

Jesus is better: than all the prophets

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[0 : 00] So we pray for your help in our time together. We're praying in Jesus' name. Amen. So we'll think about the first three verses of this wonderful chapter, this wonderful book, the book of Hebrews, thinking about this theme of Jesus being better.

And I think here we will consider that Jesus is better than the prophet who came before. This theme, Jesus is better, is important to our unnamed author because the situation he is writing into is one in which there are Christians who are being tempted back towards Judaism, towards the old ways of temple and sacrifice and law-keeping in order to earn salvation.

There is pressure and there is opposition that is growing. And so they're perhaps asking the question, is following Jesus worth it? There's that temptation to drift back.

And so the author very powerfully through this letter brings this repeated emphasis that Jesus is better. Jesus completes all that has come before. In our little series, we'll probably just look at the first four chapters.

And even in those four chapters, we'll discover Jesus is better than the prophets and then the angels, then Moses and Joshua, better than the temple, better than the priests of the Old Testament.

[1 : 28] The author wants to make absolutely clear that God has spoken in His Son, Jesus. Therefore, as the church, they and we ought to pay attention.

That Jesus is the foundation of our faith and we also want to make Jesus that anchor so that we wouldn't drift away from the truth.

So today, just by looking at these first three verses, we'll think about Jesus being better than the prophets. In that sense that Jesus brings a greater revelation of God.

He is a new way of God communicating as He comes in His Son, Jesus. And we'll also think about the fact that Jesus completes the story that the prophets told, that the Old Testament told.

It needs resolution in Jesus. So for the church then and for the church today, we need to hear and we need to believe in Jesus in order to have that complete picture of God's story of salvation in order to belong to God and His kingdom.

[2 : 34] And that was a very necessary lesson for them. And it remains important for us, of course, today. I mentioned this morning that one of the things I took on my holiday was a bunch of different mission biographies.

And one of the things I guess that you notice when you go back to, let's say, the 1800s where I was for the last couple of weeks is when it came to communications, there's been quite a lot of improvement, hasn't there?

200 years ago, a letter went by sea, by ships, perhaps by horseback. It took a long time and not always a reliable means of communicating with friends and family back home.

But now, if you're a missionary working anywhere in the world, you have Zoom, you have FaceTime, you have mobile phones, you have internet. And we've seen that with our mission partners.

We've been able to communicate with them month by month. And the point is that when it comes to modes of communication, in this instance, that the new is better. And I doubt if any of us would want to go back to snail mail and getting our post delivered by a horse.

[3 : 50] And then perhaps it'd be helpful for us to think about communicating a story. As we come to the book of Hebrews, one of the things the author wants to make clear is that Jesus completes the story of God's mission of salvation.

But think about the stories that we enjoy. Think about perhaps a TV series or perhaps a series of books, even a series of films.

Quite often they will use the cliffhanger device. We will build to a point of tension. And then perhaps that'll be the end of a book or the end of a show.

And you're left waiting for resolution. When will the hero arrive? How will people be saved? That kind of thing. And the point of the cliffhanger is that we always want the story to be resolved.

Perhaps we've had the frustration of a favorite TV show being canceled in the middle of a series. And so the story is left unfinished. It's profoundly disappointing.

[4 : 53] Well, the author is saying, Jesus completes the story of God's salvation. We cannot miss the coming of the hero. We cannot leave him to one side.

Jesus is God's final, God's complete word. There is nothing better than Jesus. And so our author says to first century Jewish Christians, don't go back to the old.

And the author would say to us, let's not leave Jesus behind. Let's not drift back to those other things that perhaps we used to trust in for satisfaction, security, and salvation.

So two points to show Jesus is better than the prophets. We'll think first of all about how God speaks because our author compares the old and the new. In the first couple of verses.

And then we'll concentrate our attention on who it is that God is speaking through as we think about Jesus as the full and final revelation. And the purpose is that we would worship Jesus.

[5 : 57] That we would have a confident faith in Jesus as Lord as we recognize his identity and his mission. That we would listen and we would stick close to Jesus.

So let's think first of all briefly about how God speaks. And let's notice how our author compares the old and the new ways.

