

What Child Is This? He Is The Radiance Of The Glory Of God

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[0:00] We're going to be, like Mike said, we're going to be in Hebrews chapter 1 this morning. So go ahead and open up Hebrews if you're not sure exactly where that is.

It's toward the back of your Bible. Not quite to Revelation, but almost there. So find the back of your Bible, start flipping left, and you'll find it pretty soon.

And while you're turning, I was wondering if you might join me with a little poll on interpersonal communication. Raise your hand if you'd like to receive messages.

What probably popped into your mind was text messages, but I'm just saying any message whatsoever. Any kind of message. What are ways we receive messages? Maybe some sort of electronic text, whether email, text, Facebook, Instagram, whatever communication you like that's electronic.

Let's say that's option A. Option B, a phone call. You get a phone call for somebody. Or option C, you get a handwritten note. That would be cool. That's a good way to receive a message.

[1:09] Or option D, face-to-face. So I'm actually going to ask you to tell me which one you would prefer in the following situations. So give me a one if it's some sort of electronic text.

Two, phone call. Give me a three if it's a handwritten note. And four, face-to-face conversation. It kind of goes from less intimate to more intimate. Okay?

So you guys ready? One, two, three, four, four. Okay, so tell me. An invitation to a Christmas party. What would you prefer to be your invitation? Four, face-to-face?

Or electronic, phone call, handwritten note? Okay, good. All right. See, a lot of fours. That's kind of cool. All right. So how about someone's rescheduling a meeting that you're about to have in two hours?

How would you like to receive that message? One, two, three, four. Okay. All right. So there are different preferences here. How about bad news? Health bad news?

[2:09] Or job bad news? Or family bad news? Okay, I see a lot of fours. Me too. How about good news? Health good news?

Job good news? Family good news? A lot of fours? Okay. All right. The way you communicate matters, doesn't it? It's really important. It affects the relationship. If someone communicates a really important thing to you in a really not personal way, it affects something.

You can even, the way we communicate can depend on whether that message is communicated well or not. Have you ever had the whole autocomplete thing happen to you on sending a text message and it autocompletes something and then you send it and, oh my gosh, I didn't want to say that.

So the message might be affected. The message might not even be relayed at all if the email comes too late, right? The way we communicate matters. What about God's communication? How does He speak to us? How does He relay messages to us? Does He speak? Has He spoken?

[3:21] What has He said? What would He say or what does He say in certain situations? Whether you've been a Christian for a long time or you're just wondering what this whole God thing is about, anywhere on the spectrum, these questions really matter.

They matter because if God has spoken and if He continues to speak, then the question is how do we receive and how do we respond to those messages?

Well, Hebrews 1, 1 to 4 is going to say something to us about this. Before we dive in, let me clue us into what we're about to read. We're not normally in the book of Hebrews.

This is what's going on here. This is a letter written to a congregation just like us of Jewish believers. They were Jews and then they had become Christians.

They had believed that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and they were being written to by a pastor. And we don't know who it is, but some people think it's Paul. Some people think it's Apollos. We don't know. We'll find out in heaven.

[4:25] That's probably one of the first things that, no, that's not one of the first things I'm going to ask God. I would like to know that someday. Who wrote Hebrews? But it was written by a pastor who was very familiar with the Jewish religion, very familiar with the Old Testament, and he's writing to Jewish people who were very familiar with the Old Testament, very familiar with the Jewish religion.

So you're going to see that in just a minute. But the people he was writing to, these Jewish believers, they were on the fence. They had believed in Jesus, but now they're starting to take some flack for it.

They're starting to take some heat. And the heat is making them start to wonder, is it really worth it to stick with Jesus? Maybe he wasn't everything that the Old Testament was pointing to.

Okay? So with that in mind, let's read these first four verses. 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, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

[5:34] 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, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Thank God for his word. So as a church, we've been asking this question, what child is this? It's helping us to take a step back and ask, who is this baby in the manger?

