

God's Word Is Sufficient

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[0 : 00] Good morning. I'm Dan Bielman. I'm an assistant pastor here at Church of the Advent. Also, you saw on the chancel this morning the Reverend Jeffrey Simpson, who was just ordained to the priesthood last week, right?

Jeff will be celebrating communion for the first time today. Really looking forward to that. Neither of us claim to be Tommy Henson or want to pretend like we are. That would be for my 14-year-old who was dressing as Tommy Henson for Halloween this year.

So look out for Instagram and see how that goes. We're on week three of a sermon series called Read, Mark, Learn.

We're exploring the doctrine of Scripture, asking questions such as, what is the Bible? What makes it the Word of God? Can I understand it? Is it reliable?

Does it tell us everything we need to know about God, the world, and ourselves? What should my relationship to it be? What makes it different than any other written book?

[1 : 13] So three weeks ago, Tommy took us through Psalm 119, and he gave us an overview about the nature of Scripture. God's Word, rightly apprehended, inspires our love and delight, because it gives us the truth, goodness, and beauty of God Himself.

Two weeks ago, Tommy talked to us about Scripture's clarity, or as theologians would put it, Scripture's perspicuity. Though some things in the Bible are hard to understand, it's clear enough that we who read it can understand what it is saying about the most important things it has to say about God, about us, and about the world, and our relationship to God, and God's purposes in the world.

Last week, we took a week to celebrate the ordination of Jeff Simpson to the priesthood, and now we're back to the sermon series on Scripture.

And we're going to look today at Hebrews 1. It was the first passage read this morning. We're going to see what this very important passage has to say about the Bible, and how it all relates to Jesus.

We're going to first see what it has to say about the history of God speaking to His people.

Second, how He has spoken through Jesus. And third, what that all means for Scripture's sufficiency and completeness. So the first, the history of God speaking to His people.

[2 : 40] Second, God speaking through the person of Jesus. And third, Scripture's sufficiency. But before we do that, let's pray. Not on riches, we will fix our eyes.

Lord Jesus, it would be our prayer that Your Word would be our delight this morning. As we sang earlier, and as we heard preached three weeks ago, that when we hear Your Word, when we read it, we could experience joy.

Lord, that we who would be thirsty when we come to Scripture would be filled. Lord, that we who come to Scripture hungry could be satisfied.

Even more so, Lord, that it would fill us with delight. Lord, could You even surprise us this morning through hearing Your Word preached.

Lord, forgive the sins of the preacher, and may Your words, Lord Jesus, be made clear through the working of Your Holy Spirit right now.

[3 : 59] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, so the writer of Hebrews begins with a fairly compact summary of how God has spoken to His people.

Long ago, at many times, and in many ways, God spoke. Long ago, at many times, and in many ways, God spoke. That God has spoken at all is because He is quite simply a person.

equally, His having spoken is in part evidence of His personhood. This is important and crucial to our faith and beliefs. Much of philosophy would tell us that the attempt of finite minds like ours to comprehend the mind and nature of an infinite supreme being would either be futile or idolatrous.

Futile because the incompatibility between a supreme being and ourselves. idolatrous because any claim to understand that supreme being would actually be a recreation of ourselves and we would just be giving it human characteristics and not understanding and comprehending that being as He is.

Well, Christians resolve this question of incompatibility by means of personhood. Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God.

[5 : 23] created in the image and likeness of God and what that means exactly would require its own sermon series but this morning we can say at least this that we are the only material creatures made in this manner and that image and likeness make communication possible.

We have personhood because He does and that common ground established a link between God and humanity which allowed for communication from the very beginning.

God spoke with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and why did He speak? Why did He speak at all? Because God created human beings to be in relationship to them.

Relationships don't exist without communication between the persons. So how did God speak according to the writer of Hebrews?

He spoke at many times and in many ways. He spoke with Adam and Eve in the Garden. He would later speak to Noah and then Abraham. Now it's unclear if and when such communication was oral.

[6 : 32] It is certain that at times He would communicate through visions and dreams. Now when we move from the book of Genesis to the book of Exodus we see God for the first time employing writing in order to communicate with His people and that happened on Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments when He gave them to Moses to give to the people of Israel.

And from the time of Moses onward God's revelation to His people through the prophets and others was recorded in written form for posterity. The first five books of the Bible are called the five books of Moses or in Hebrew the Torah.

Moses lived in the 15th century B.C. and it seems God doesn't speak through a prophet for another 400 years after that until the time of the prophet Samuel. And then for 700 years He would speak through prophets such as Elijah and Elisha Isaiah and Jeremiah up until around the year 400 B.C. And the messages delivered through the prophets were sometimes intended for specific individuals often kings sometimes to an entire nation. Sometimes a prophet would be asked excuse me be told to go to foreign lands to deliver a message.

At first prophecies would be delivered orally but at around 700 B.C. prophecies were written down and preserved as distinct collections like Amos Micah Joel Nahum.