Verse one and two. In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son.

Now our starting point, and it's a wonderful starting point, is that we have a God who speaks. We have a God who makes himself known.

We have in Christianity a faith that is top down. It's based on God's revelation, not human speculation. We are reminded even in these opening words that we don't have a God who is silent and uncaring and distant.

[7 : 02] Rather, he speaks and he speaks so that we would know him. Speaks so that we would know his salvation. So having seen that we have a God who speaks, let's look at how the author contrasts how this speaking God has chosen to communicate.

So he looks at two different eras. So notice verse one begins in the past. So we think all the way back to Genesis one. We discover from the beginning, our God is a speaking God.

He speaks the universe into existence. But in the past here is really thinking about the whole Old Testament period. Before Jesus, that's in the past.

So that was in the past for the church that our author was writing to. That's in the past for us too. Compare that with, but in these last days.

So there was the past and now this new era is the last days. This is the time in between the first and the second coming of Jesus.

[8 : 10] So this is the era in which we find ourselves in today. Jesus has come and now we await his return.

So it's a new era. And then he draws attention to the fact that there are different recipients in view. So verse one, in the past, God spoke to our forefathers, to our ancestors.

Here he's thinking about Old Testament Israel. So in the past, God spoke to Old Testament Israel. And we discover that all through the Old Testament. But in these last days, he has spoken to us.

There he has in view the church that he's writing to. But by extension, God has spoken to us in the last days, in our period of time.

And we know, don't we, that there was that period of silence between the Old Testament and the New Testament, 400 years. But that silence has been broken, broken decisively as God sent his son, Jesus, in that new way to speak his glory, his salvation to his church.

[9 : 20] And we are those who receive that message. Notice too that he draws attention to the different agents that God spoke through.

So in verse one, In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets. Who were the prophets? Prophets were God's Old Testament mouthpieces.

The Old Testament prophets were famous for saying, thus says the Lord. They received messages from God that they communicated to the people. They functioned as middlemen between God and

his people.

But now in this new era, verse two, But in these last days, he has spoken to us not by prophets, but by his son, the great prophet.

There is no middleman as God speaks in this decisive new way. And when we remember how Jesus spoke, Jesus didn't say, thus says the Lord.

[10:17] Jesus would say, truly, truly, I say to you. Jesus spoke with the authority of God as God the son. And then in these two different eras, there were different ways in which God communicated.

In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways. So throughout Old Testament history, we discover God revealing himself and speaking to the prophets.

A variety of ways. The burning bush. God appearing in visions and dreams. God speaking audibly. But now, in these last days, he has chosen one decisive way.

He has chosen to speak to us by his son. So the whole of Jesus coming is God speaking. Here is God in the flesh.

Here is Jesus preaching the truth of God with the authority of God as the son of God. And then we think about Jesus on his mission.

[11:28] And that mission reveals the salvation of God as he comes to die in the place of sinners that all who believe in him would have eternal life. And in all of those ways, God is speaking to us about himself through Jesus, his son.

So the author begins very clearly by saying Jesus is better. This new way of God speaking is better than the old. Not that the old was unreliable.

It's just God is speaking in a new way. In our modern world, I guess we are intrigued and fascinated in many ways by what is new and by what is novel.

And we can discuss, and maybe you have been in discussions, but is the new always better? Well, when it comes to God speaking, there's no debate in this argument.

It is better that God has spoken through his son Jesus. Now, what does this mean for a church? What does this mean for us?

[12:30] Well, it certainly has implications for how we read God's story, doesn't it? The Bible is deliberately Jesus-centered. And Jesus himself invites us to read it this way.

After his resurrection, as he spoke to his disciples on the Emmaus Road, he began with Moses and the prophets, and he explained that the whole Old Testament was pointing forward to him.

So when we read the Bible at home, or when we read the Bible and teach it in church, we are looking to see how this passage of the Old Testament connects us to the Lord Jesus, his person and his work.

So we understand that we don't want to throw the Old Testament to one side. And in fact, the whole book of Hebrews draws repeatedly from the Old Testament. We recognize that it is true, it's reliable, it's inspired, but it's incomplete until Jesus comes.