What does that have to do with us? Two weeks ago, we saw in Mike preach that he is the word made flesh in John 1. We saw in Colossians 1 last week that he is the Lord of all.

And here in Hebrews 1, something about the ones, we're going to discover that something else about him. So, what child is this? This child is God's full and final revelation to God's people.

This child is God's full and final revelation to God's people. Now, when I say revelation, I'm not talking about the really cool last book of the Bible with a bunch of dragons and beasts and living creatures covered with eyes.

[6:58] That's what I'm talking about. It's a really cool book. Read it sometime. No, this child whose birth we're celebrating is the full and final revealing, unveiling of who God is and what God has done for his people.

This baby is God's communication. Jesus is God's full and final revelation to his people. That's the point of this passage.

And really, it's a good summary of the whole letter of the book of Hebrews. So, like the space shuttle has stages in its launch, the author is going to make a staged argument.

He's going to make his argument to prove that Jesus is the full and final revelation to God's full and final revelation to his people in four stages. The first three are going to focus on who Jesus is and what he's done.

And the last one is a sparkling, logical conclusion as to what that means for us. So, four stages. Let's look at the first one. Stage one. Jesus completes Old Testament revelation.

[8:04] Jesus completes Old Testament revelation. Let's read those first two verses again. Long ago, at many times, in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. Did you know God is a talking God? I'm really glad he's a talking God.

The Bible opens with God talking. Not just because it's God's word, but he starts talking and then galaxies appear. God's words spin galaxies into existence.

But he doesn't just have words for galaxies. He has words for his people. God began speaking to his people from the beginning. And the record of this revelation is in the first 39 books of your Bible, the Old Testament, and not even all the way there.

So, the first big chunk of your Bible is the record of this revelation. God used his spokesmen and spokeswomen to reveal himself to his people in various ways and at various times.

[9:11] And God wasn't just speaking to them about the weather or about high theological ideas. He wasn't just giving them a bunch of cold, hard rules to follow. He was speaking redemptively to them.

He broke in with his words into their cursed existence because of their rebellion against him. And he spoke the promise of his blessing and his grace.

He spoke this blessing to a random guy he chose by grace named Abraham. Then he showed this man's descendants what kind of predicament they were in when they were in slavery in Egypt.

And then he promised his grace to them to deliver them and he does it. He reveals his glory and holiness to them on Mount Sinai. He invites them near to his presence to experience his glory.

He rebukes them when they forsake him for false gods. He forgives them when they repent and they turn to him and worship again. And all the way through Israel's history, God continued speaking in various ways and in various times, progressively revealing both himself and his purposes for a complete salvation for his people.

[10:19] And by the way, this is really important for the first people who are reading this letter to the Hebrews. This is their story. They were Jews. And this pastor is writing this to them to help this weak church see that everything about their story was pointing forward to the end of the story when God would unveil his full and final revelation to his people, the Jews, and then gloriously extend it to all people.

He's trying to help them see that everything God had revealed to them so far had been true but incomplete. Not until a full and final revelation came would their whole story make sense.

But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. Let's just notice the contrast that this pastor is making in these first two verses. First notice, long ago versus in these last days.

This is pointing out how this revelation is progressive. Long ago, he started revealing himself. But then these last days, the progression is complete.

Now look at the two phrases, by the prophets and by the son. Two different kinds of communication. Two different kinds of message relaying.

[11:46] One is through the prophets, the other in his son. Look next at who receives the communication. To our fathers. He spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. He's bringing it home to them. Lastly, the last one's kind of implied this contrast.

But notice that it says, at many times and in many ways. You could almost interpret that in many ways as in various parts. A part here, a part there.

So, God revealed himself partially, in parts. But now, it's the whole. Literally, the text reads, he has spoken to us in son.

There's no article there. And so, the way you could paraphrase it almost is by saying, God, having spoken partially, has now spoken son-ishly.

