

The Ultimate Revelation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 February 2015

Preacher: Tom Warburton

[0 : 00] It was a news story which would change the way things would work in the future.! And today we're going to spend a few minutes looking at how Christ is God's final word, his ultimate revelation, and then think about what this means to us.

Now last week you heard about how God is good, he is our refuge, and the book of Hebrews is a book that links to this as it lifts our eyes to Jesus and tells us how Christ is better.

How salvation through Jesus Christ is better than everything else. And although Hebrews is situated at the end of Paul's letters in the Bible, we aren't sure who wrote Hebrews.

Hebrews is not written to a particular group of people that the writer knows directly, but more generally to Jewish Christians in Rome and was written not long after Jesus' death.

So why write the letter? Well these Christians whom the letter is written to are in danger. Now I once went to Kenya and whilst there did some whitewater rafting, although it turned out to be extremely muddy water rafting.

[1 : 35] And once we got in the boat and were hurtling along downstream, so it was too late to turn back, we were told by the guide to watch out for the hippos and also snakes who like to jump in the boat from the overhanging branches.

So the danger in that scenario was very apparent and obvious. However, the Christians who Hebrews is written to were in danger of falling away, failing to see that Christ is better.

And this kind of danger is much less obvious. The writer is writing out of concern that these Christians will miss out on their prize for finishing the race well.

Now since these Christians were in Rome, so since they were converted, they've been exposed to persecution. They would have had to endure public abuse, imprisonment and the looting of their property.

And this persecution has made them scatter. And as a result, their Christian development has stalled. So instead of pressing on, learning more and growing in their faith, they're in danger of slipping back and missing out.

[2 : 42] Now, many of the readers of this book would have been Jewish Christians who were suffering. They would have been reluctant in severing ties with their last religion, Judaism, which was protected under local Roman law.

The reason they would have been reluctant to completely drop Judaism is because they would lose this protection and they would have to face the risks of publicly following Jesus. So the people reading this letter would have been thinking, why is life so hard?

And Hebrews gives the answer that life is a journey, a journey from weariness to rest, from alienation to the presence of God.

And this book reminds us how you won't get home through sprints of energy, but by fixing your eyes on Jesus in a long-term sustained way. And the writer knows that Christ is God's final word, meaning that there is no more revelation to come.

So when he hears about these people, he writes to them, trying to stop them from slipping away and reminding them of who Christ is and what he's done and where he is now.

[3 : 49] He encourages them with the assurance that they have everything to lose if they fall back, but everything to gain if they keep going. Hebrews is basically an early Christian sermon.

And the purpose of these verses is to alert us to the foundations of the book, which is all about God communicating to us through the work, person and status of the son.

Now, communication in the modern world is becoming increasingly easier and more flexible. So as a stats highlight on screen, over a billion people communicate on Facebook and billions of messages are sent via text and Twitter each year.

So we have lots of ways to learn about each other and build relationships through these types of communication. But in order to learn more about God and to build our personal relationship with him, we need to listen to him.

God communicates to us through the Bible, reading and listening to what he has to say. It's how we can focus on Christ long term. So in these verses, he isn't telling us general information.

[4 : 56] We're told about Jesus' character. There is no formality like the other letters that sets out who it's to. The author engages our attention instantly by reminding us what God has been doing.

So in verse one, the author starts by presenting divine revelation from God. He contrasts the older communication in the Old Testament during the time of the prophets with the newer communication in the New Testament through his son, Jesus.

So the prophets in the Old Testament were teachers who would have revealed God's word to his people, for example, Moses or Isaiah. And they were men who spoke from God.

And there is continuity between the old and the new communication. God is always the one speaking. And the Old Testament bears witness to the new era of communication through the son. Now, the writer contrasts various areas of the revelation. And the different eras mentioned contrast when God has spoken to us. So in verse one, he says, In the past, which refers to the time before the coming of the Messiah.

[6 : 06] And in verse two, he says, These last days, meaning that the last days was initiated when Christ the Messiah came. So during these two periods, who did God speak to?

Well, the Old Testament communication through the prophets was received by our forefathers, the people alive at the time. And the revelation would have come in many forms, ranging from exhortations, visions, and dreams.