So that shapes how we read God's story as the people of God. It also, I think, reminds us, doesn't it, of our privilege and our responsibility.

[13:41] The prophets who are being compared here, they longed for what we now enjoy. And we discover them eagerly wondering who this promised Christ would be, who this suffering servant Messiah would be.

We know. We've been given that privilege on this side of the cross. We have heard God speak of his love in a new way in the sending of Jesus.

That's our great privilege as the church. But that brings with it, doesn't it, a new responsibility. To respond to that word and to respond with urgency, to respond with faith and obedience.

One of the implications, as the author of Hebrews will bring out, is that we are not to drift away, not to become complacent, not become tired of our faith and to move on to something else.

Rather, we are to enjoy it ourselves. And as we come to taste and see that God and God's son Jesus are good, that we are then responsible for sharing that gift as the church, we are to be about mission.

[14:59] And in that light, one of the other things that we recognize, as we look at the world around us, we think about the society we live in, we recognize that Jesus is the answer to the spiritual search that so many people are on today.

People who have decided the church has nothing to say to them, no interest in picking up the book, but they're still deeply spiritual, still looking to connect with the divine, whatever that might mean, still wanting to hear from God.

Spirituality is a multi-billion pound industry. People are still searching, still want to hear from God. Perhaps we have friends like this, seeking meaning, seeking connection, trying different pursuits and practices in order to try and find that higher meaning.

In Jesus and in God's Word, we have the answer to the deep longing of every human heart.

Because what we have is a God who in love speaks and speaks in the sending of His Son, Jesus.

[16:13] And Jesus invites us in. That we can hear God in His Word. So right from the beginning, there is a big point that our author wants to make clear.

And it's simply that He is the speaking God who wants to speak to His church, to His world, and He does that by sending His Son, Jesus. Therefore, as a church, as an individual, we want to be people who listen.

We think about every effort at communication, every part of technology involved in communications. There is a responsibility on our part to pick up and to respond.

And God is speaking so that we would respond to Him, that we would be drawn in. So Jesus is better, that this new way of speaking is better than the old.

Let's think too about the reality of who God speaks through. Because this is where the author chooses to focus from the second half of verse 2 into verse 3, to recognize Jesus as the full and final revelation from God.

[17:35] See, it seems like the author knows that the church, the Christians that he's writing to, and indeed every church in every generation, will face opposition and will then have that temptation, the temptation to going back, to departing from Jesus and His truth, to drifting away from faith.

Our temptations won't be the same as a first century Jewish Christian. Perhaps we will be tempted to place our sense of salvation and security in our bank balance or in our status, in our job.

Perhaps we're looking to a relationship, imagining that that's the one thing that we really, really need. And we can easily displace Jesus from the throne of our hearts, just as they were tempted to. Well, the author knows their thinking, and his response is, you know, one and a half verses of incredibly rich theology. He gives them seven ways to confirm in their hearts, in their minds, that Jesus is better.

He doesn't just want to say Jesus is better than the old. He wants to persuade. He wants to give evidence so that God's people would continue to persevere in faith, to recognize Jesus as that full and final revelation.

[19:06] So we're going to really just blast through these seven ideas. But let me encourage you this week to read them again, to think through them, to pray over them, to think how they connect with the Old Testament, that it'll be clear in our minds that it will lead us to worship Jesus, to recognize just how great He is.

So to help us, let's group this into three categories to show also how Jesus fulfills the big story of the Old Testament.

We'll think about the three roles of Jesus as king, as prophet, and as priest. So let's remind ourselves from God's Word of Jesus, our King.

So look with me at verse 2. Having said in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son. Our author then goes on to say, whom He appointed heir of all things.

Who is Jesus? He is the heir of creation. Brings us back to Psalm 2 this morning. God's King has been installed.

[20:21] This King has the right to rule and to judge the nations that this creation belongs to the Father and the Son is the heir of it all. And so we should listen and we should honor and we should obey.

Continuing in verse 2, this Son is the one through whom God made the universe. The Father is the source of creation.