[12:46] He almost abverb-izes it. The prophets were God's spokespersons. They spoke God's revelations to his people. But the son, the son embodies God's revelation to his people.

One commentator wrote, It's as if God's people were used to hearing God's voice on the radio through the prophets. But then he shows up at the front door in person. In the son.

Jesus completes Old Testament revelation. Do you feel the weight of that? God has spoken. He spoke partially, partially, progressively, partially, progressively.

And now, it's done. Jesus completed it. God has nothing more to say. He showed up in person. To communicate the message.

And that thought leads us naturally to the second stage of the pastor's argument. The second stage is this. Jesus is the eternal son of the Father.

[13:47] Jesus is the eternal son of the Father. I'm going to warn you, this is going to make your brain hurt. It makes my brain hurt. Let's look at verses 2 and 3. The middle of verse 2.

He has spoken to us by his son. And then it starts to describe the son. Whom he appointed the heir of all things. Through whom also he created the world. 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. Here, the pastor is demonstrating Jesus' absolute godness.

He's focusing particularly on the son's pre-existence in eternity as the son of the father. And then he becomes the child in the manger.

So let's look at that first part. So God created the universe in all of its vastness by speaking through his powerful word. We learned that from John 1 that Jesus is that creative word through whom God made the world.

[14:54] Mike pointed out last week too that he is the one through whom God made everything. This is pointing to the cooperative effort of the father and the son participating together to speak all things into existence.

This child is the eternal son without whom nothing would have been made. He shares the father's absolute self-existent authority as creator of all.

But he's also the heir of all. Did you notice that? That means just by virtue of his sonship, just by being who he is as the son of the father, the whole universe is his personal property.

It belongs to him. He owns the pews you're sitting on. The car you drive, the constellation Orion, every cent you have in the bank, it's his.

It all exists for him. He owns you and he owns me. He and the father made all things so that it would belong to the son.

[16:08] But that's not all. Check out what comes in verse 3. I hope your jaw is dropping already. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. He upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Okay, let's take that first phrase. Imagine the sun, S-U-N, the sun, the star at the center of our solar system, without light. A little hard to imagine.

Wouldn't really be the sun, would it? That's the image that the pastor is giving us about the relationship of the eternal sun and the father. We're doing a lot of spiritual bench pressing here, guys. I'm sorry, but this is like, this is awesome stuff.

In the same way that you can't separate the star, the sun, from the light of the sun, the father does not exist apart from the sun and the sun does not exist apart from the father.

He is the radiance, the outshining, the visiblensness of the father's glory. The father is glorious and he is seen to be glorious in the sun.

[17:16] All the excellence of who God is is perfectly made seeable in the eternal sun. The pastor makes his point another way in the next phrase.

The ESV captures it pretty well. He is the exact imprint of God's nature. When important people wrote documents in ancient times, they were on a scroll and they rolled the scroll up and they poured hot wax on it, on the little, where the paper ends, and then they pushed a metal or wood seal onto the wax to create an exact imprint, reduplicate, reduplication, oh my goodness, reduplication of what was on the seal to show the approval that this was theirs.

That is that word there, that exact imprint. There's no difference between what's here and what's here in terms of what is there. But the eternal sun is not the exact imprint of what God looks like. That's not the point. God is spiritual. He's not physical. Rather, he is the exact imprint of his very being, his essence. In the words of one writer, what God essentially is, is made visible in the sun. In the words of the Nicene Creed, the sun is very God of very God, light of light. All of God's godness shows up exactly and visibly in the sun.

[19:01] But just in case we're not fully clear on what this pastor is trying to say about this eternal son's unique oneness with God the Father, he throws in this rather insignificant little phrase, he upholds

the universe by the word of his power.

Okay, don't get the Greek god Atlas in your mind, the guy who's holding up the world on his shoulders. Don't get that in your mind. It's not like that. Rather, get this image in your mind. The entire universe and all of the universe's history is a rowboat floating along a steady stream of Jesus' powerful word.