[7 : 59] Now in addition to the prophecies in the Old Testament there's other writings found.

There's histories there's poetry there's wisdom literature. Now next week Jeff is going to talk to us about the reliability of all of these texts from antiquity.

But this morning we're just going to note three things about the Old Testament. The first is that Christians have viewed all of these texts of the Old Testament to be equally inspired.

Paul writes that all scripture is God breathed. The apostle Peter wrote no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. So that was first Christians have viewed all texts to be equally inspired. Second even though they're all equally inspired we weren't meant to read and interpret them all in the same way.

I'm so glad we have in our Bibles the writer of the Hebrews saying this very simple thing that he spoke in many ways. It's like a key to interpreting scripture.

[9 : 06] We don't read direct commandments like do not murder in the same way we read poetry celebrating intimacy between husband and wife as we do in Song of Songs nor do we read it the same way as we read vivid, mysterious, apocalyptic visions recorded in the book of Daniel.

Okay? So equally inspired we don't read them all equally the same way we interpret them based on their genre. Third everything in the Bible I would suggest is a love letter from our creator.

First John chapter 4 tells us that God is God is what? Love. Thank you. God is love. If God is love then from the very beginning starting in the Garden of Eden we would expect him to speak to listen to react and to speak again.

Imagine a God who didn't communicate anything at all ever. What would that be like? Imagine the fear and anxiety and despair that we would have if God were never to have spoken if he had never revealed his mind and purposes.

Imagining this when you think about it isn't so hard because we can just look at our own relationships. Some of you may have seen a video perhaps on YouTube called the silent face excuse me the still face experiment.

[10 : 48] it shows a mother with her baby face to face and the baby is communicating with his mother and the mother is constantly giving feedback both verbal and expressive.

The baby points and the mother looks and looks back at the baby smiles speaks and the cycle continues until at one point the mother turns away for about five seconds and then when she turns back she gives the baby a completely still face and it doesn't change and it's super interesting what happens next.

The baby tries to communicate and gets nothing in response. The baby flaps its arms makes that really high pitched shrill voice you might be familiar with then exhibits like all kinds of negative feelings turns away loses control of his posture and then completely melts down.

The baby's nervous system just goes haywire because human beings can't handle complete unresponsiveness. We weren't made that way.

Humans of all ages we need loving contact like we need oxygen. We really don't have many ways to deal with disconnection at any age.

[12 : 21] I think it would be fair to say that what is true for individual humans and human relationships is probably true the entire human race.

Humanity needs loving contact like we need oxygen. God spoke. You see God's speaking is an act of love.

Whether it's a command or a poem or an apocalyptic vision that you're reading in the Old Testament when you read through the Bible you are getting God's love for you poured out onto the page.

And his verbal outpouring of love reaches its fullest expression when Jesus is born of Mary. So let's continue that statement from the Hebrews.

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.

[13 : 26] This verse reveals to us the purpose of scripture actually which is to reveal God. His speech is a person. The person of Jesus is himself the speech of God.

John chapter 1 verse 1 which we read earlier in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. Jesus is himself the word of God.

Jesus is the speech of God. That can be true if the purpose of scripture all along was God's self revelation to humanity.

The purpose of scripture was for God to reveal himself to humanity. But too often readers of the Bible think the Bible is primarily this list of instructions for how to get through life or it's a collection of stories about spiritual heroes that we're supposed to emulate.

It's neither of those things. The Bible is meant to disclose to humanity who God is, his character, his attributes, his will, and the means by which we have relationship with him.

[14 : 37] And then, in the fullness of time, God speaks the most clearly by just showing up. God comes in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

To make it extra clear to the readers of the Hebrews that Jesus is God himself, the writer says the following things about Jesus, starting with verse two on the next slide, that Jesus is appointed the heir of all things.

That means Jesus is king and lord of all things. Who else but God has the right to rule everything that was made? We read that Jesus was an agent in the creation of the world, but who else but God creates?

Of course. We read that Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God. So the readers to remember were given.

The writer is saying that Jesus is the exact imprint of his nature. The author is evoking the engraving on a coin, the stamp, the character.

[15 : 46] Jesus provides a true and trustworthy picture of who God is. Next slide says Jesus upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Again, who else but God can sustain the cosmos. Finally, Jesus is God's salvation for us. He made purification for sins and sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. So to summarize everything so far, since the creation of the world, God spoke.

He spoke in order to reveal who he is. His revelation comes to us in written form until God's revelation of himself culminates in the sending of his son, Jesus Christ.

There's writings about Jesus, both eyewitness accounts of his life and his teaching, and letters to the church written by those who witnessed his resurrection.

[16:54] And those writings we call the New Testament. All of these writings, the Old Testament and the New Testament, we call the Bible. Bible being a word that means simply a collection of books.

We call these writings also the Word of God because we believe that God, through the Holy Spirit, intervened and influenced the words, message, and collation of the Bible.