Jesus, the Son, is the agent of creation. Some of us, I know, are good at making things, good at crafting things.

Boys and girls, perhaps that's something that you enjoy, you have enjoyed. It's amazing to just stop and reflect, even for a moment, on the fact that Jesus can look out over the whole universe and He can say, I made that.

The pride that we take in our DIY projects, Jesus made the solar system. And then in verse 3, King Jesus, we're told, sustains all things by His powerful words.

[21 : 42] Not only does He make them as the agent of creation, He sustains all things. We don't have time, but it'd be worth looking at Psalm 104, which tells us that growth and life and seasons, they're all managed by the word of the King.

King Jesus creates, King Jesus sustains all life. God has spoken by His Son, His chosen King, and Jesus is ruling today.

Therefore, what's the implication? We're being invited again to trust Him. Think about the folks that are getting written to here.

They were facing trouble, persecution. They were anxious. They're being called back to trust God in life and in death, to trust in King Jesus.

When we think about our church, when we think about the church, perhaps we can be anxious. Perhaps we can feel so weak and powerless. We wonder what's going to happen.

[22 : 54] We're invited to trust King Jesus. He's building His church. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. We're being invited to trust the word of this King.

We're invited to faith and obedience because He is God's chosen King. To trust His word, to trust His promises.

Jesus is not one of those who promises the moon but fails to deliver. Jesus doesn't make promises and then forget all about them. No, our King can be trusted.

And so our author here is saying to us, don't drift. Keep trusting. Don't give in to doubt.

Don't give in to fear. Rather, honor Jesus as King. And then let's think next about Jesus as prophet.

[24 : 02] A couple of things here in verse 3. We begin there. The sun is the radiance of God's glory.

So if you remember back to Exodus 34, we were reading there of Moses face to face in the presence of God and after being in God's presence, his face was shining.

It was radiant. But we need to understand and Moses understood that that was a reflected glory. That wasn't a glory from Moses himself.

It was a reflected glory and it was a fading glory. He put the veil on because he knew that that glory would fade. But by contrast, Jesus, God's great, true, final prophet, he shines with the glory of God. That's not reflected. That belongs to him. We can think of the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus takes James, Peter, and John up a mountain and there he's transfigured.

[25 : 08] There he shines with brightness and with glory. And remember, who else is there? Moses is there. But Moses is not shining with glory. Jesus is.

Jesus is better. Jesus is the radiance of God's glory. Then continuing in verse 3, he is also the exact representation of his being.

We might like to think of a stamp where the imprint is a perfect match. What our author is saying is that Jesus looks exactly like God the Father.

We want to know what God is like. We can look to Jesus. Jesus said that. John 14, verse 9, He who has seen me has seen the Father.

He who has heard Jesus has heard the Father. Our Westminster shorter catechism is helpful on this.

[26 : 17] Thinking about how does Christ execute the office of a prophet? It says there, Catechism 24, for those of you who have good memories, Christ executes the office of a prophet in revealing to us by his word and spirit the will of God for our salvation.

That's the message of the prophet Jesus. Here is this announcement from heaven of a God of love, of a God who has graciously provided a way to be saved.

From our sin, from our guilt, from our fear of death, Jesus takes our sin, our guilt, he dies in our place so that by faith we can know salvation and we can receive eternal life.

John Calvin on this verse says that God has in Christ stamped for us the likeness to which he would have us conform.

Jesus is the one perfect human being. He is the true image of God. We are made in the image of God as people because of sin that image has been defaced.

[27 : 42] Jesus is the perfect image of God and God is at work in us in order to make us little by little bit by bit more like Jesus with the promise that when we are with him in glory we will be made like him and we will see him as he is.

So to be most ourselves as people and to live out our true identity as people is to live like Jesus. What does that look like?

It looks like worship. Worshipping God the Father. It looks like enjoying God's glory above all else. It looks like hating sin, dying to self, pursuing God's will in our lives. Jesus speaks of God's salvation and Jesus speaks of how God would have us to live and God is conforming us to that image when our faith is in Jesus.

