

Hebrews 1:1-6, Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. <sup>5</sup>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"? <sup>6</sup> And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

## Introduction

Now looking back, if you were to summarize the book of Hebrews in a single word, what word would you choose? My wife suggested the word encouragement. That is interesting in light of the apprehensions that many of us had and that I had in coming to this epistle. The warnings of the book are serious and sobering, but in the process of going through the book it became evident that this pastoral sermon is not only an exhortation to persevere, it is also a positive and uplifting encouragement. It only takes a moment's reflection to discover why this is the case: it is because this letter calls us to consider Jesus: **Therefore, holy brothers [and sisters], you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, <sup>2</sup> who was faithful to him who appointed him (3.1-2).** This letter summons us to run the race to glory looking to Jesus: **let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. <sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood (12.1-4).**

In light of these things, it is appropriate for communion today that we remember Jesus according to the book of Hebrews. The core of our reminiscing comes from the prologue; there the author presents our Lord as the Word in way comparable with John's prologue about the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1.1-11). We find here that Jesus is God's word of covenant purpose, of self-disclosure, and of saving love. He is God's speech, the saving communication of God's nature, and the embodiment of God's love in His person, word, and works.

### 1A. Jesus is God's word of covenant purpose

1) Let consider first how it is that He is God's word.

The opening verses of Hebrews set forth a contrast: **Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son** (Heb.1.1-2). God spoke by the prophets but now He has spoken **by his Son** (v. 2). The contrast includes reference to three things: time (**Long ago, at many times ...but in these last days**), recipients (**to our fathers... to us**), and focus (**whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world**; implied: not angels).

Previously, the revelation of God's plan to save undeserving sinners was incomplete. In the past, God spoke *to our fathers* by the prophets of promise, now He has spoken *to us* about fulfillment. When he says, "to us," he refers to the people of the last days. God has spoken to His people in the time between the comings of Christ. With the original readers, we also live in the last days, we are the people of God upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Cor. 10.11); we live in the dawning of the new day (Rom. 13.11-12) All of this is true because **in these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son**. God has spoken and Jesus is His speech; He is God's word to us.

2) Now let us consider how He is God's word of covenant purpose

The writer says that the Son is the one **whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom also he created the world** (v. 2). Jesus *is* the heir by appointment. The text associates creation with the appointment to be heir of all things. This association shows that the appointment refers to God's decree or plan. In other words, in view is the eternal covenant. His covenant purpose from "before" the first moment of creation has at its center the appointment of Christ to be heir of all things. Co-creation of all things has bound up with it an appointment by the Father that the Son *will inherit* all things. From the very beginning of the world, the Son has this appointment out in front of Him to keep. He *is* heir and therefore *will have* an inheritance. Thus, down the road of history in the consummation of God's plan, God will present the nations and the world to Jesus.

Hence, the text cracks open the curtain of God's eternal covenant; it gives us insight into the agreement between the Father and the Son. This promise was made before the creation and explains in a fundamental way why the world was created. Consequently, in His coming into the world, Jesus is a communication, an expression, a realization of covenant love between the Father and the Son. *Accordingly, Jesus is God's word of covenant purpose. He reveals that purpose, explains its meaning; He does so in His person, word, and works.* He is the Word. God has spoken and Jesus is His word of covenant purpose.

## 2A. Jesus is God's word of self-disclosure

The fact that God spoke indicates that He makes Himself known; this is personal; it is personal self-disclosure. Thus, in the covenant, Jesus agreed to come on mission to earth to make the Father known. He was faithful in fulfilling His mission; He **was faithful to him who appointed him** (3.2). Accordingly, He reveals three things about the Father in His faithful obedience; they are in the phrases of 1.3a: "**being the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, while upholding the universe by the word of His power...**" (1.3a).

1) He the radiance of God (v. 3, **being the radiance of the glory of God**). As such, Jesus *reveals* the beauty of God's essential nature and essence. He radiates the beauty of God like light radiates the brightness of the sun. He is of the same essence as the Father, so, Jesus said to Philip, **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father** (Jn. 14.9).

2) He is the imprint of God (v. 3, **being... the exact imprint of his nature**). He is the accurate and true representation of God like a coin is the true representation of its stamp. The thought here is equivalent to the teaching that Jesus is the exact image and perfect reflection of God. He is *the revealer* of God *in human terms* as the incarnate Son. He is God's speech in human form. He is the Word that was with God and was God and became flesh (Jn 1. 14, **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth; 1.18, No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known**).

3) Finally, He **upholds the universe by the word of his power** (v. 3). Here we learn that the properties of matter and the way the structure of the universe is maintained through history *reveal* the Father's plan: the powerful word of Christ *reveals* the powerful word of His Father. What the Father and Son planned in the time transcending covenant comes to realization by the unbreakable power of His word. His word always accomplishes the purpose whereunto it is sent.

Thus, Jesus is God's word of self-disclosure. God spoke and Jesus is His speech. Jesus reveals the radiant beauty of God's essential glory in human terms... perfectly... as He shows that the eternal covenant comes to realization across time by the unbreakable power of God's Word.