He bears it along. He carries all of existence to its proper end simply by virtue of his immense authority.

In other words, Jesus isn't just the one through whom God created the cosmos. He's not just the owner of the universe. He's not only an exact visible reduplication of God's godness.

He is the one whose powerful word carries on the entire fabric of space and time along to its appointed conclusion. History is going somewhere. The eternal son is taking it there by the power of his word.

[20:21] Every atom, every ray of light, every speck of dust, every human life, every political figure, every plot of Satan is moving exactly according to the word of the eternal son simply because he is who he is.

Who else should be God's full and final revelation? Stage three. Jesus is the exalted priest king of God's people.

Jesus is the exalted priest king of God's people. Look at the middle of verse three. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

If the author focused on the son's pre-existence and eternity with the father in the last stage, now he's highlighting how the eternal son entered into the fabric of space and time.

That he created to accomplish the salvation of God's people. He came to be the priestly mediator between God and his people.

[21:40] And he also came to reestablish God's loving rule over his people. In short, he came to be their priest king. Now, we're going to have to flip a little bit to the middle of the book of Hebrews to kind of expand on this.

The author expands on this idea significantly in chapter 9 and 10. So flip there with me. While you're flipping, let me give you the background. Back in the Old Testament, God gave his covenant people a system of sacrifices that allowed him, the holy God, to dwell near his sinful people in a fancy tent called the tabernacle.

And that he also gave them a whole bunch of priests, too. And these priests were the people who offered the sacrifices that were animals to God on behalf of God's people.

Why, do you ask, did they need to make sacrifices? Well, God is holy. Why, God's people were unholy in their hearts and actions. If they lived near him without dealing with their unholiness, it would be dangerous for them.

Not because God's bad and mean, but because he's so good. The priests and the sacrifices were the way that God's people could be close to God in safety and in peace.

[22:58] The animals took the punishment for the sin of God's people. And therefore, God received that sacrifice as a substitute for the punishment that God's people deserved. Therefore, God's people could be near him and experience his glory and beauty without being afraid of punishment.

But the problem was, these sacrifices had to happen all the time. Daily, in fact. Because God's people sinned all the time. Daily, in fact. And the priests themselves sinned.

Which meant that they had to offer sacrifices for themselves first before they could offer sacrifices for God's people. So the whole system was just a temporary solution until something permanent could be done about the sin of God's people once and for all.

So let's read Hebrews 9, verses 11 through 14. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

[24:37] So what's the pastor saying? Jesus isn't just the priest. He's also the sacrifice. He's the sacrifice that willingly lays himself on the altar as the substitute for God's people.

He purified God's people as priest, not only because he was uniquely qualified to be the perfect priest between God and humanity, being both God and man, but also because he offered himself as the sacrifice.

The whole sacrificial system and the whole priesthood were just placeholders. They were pointing forward to how the eternal Son would enter into our world as one of us, descend to the lowest place of humiliation and death on a cross, only to rise again in exaltation and be seated at the right hand of God as the vindicated, glorified King over God's people.

He's not a dictator. He's the king who reigns as a suffering servant. He went to the lowest of depths for God's people, for you and for me.

And now he's exalted, reigning on high. Just move one chapter over into chapter 10 and look at verse 11 of chapter 10.

[25:50] He contrasts the priests of the Old Testament with what this priest has done and how it points to his kingship.

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemy should be made a footstool for his feet.

For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. When our priest, the eternal son, stepped into God's holy temple in heaven, bearing his own blood as a sin offering to take away the guilt of God's people and accomplish our redemption, he sat down.

Unlike the Old Testament priests, whose job was never done, therefore they were always standing at their post. Next sacrifice. Next sacrifice. Next sacrifice. Once for all, this priest accomplished a one-time sacrifice.