Now, however expansive this revelation was, it wasn't the ultimate revelation. It was incomplete. The revelation through Christ in the New Testament has come to us.

So we receive the full Christian message. It's focused on his person, work, and status. So have a look down at verse two. Look at how the author introduces Christ.

He simply says, By his son. There are no prior introductory words. And this emphasizes the unique relationship between Jesus and his father, who relates to him as son.

[7 : 11] So everything he did as a person, through words or acts, was to communicate God's word to his people. And in verse two, it also says how God has spoken to us, which connects with verse one, saying how in the past God spoke to our ancestors.

So God has always been communicating with us. The revelation of the son builds on the revelation of the old, and the climax of his communication is his son, Jesus.

Now, in the news, whenever the American government have to comment on a particular issue, they use their press secretary. So you see them quite a lot in the news, and their role is to represent and be the government's public voice.

Now, they act as their spokesperson. Christ was God's spokesperson. But what kind of spokesperson was he?

Well, the author provides us with various affirmations which describe the son. So have a look at the second half of verse two. Now, this inheritance of all things relates to the whole of the created order.

[8 : 23] The royal inheritance of Christ has begun but will conclude at the end of the age. Now, this heir of all things proposition affirms the present and anticipates the future role of Christ over all creation.

So Christ, as God's spokesperson, will rule over creation when he returns. Now, glance at the end of verse two and see what it says next, which is through whom he made the universe.

And this is taking a backward look at another one of the son's roles. So the writer here is proclaiming how God used Jesus as his agent in the creation of the universe.

So if you have a look at screens, we've got in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 6, Paul says, Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live.

But there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

So do you see how he makes a distinction between the work of the Father and the Son in the work of creation?

[9 : 30] Creation came from God but through Jesus. So the Father is the source of creation, but Jesus was the agent in the creative process.

So this means that Jesus, in the end, will inherit all of creation which he originated in the beginning. So Jesus has the same personal interest in the world around us as he created it.

Now, what does that reveal to us? Well, Jesus was alive before the world was created. Jesus is God. When he came to earth to live as man and teach us, God was sending his Son to teach us how God wants us to live.

So Christ is the best possible witness of how we should live as he is the Son of God. Now, do you see the importance of Jesus' teaching through the Bible?

Well, God came down to live as one of us to be God's final word and show us the complete picture of how we should live and how we can be saved through repentance and faith in Christ.

[10:43] So how do the verses describe what Jesus, who is God's spokesperson, is actually like? Well, at the end of last year, I went skiing for a day and my goggles started to steam up, which is really annoying because to fix it, you have to take your gloves off and then instantly your hands freeze.

And when you take your goggles off, you very quickly realise how bright the snow is in the sun. Now, the snow on the mountains shining in the sun fills your vision so much so that after a minute of looking at it, your eyes actually start to hurt.

Now, this brightness or radiance is a bit like how the writer describes what Jesus is like. So verse 3 begins by describing him as the radiance of God's glory, which in essence is saying that he's like an incredibly bright light.

And the word glory here refers to a luminous display of God's person. And together, it means to look at Jesus is to see God. Now, God is revealing himself to us through Jesus.

So what Jesus teaches us in the Bible is direct revelation from God. So in verse 3, we are told that Jesus is the image of God.

[11:59] God. Now, you might have heard how soon UK banknotes are going to be made out of plastic instead of cotton, which they currently are, which is similar to Australia.

Now, money is identical, and the process for creating bank coins in particular involves a machine stamping out an engraved design hundreds of times on a blank piece of metal, which are then counted.

Now, these coins will be exactly identical. And in the same way, Jesus is an exact representation of God.

Jesus represents the being or nature of the Father. Jesus is the likeness of God, and he provides us with a true and trustworthy picture of God, the Father.

So when Jesus speaks, God is speaking. We will never meet God face to face before we die. So in order to understand who he is and to learn more about his character, we can look at Jesus, look at what he teaches, look at how he behaves, and learn from his obedience.