## 3A. Jesus is God's word of saving love

He is such by death and resurrection.

1) He is God's word of saving love by His death per 1.3b

The text sweeps from creation to consummation, but to get there, an obstacle must be overcome. The obstacle comes into view from the perspective of its remedy. The obstacle is sin. Marvelously, it is the heir that overcomes sin. He overcomes by making purification of sins as part of the journey from creation through humiliation to consummation. That is the case because of the pretemporal agreement that the Son will receive His promised inheritance.

At this juncture, the writer only hints at the saving work of Christ stating it as something that Jesus did *before* He sat down at the Father's right hand: **having made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high** (Heb. 1.3b). We have no development here of the purifying work of Christ. In chapter 2, the writer oscillates back to this point and fills it out. Why did Jesus partake of flesh and blood in His coming to this earth in covenant obedience? He did so because **the children** [God gave Him, v. 13] **share in flesh and blood** (2.14). Why was Jesus able to sit at the Father's right hand **crowned with glory and honor** (2.9)? It was **because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone** of the children God gave to Him as His inheritance (2.9, 13).

Literally, the text in 1.3 says, "having made a cleansing of sins" (v. 3). Thus, Jesus reveals the mind of God regarding polluted, unclean, and defiled people. The person and work of the Son communicates the love of God toward fallen sinners. Jesus paid it all. He did a cleansing work. He washed sins away in a cleansing flood. It is not a potentiality. It is an accomplishment on the cross for His covenant children for all time (10.14)

2) He is God's word of saving love by His resurrection

As we come to the end of this rich prologue, we encounter a comparison with angels in verses 4-6: **After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. <sup>5</sup>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"? <sup>6</sup> And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."** In humiliation, Jesus was made lower than the angels and having accomplished the work of purification, in exaltation, the Son of God incarnate received a name more excellent than that of the angels. He has a supreme title that is higher than any title given to angels because He *became* superior to them by His resurrection. You will recall that the day of His begetting (v. 5) was resurrection day according to Acts 13.33. That day was the day of His exaltation.

What makes this a powerful and important point is the fact that Jesus has this position as a man. It is a man, this man, the Son that has the title of heir of all things.

Therefore, as the incarnate Son, as truly God and truly man, and as the radiant beauty of the Father's glory, as the perfect image of God, the man who walked the dusty roads of Galilee had the right by death and resurrection to sit down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Moreover, because He became the heir of a family of brothers and sisters that God gave Him in the eternal covenant of redemption, He is the communication (the revelation and word) of God's everlasting love for sinners in bringing many sons to glory: **we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone** [of His covenant children]. <sup>10</sup> **For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering** (Heb. 2.9-10).

Furthermore, He became our intercessor forever in the power of an indestructible life: **This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, <sup>16</sup> who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life** (Heb. 7.15-16). That is why [Consequently] **he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. <sup>26</sup> For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens** (7.25-26). Therefore, His blood secured His resurrection (13.20) and your resurrection and mine as the fruits of His resurrection.

Now we understand why He sings! As He said, **I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise** (2.12). Thus, we are to **run with endurance the race that is set before us,** <sup>2</sup> **looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God** (12.1-2). You are His joy; the joy before Him in His enduring. It was His joy to give His life, His all, in suffering your death in order to fulfill the eternal covenant and become the author and finisher of your faith. This is what causes Him to sing; this is awesome, glorious, astounding. “Think what Spirit dwells within thee; what a Father’s smile is thine; what a Savior died to win thee; so child of heaven should you repine? No. So, haste then on from grace to glory; armed by faith and winged by prayer; heaven’s eternal days before thee; God’s own hand shall guide thee there. Soon shall close thy earthly mission; swift shall pass thy pilgrim days; hope soon change to glad fruition; faith to sight and prayer to praise” (*Trinity Hymnal* 593).

What then shall we say to these things?

The only right response is worship with thanksgiving, reverence, and awe: <sup>28</sup> **Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,** <sup>29</sup> **for our God is a consuming fire** (12.28-29); **Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.** <sup>13</sup> **Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.** <sup>14</sup> **For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.** <sup>15</sup> **Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name** (13.12-15). Accordingly, in communion worship, we say three fundamental things about our Lord who passed through the heavens to be our intercessor forever as our great high priest after the order of Melchizedek: I need Him, I own Him as my very own, and I own His family as my family.

I need Him, so, I am looking to Jesus: “Looking, looking to Jesus; let us be striving to enter His rest; to rest in glory; within God’s presence; let us be looking from our hearts to Him.”

I own Him as a communication of God in human terms: a perfect revelation of God. I commit myself to learn from Him as my prophet, priest, and king. I am resolved to hear and heed Him as the word that makes God known.

I own His family as my family. His love is so deep that it included the suffering of death to receive His given ones as His inheritance. He formed the family by making God known in His self-sacrifice. I must commit myself to self-disclosure, to overcoming strangeness, and to full-fledged one anothering family love for His name’s sake and for His honor and glory.