And he is the unique priest and king, and he is not standing because his job is done. And now he sits enthroned, exalted at the right hand of the Father, sharing his majesty until one day all things will be under his feet.

[27:25] Who else is more uniquely qualified to be God's full and final revelation? This is what God has planned all along for the salvation of his people.

And he brought it about through the eternal son. No one else could have done this. And that's what leads us to the last stage of the pastor's argument.

He finishes with a logical conclusion. Here it is. If Jesus is God's full and final revelation, it's impossible to find a better alternative.

If Jesus is God's full and final revelation, it's impossible to find a better alternative. Look at the end of verse four. Having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Here the pastor introduces a word that pops up again and again through the letter to the book of Hebrews. It's that word superior. Literally, it just means better. And in this verse, the pastor's comparing Jesus to angels and demonstrates that he is better simply by virtue of the name that he has inherited.

[28:41] But why angels? It seems a little random. Well, in Jewish thought, the angels were God's messengers. They were the revealers of God's will and God's purposes.

They were his communicators. They carried his messages. So if God revealed something in the Old Testament, he did it through his messengers, the angels, especially when God gave the law on Mount Sinai, he gave it through angels.

They were revered as the carriers of God's revelation. And these people that the pastor's writing to are tempted to say, well, Jesus is just another angel, right?

Just another version of God's messengers? No. Now, because he is both eternal son and exalted priest king, his name is far greater than the angel's name.

His authority, his power, his identity is far better. The angels are not the exact imprint of God's very being. The angels are not the radiance of God's glory.

[29:42] The angels never offer themselves on a cross for God's people for crying out loud. The son is not just another angel. Oh, no. He has the name above all names, at which every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all.

The angels can't claim the title of savior. Jesus can. There's no better alternative to the son. He is supremely superior to any teacher, any supposed possessor of truth, any motivational speaker, any health program, any exercise plan, any entertainment package, any earthly pleasure, any job, any Christmas bonus, any new car.

He is supremely better. This pastor wants his people to see that Jesus is better. He is superior. He is excellent. He is satisfying. There's absolutely no better alternative apart from him.

But neither is he a helpful add-on to our lives that when things get tough can be tossed aside. Either this child is the full completion of what God has said and says to his people, or you reject everything that God has said.

Either this child is the eternal son who exhibits the father in every aspect, carrying your life and all of history with it to its specific end, or you forfeit a complete knowledge of who God is.

[31:06] Either this child is the exalted priest king, or who redeemed God's people through his own priestly self-sacrifice, or there is no redemption. There is no forgiveness of sins.

There is no hope in our lives except the frightful expectation of God's holy judgment. There is no better alternative but to see this child for who he is and adore him in his excellence, in his supremacy, in his immense power, and in his self-giving love.

What substitute for him is worthy of your confidence and affection? Whose voice would you rather hear? Whose solution to your problems would you rather seek?

I'm not sure where you find yourself this morning. This passage speaks to us loud and clear about how incredibly majestic the son of God is.

Let God's word about this son wound and heal your heart. Lord, are you putting your trust in something or someone other than this eternal, exalted son, thinking that it is better?

[32:25] There is no love more fierce than your priest king's love. There is no redemption more effective, no purification for sin, more cleansing.

There is no power greater than the one who is sustaining and carrying every detail of your life along by his powerful word. You can trust him.

There is no message more full or final than the one that God has spoken in his son. Let this truth pervade your mind and astound your heart this morning.

Let's gaze upon this child. He is the fullness of everything God has ever said. Make him your treasure, your truth, your peace, your joy.

Let's pray. Father, we see that you have spoken sun-ishly.

[33:27] You have revealed yourself through your son. Oh God, would you help us to see how we are seeking better alternatives?

Would you cause us to behold and delight in him? Would you cause him to stand out in our minds as exalted, reigning on high?

Help us, God, to trust in his priestly work for us. Exalt him in our midst, in our hearts today.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Thank you.