[13:10] Now, verse 3 tells us the Son is also sustaining all things by his powerful word. Now, the term sustaining should be understood in a managerial sense. So God isn't like a watchmaker who, after making a watch, leaves it to run on its own.

Jesus is continually sustaining and carrying forward the created order to his designed end. And he is doing this through his governmental power, in the same way our government has sustained things in our country.

Now, the world was created by the word of God through his Son, and is sustained by the Son's powerful word. But do you actively listen to what he has to say? Well, I wonder if you saw the recent James Bond film, Skyfall.

I thought it was one of the better ones. And what I particularly like about James Bond films is how, as an agent or representative of MI6, he makes decisions on behalf of the organisation.

So he is their agent, their man in the field, speaking and making decisions on behalf of who he is representing. Now, Christ, as God's representative, is his agent in the field.

[14:24] He has all of God's power, and his actions help us to understand more about God. Now, one of the main concerns in these verses is to remind the reader what Christ has provided with his power.

So if you look at the second half of verse 3, it says he has provided purification for sins. And the writer here is introducing how Christ died sacrificially on the cross to provide a permanent forgiveness that would lead into the very presence of God.

So Christ, as God's representative, has the power to forgive our sins. He can restore us if we choose to repent and put our faith in him. And ultimately, he can help us conquer our greatest fear in life, death.

So after Christ rose again, where did he go? And what status does he have now? Well, at the end of verse 3, it gives us the answer.

He sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. And this is the heart of the revelation, reveals to us Christ's status. Verse 3 reminds us of the good news of the gospel.

[15:38] Christ is alive, and his permanent status is in heaven. It says how he sat down, as if to tell us he's not just a passerby, he has sat down next to God, the Father, today.

But whereabouts is he sitting? Well, by the right hand of God, the right hand representing superior power and ultimate honour. So would God let anyone sit next to him?

No, only his son, one whose name is great and worthy to sit there. And this supports God's revelation how Jesus is king. He has been vindicated through the resurrection.

He is now up in heaven to take on his role as judge, as Lord, and to intercede on behalf of believers. So he's sitting next to the Messiah, who sits in the most privileged position of all.

Jesus has been exalted to an exceptional position of authority and honour. Now, does Christ's status affect how seriously you take on board what Christ says?

[16:40] It's easy to forget who Christ is and how much authority he has and where he is now. So how important is Jesus? And what status does he have in heaven?

Well, take a look at verse 4, which says, he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. Now, if you've ever worked in a big company, you will know that they have very defined employee hierarchies of who reports into who.

Now, in heaven, those who report into God are called angels. Their role is to do God's work. And in heaven, angels are very high up in superiority.

But the Son has now moved to a position of authority and governance in heaven, which is superior to the angels. He is above them in the hierarchy.

So what does the author mean by the word superior? Well, Jesus Christ is superior in so many ways. Firstly, Christ is the superior priest.

[17:46] Back in Bible times, in order to talk to God, you had to go through a priest who would talk to God on your behalf. He would intercede for you. But Christ is our ultimate superior priest.

We can have a relationship with God through Jesus who has the superiority to speak to God on our behalf. Well, a few summers ago, a Welsh football player called Gareth Bale signed for a club called Real Madrid in Spain.

Now, he signed one of the biggest sports contracts ever written. And this contract is like a covenant an agreement or a way of promising to play for a club.

Jesus is our superior priest at the right hand of God. And he gives us a new covenant, a superior promise that he will save all who willingly repent and acknowledge him as Lord and Saviour.

And because of this superior covenant, Jesus gives us a superior hope, a hope we can believe in. In verse 4, it also says his name is superior.

[18:58] It shows how Jesus is superior to the angels in rank, status, reputation, and in person. Simply, it means how Jesus' name is above any other.

So to recap, in these four introductory verses, we have learned about how God is a communicator. He has something to say to us. He wants to change our hearts and lives.

He has revealed his final communication to us through Jesus, who is now at the right hand of God. And Jesus, through his work and sacrifice, had a message to deliver to us, to tell us how we can be saved.

So how should the power of God's communication through Jesus affect our lives? And how can we use it to build long-term foundations in our lives and in others?