And we also call it Scripture, a word that describes the writtenness of God's Word. word. So what can we say about Scripture based on what we've discussed so far?

Two things. Scripture is complete and Scripture is sufficient. It's complete and sufficient. So what do those mean? Well, if the purpose of Scripture is for God to reveal himself and he has fully revealed himself in the person of Jesus, then Scripture is complete and there is nothing more that needs to be revealed.

This is a huge comfort. It's a huge comfort when you think about it. You may know someone who married a person and after getting married learned something big about their spouse that had remained hidden before the wedding day.

[18:11] That can cause a lot of destruction and trauma and I know it's happened to a few of our folks here at Advent. But there's no danger of that happening with God. Everything we need to know about our Maker has been revealed in the Bible.

There will be no new information that completely changes his posture towards you. Nor will there be anything new revealed to Christians in later generations that has so far been withheld from you. Does the Holy Spirit then, as an aside, does the Holy Spirit then speak or not speak to Christians? Well, he certainly does. He's still a person and you're still a person. He leads and he prompts and he can give special insights into certain situations.

He comforts, he consoles, but he won't say anything that reveals something new about God or something different as to how we can have relationship with him.

This is because Scripture is both complete and it's sufficient. So what do I mean by sufficient? I prefer this definition from an old professor of mine, the theologian John Frame.

[19:19] he wrote that Scripture contains all the divine words needed for any aspect of life. Right? Very concise. Love it. Scripture is sufficient in that it contains all the divine words needed for any aspect of life.

So Scripture doesn't give us the precise details about how to be an architect or a plumber or a scientist, but it does give us all the divine words needed to follow God and obey him as an architect, as a plumber, or as a scientist.

Additionally and more importantly it contains all the divine words we need to know about how to have a relationship with God. So let's go back to Hebrews chapter one. Jesus, through whom God has spoken, has made purification for sins.

He's made purification for sins. The revelation in the Old Testament was continuous. God revealed himself continuously, but the revelation in the Son is complete once for all because nothing can be added to Christ's redemptive work.

Nothing can be added to the revelation of that redemptive work. All right. So the message of redemption is found from the very beginning in the opening pages of Scripture. God spoke the universe into existence.

[20:44] God spoke and man was created in his own image, male and female. God spoke and gave Adam and Eve clear instructions about how to live in obedience and submission to him.

Adam and Eve rebelled and then what happened? Did God go silent? I mean that would be like perhaps my reaction if I was God.

Like well hey, if it's not good enough for you then I'll just back away. But God was not passive aggressive. He was communicative. As a matter of fact, not long after they rebelled, he said one word and it was a question.

The word is translated. Anybody remember? What does God say to Adam and Eve for the very first time after the fall? He says, where are you? Where are you?

With that one question. God communicates that he seeks out the lost sinner. That God welcomes him to confess.

[21 : 55] That God desires his restoration. And that God works his redemption. That redemption was finally worked by Jesus on the cross.

taking on himself all the sins of the world and all of its consequences and restoring to the father all that would come to him. So I'll leave us with those words.

Where are you? Where are you? Now some of us are new to church or new to Christianity and perhaps are partly skeptical or partly curious or both.

Christianity claims God has spoken through the person of Jesus. So it seems to me you can't really settle your skepticism or your curiosity until you've investigated that claim.

The claim that God has spoken through the person of Jesus. And then in order to investigate it, you have to read the Bible. Bible, you don't need to read the whole thing.

[23 : 02] Not at once. Not at first. All right? But you do have to read the first four books of the New Testament or maybe just one of them. Those are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

You can start with any of them. But start with what's called a gospel, which is an eyewitness account of the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. If you would like to get started reading the Bible, we have Bibles we can give to you if you'd like to start that.

Now some of you have been skeptical or curious and perhaps now you're convinced of the claims of Jesus. The claims he made about himself. And you're ready to respond to him.

And you can speak to me or with Jeff or with Lisa. And we'd be happy to help you as you start your relationship with him. My last word is for those of us who have been believers for some time now.

Some of us here are very sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Like we get all those things that I mentioned earlier about being sensitive to his prompting, his consolation, his comfort, his direction, his confirming the words of Scripture.

[24 : 13] Some of us aren't as sensitive or as attentive. And it causes a lot of discouragement. And I'd like, I would hope that this message, the idea that Scripture is complete and sufficient, I hope that would be an encouragement to you.

That you wouldn't confuse not sensing the Spirit's leading or its direction with not hearing from God at all. For those of you that lament not being able to hear from God or sense his reality or his nearness, know that God has spoken.

He has spoken and he has said everything he needs to say. He has said everything you need to hear. It's all right there in the Bible. Bible. There's nothing missing.

Nothing missing. Do you want to hear from God? Open your Bible. Immerse yourself in it. Immerse yourself in it with other Christians. Talk about it.

Discuss it. Because not only is God's word complete, it's also sufficient. Christian, you have all the divine words you need for any aspect of your life.

[25 : 38] In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.