We're given the Spirit and the Spirit is at work in us to sanctify us. And let's think about Jesus as our priest. half way through verse three we read after he had provided purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

[29 : 27] Jesus our great priest has provided purification purity. This is day of atonement language. You can read about the day of atonement in Leviticus 16.

That great ceremony where there was the burnt offering that was sacrificed the scapegoat that was said to carry the sins of God's people into the wilderness and the outcome of that verse 30 of Leviticus 16 tells us on this day this day of atonement on this day atonement will be made for you to cleanse you then before the Lord you will be clean from your sin so the point of the day of atonement is cleanness before God by having sins dealt with but see the thing is that day of atonement was an annual ceremony for the people of God because those animal sacrifices could never fully deal with sin Jesus comes as a better priest and then he offers the better sacrifice not animal sacrifice needing to be repeated rather he gives himself as that perfect once for all sacrifice at the cross where full and final forgiveness is purchased where

God's people are made clean and then we're told having provided purification he sat down the point is the work is done his work is completed that sacrifice has been accepted forgiveness is ours by faith in Jesus access to God is ours by faith in Jesus and now Jesus has the place of honor and glory as king sitting at the right hand of the majesty in heaven seven ways our author says Jesus is better than the old seven ways in which our author wants to say to us don't be tempted by anything less than Jesus so that we might not lose sight of our good our salvation is that we would see again the beauty of the gospel when we think about it and Davy was talking about it this morning we as people naturally choose to rebel against

God our king we spark revolution in our sin our desire to rule and to decide for ourselves how our life is going to go we are those who by nature reject God's word the prophets that would speak to us we would naturally choose to reject we don't we don't listen to to God's voice and God's authority and yet how does God respond he responds in sending Jesus who comes as our great high priest who dies to wash us clean us rebel sinners sinners who disregard his word he comes to overcome our sin to speak that word of grace and love to our hearts so as we look at the gospel we understand Jesus is better Mike Kruger who's written a really helpful little book on Hebrews says we have the honor and privilege of living in the age of Christ through whom

God has fully and finally spoken and because that's true we are urged not to drift away not to go back not to look elsewhere but rather to pay attention as God speaks through Jesus his son let's take a moment to pray together Lord our God and we thank you for the rich truth that we find throughout your word we thank you for this part of Hebrews and this reminder of how wonderful Jesus is that reminder that he shines with the glory of God that he speaks with the authority of God he has come on a saving mission from God that he is our true prophet priest and king and may you help each one of us whether we're here in the building whether we're listening online may you help us to hold on to

[34 : 01] Jesus to come to him in faith not to turn away to think the old is better not to think there is some greater source of satisfaction not to give up on Jesus when we face persecution or opposition or suffering Lord may you keep our eyes fixed on Jesus our great saviour so that we might praise him and live for him we ask it in Jesus name Amen Now we'll close our time hearing the hymn that we heard a few weeks ago Forever Jesus My hymn of praise shall be forever

Jesus my firm foundation in shifting sands my strength and hope through many fears and failures the disappointments of the past His constant love has held me fast So for all my days I will sing my praise to the King Forever Jesus Though the storms may rage He is strong to save He's the King Forever Jesus

My song of joy shall be forever Jesus who bore the suffering who made way His life a gift His death the precious ransom that wipes the sinner's guilt away and turns our night to glorious days So for all my days I will sing my praise to the King Forever Jesus

Though the storms may rage He is strong to save He's the King Forever Jesus My final prayer shall be forever Jesus when shadows lengthen before my eyes My Lord and friend companion through the valley where dearest ones are left behind

His hand will lead me to the light So for all my days I will sing my praise to the King Forever Jesus Though the storms may rage He is strong to save He's the King Forever Jesus When I meet His gaze I will sing my praise to the King Forever Jesus All my sorrows past I am home at last with my King Forever Jesus

[39 : 17] With my King Forever Jesus With my King Forever Jesus We stand together for our closing prayer prayer You can use Revelation 5 verses 12 and 13 praying that this song of the angels and every creature in heaven and on earth at the end of time would be the song of our hearts as well worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be praise and honour and glory and power forever and ever

Amen and and all