Well, I get the train to work each day, and recently, a new trend has started. So even though it's a commuter train where you practically sit with the same people every day, when the train starts to pull away, the conductor started to give a long, loud, over-the-top introduction, telling us where we're going.

[20:10] Now, maybe it's part of a new customer service initiative, but when I hear this message every day, it just becomes annoying, and I stop listening. Now, I wonder if that's how you sometimes feel about the Bible, when God speaks to you through it, or when he challenges your

way of life.

Now, the word of God is written for us to read and listen to what he has to say. It's written to change, mould, and direct the lives of those who follow Jesus, who believe in him as their saviour. Now, if you believe in Jesus today, do you let God's word change you? Or is it just like the drone of a conductor on a train? Now, these verses aren't about practical things, such as how we use our money or other practical issues.

It's challenging us to see the powerful life Jesus lived and ministered, and use his teaching as a foundation for a robust Christian life. Now, in order to build a house, you need the right foundations. But in order to build a Christian life, which is obedient to God and useful for his kingdom building, you need to base it on sound teaching. And if you don't, then your faith may not stand the test of time.

[21 : 24] Now, why should we keep reading the Bible and learning more about what God is saying to us? That's to stay on track. The teaching we receive and our own quiet time reading can help us stay on track, living a life honouring to God.

If we stay on track, we develop a foundation of perseverance and learning more about what God has to say to us is an act of repentant humility. Now, all churches are full of sinful people like you and me, and hearing God's word makes us critically examine ourselves, which can lead to apologetic regret.

Now, do you ever try to talk to others about the gospel? In these verses, we can learn a lot from the author about how to package a punchy message and get the attention of the listeners.

In order for the gospel to be communicated effectively, it needs to be simple to understand and with few communication barriers. So I wonder if you ever try and teach or talk about the Bible with someone and the TV's on in the background.

In order to hear the gospel, you need to try to explain it clearly, and to do this, it helps if there are fewer distractions. And C.S. Lewis once said that a great way to teach what God has spoken is to sneak it in via a good story, which is what he proved in works such as Chronicles of Narnia.

[22 : 45] But whose words have the power to change lives? Well, not ours, but God's word. But how can you hear God speak to you? Well, listening to God's word is one of the primary instruments of change in your spiritual life.

You can listen by going to church, listen to sermons online, and actively seek to read the Bible. And I always think it's good to preferably do that with study guides, that way someone who has studied the passage a lot is going through it, which means you learn even more.

But why should we listen to God's word? Well, God speaks from the top down. God, who is the almighty creator, reveals his truth and his will to us. Now, what is the significance of God's ultimate revelation of speaking through his son?

The answer is hope. Now, I've sailed a few times in my life and I'm not particularly good at it. And when you're out at sea, it helps to have a point of reference to work out your position if you get lost or lose your way.

And the best reference points are usually distinguishable buildings, which are preferably tall or on a hill. And Jesus' death on the cross offers us not only the foundation for any gospel conversation or Bible study, but a stable point of reference for you to keep hold of for the rest of your life.

[24 : 10] No matter what happens in life, God won't change. And the hope we have in the resurrection won't change. Whenever you struggle to obey or to listen, remember the hope that Jesus has invited you to have.

If you put your trust in him and let him who is at the right hand of God intercede for you, forgiving you for your sins and rescue you from judgment. Now, do you let the gospel and all of what God says in the Bible change you on the inside?

Maybe think this week about how you can weave the gospel into your life. It doesn't happen overnight. It might be just small steps to becoming more obedient and learning more. Now, what is your motivation for trying to become more Christ-like?

Well, because you're on a journey and you need to realise it's a long-term one, which is tough.

Now, like the Christians in this passage, you will suffer and find it tough, which is why you need to fix your eyes on Jesus, listen to him, and learn how to obey.

So Jesus is not another prophet. He completes the picture of salvation. Jesus has paid for our sins. He's living in heaven at the right hand of God and he is our true and present source of hope and

help.

[25 : 35] Now, will you choose to listen to him, to trust him, to obey him? Today, I urge you to give your whole life to Jesus in exchange for a better eternity with him.