again, as Paul says in Romans 1:3,

Christ “was descended from David according to the flesh
and was declared to be the Son of God in power
according to the Spirit of holiness
by his resurrection from the dead.”

The resurrection of Jesus declares him to be the Son of God.

Or as Hebrews puts it,

in his exaltation, Jesus inherits the name of Son.

It’s not as though at one point Jesus was *not* the Son of God.

Rather, the eternal Son of God,

who had become the incarnate Son when the Word became flesh,
now becomes the eschatological Son.

Why is this important?

Well, if the eternal Son of God had remained simply the eternal Son of God,
we would never even know that he existed.

We only learn about the eternal Son of God when he became the incarnate Son.

It was only then that God began to speak *to us* by his Son.

It was a great and marvelous thing that the Word became flesh—
that the eternal Son became the incarnate Son.

The radiance of God’s glory veiled that glory as he became one with us.

The exact imprint of God’s nature took to himself our nature.

But according to Hebrews 1:4,

even that did not give Jesus a greater name than the angels.

So as long as the eternal Son remains only the incarnate Son,

he remained under the law—he is under Moses –

and the Law of Moses was mediated by angels.

What gives Jesus that final inheritance—that great name of “eschatological Son”--

the LAST Adam—

is his priestly work of offering a better sacrifice than Moses.

The eternal Son becomes the incarnate Son so that through his own death

he might offer to God a sacrifice that will result in his inheriting that glorious name
of SON.

In other words,

if Jesus does not inherit this eschatological sonship,

then you can't be saved!
Your salvation depends upon Jesus inheriting the name of "Son."

And because Jesus has joined himself to our humanity –
he now joins us to himself –
so that his Father might become *our Father*.

As we're seeing from Isaiah in the evening service,
the holiness of God does not keep us at a distance.
The holiness of God impels him to draw near to us –
even though drawing near will require him to go to the cross,
in order that he might pay the price for our sin.

God loves you –
that's why he sent his only-begotten Son,
that whosoever believes in him might not perish,
but have everlasting life!

So don't turn away from Jesus!

As the exhortation that concludes this opening section in chapter 2 warns us,
"How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"

God has spoken his final word in Jesus.
In these *last days* he has spoken to us by his Son.
Are you listening to Jesus?