

Listening to the Father say who Jesus is

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Date: 15 November 2009

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[0 : 00] Living God, as we now turn to your word, will you in your mercy and grace give us eyes to see and ears to hear?

For this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Who is he? Jesus, about whom we have been singing, in whose name we have been praying.

Who is he? On the Sunday mornings of this fall, we have been focusing on that one question. Who is Jesus? And we have been doing so because of the statement we print on the front of our worship folder.

We are a community following Jesus with a heart for the city and beyond. After the first of the year, beginning in January of 2010, we will be asking the question, what does it mean to be a community?

We say we are a community following Jesus. Okay, what does a community following Jesus look like? But right now, we are asking the more primary question, who is Jesus?

[1 : 14] We are a community following Jesus. Okay, so who is he? We began by asking John the Baptist, the prophet sent by God, to introduce Jesus to the world.

Who does John think Jesus is? Of all that John had to say about his cousin, we focused on the great claim, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, and the one who baptizes.

Who baptizes in and with the Holy Spirit. We then turn to Jesus himself. Who does he say he is? We heard his claim to be the son of man.

Not just a son of man, but the son of man. A title that puts him in a class all by himself. For no one, no one else in history ever dared to take to himself that pretentious title.

You will see the son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. We heard Jesus claim, I am the bread of life. I am that without which you cannot live.

[2 : 22] You need me more than you need your next meal. We heard Jesus claim, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

The light that leads to life. The light that is life. We heard Jesus claim to be the stronger man. Who invades the strong man's house. Binds him and then begins to plunder his stolen property.

Jesus claims to be stronger than all the forces that threaten to undo human existence. We heard Jesus claim, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Once the good shepherd takes hold of a sheep, he never lets go. No one can snatch you out of my hand, he says.

No one can snatch you out of my father's hand, he adds. Last Sunday, we heard Jesus make the most astounding, most audacious claim that anyone can ever make.

[3 : 21] We heard Jesus speak during the Jewish feast of tabernacles. During this feast that celebrates the presence of the living God who comes to dwell among his people.

And we heard Jesus use those sacred pronouns of God's self-revelation. We heard Jesus say, I am he. Unless you believe I am he, you will die in your sins.

When you have lifted up the son of man, then you will know that I am he. Before Abraham is born, I am. I am still stunned by the implications of that claim. The world has seemed very different to me since last Sunday.

Today, I invite you to listen to God say who Jesus is. Or more precisely, I invite you to listen to God the Father say who he thinks Jesus is.

And where do we hear God speak of Jesus? In the New Testament document called Hebrews. Notice how I put that.

[4 : 28] New Testament document. I didn't say New Testament book. Although the document now comes to us in book form, it was not originally a book.

It was not even originally a letter. It was sent by mail, but it was not written as a letter. It has no letter-like introduction.

The document simply begins, God, after he spoke, has spoken to us. It turns out that the document is a sermon.

Perhaps the most eloquent sermon ever written. The author says at the end of the document, chapter 13, verse 22. But I urge you, brothers and sisters, bear with this word of exhortation.

Exhortation, or paraklesis, is the word that the early church used of early Christian preaching. In this document, in Hebrews, we have one of the most artistically crafted sermons ever preached.

[5 : 31] Some season, in one of the years to come, unless, of course, the Son of Man answers our prayers and he comes in all his glory first.

I would like us to work through that whole sermon. Bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly, says the author.

Briefly. 13 chapters is briefly. 13 chapters of dense theological gems.

Briefly. It takes about 70 minutes to read the sermon of Hebrews out loud. Briefly. 70 minutes is briefly.

Don't worry, I'm not hinting at anything. In the sermon, in Hebrews, we hear God say who he thinks Jesus is.

[6 : 35] More precisely, we hear God the Father say who he thinks Jesus is. Even more precisely, we hear God the Father speak about and to Jesus.

Where? In the first chapter. In Hebrews 1. The whole sermon begins. God, after he spoke long ago to the ancestors in the prophets.

In these last days, has spoken to us in his Son. Literally, it's just in Son. God has spoken in Son. And then in chapter 1, we hear God the Father speak about and to Son.

Now, the author of Hebrews has so carefully crafted his sermon that chapter 1 cannot be separated from chapter 2.

You just can't separate them. A sermon is to be heard. Indeed, a sermon is not a sermon until it is spoken. I handwrite my sermons and do so with pencil.

[7 : 48] And after writing, I will often say to Sharon, I finished my sermon. Not so. The sermon on the pages of a paper is not a sermon until it is spoken and heard.

So Hebrews. It does not become what it is intended to be until it is heard. It is meant to be heard. It is when it is heard that its purpose is accomplished.

Hebrews 1 and 2 are meant to be heard together. Neither chapter is finally heard without the other. So, I am going to read or preach Hebrews 1 and 2 out loud together.

Just listen. Listen. Don't worry about grasping everything right away. Don't worry about that. Just listen. 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 in Son. Whom he appointed heir of all things.

[9 : 03] And through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory. The exact representation of his being.

Sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins. He sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. So, he has become as much superior to the angels.

As the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, You are my son.

Today, I have begotten you. Or again, I will be his father and he will be my son. And again, when God brings the firstborn into the world, he says, Let all God's angels worship him.

And speaking of the angels, he says, He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire. But about the son, he says, Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever.

[10 : 12] And righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore, God, your God, has set you far above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

He also says, In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth. And the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain.

They will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe. Like a garment, they will be changed. But you remain the same. And your years will never end. But to which of the angels did God ever say, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies the footstool for your feet?

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard so that we do not drift away.

For if the message spoken by angels was binding, And every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?

[11 : 17] This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, Was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs and wonders and various miracles And gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

It was not to angels that he has subjected the world to come about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified. What is man that you are mindful him?

Of the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels And crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet. In putting everything under humanity, God left nothing that is not subject to them.

Yet at present, we do not see everything subject to humans. But we see Jesus, Who was made a little lower than the angels, Now crowned with glory and honor, Because he suffered death, So that by the grace of God, He might taste death for everyone.

In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, It was fitting that God, For whom and through whom everything exists, Should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes humans holy, And those who are made holy, Are of the same family.

[12 : 31] So, Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He says, I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters. In the presence of the great congregation, I will sing your praise.

And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, he says, Here I am, And the children God has given me. Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity.

So that by his death, He might destroy him who holds the power of death, That is the devil, And free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For surely, It is not angels he helps, But Abraham's descendants.

For this reason, He had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, In order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, And that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted. He is able to help those who are being tempted. Wow. And that's just the opening of the sermon.

[13 : 37] Now, did you hear all of the references to angels? Angels. It all begins with angels and ends with angels. The term angels is an audio cue.

Telling us that these two chapters go together. Angels is an audio cue telling us that we must keep these two chapters together. Angels.

1.4 Having become much superior to angels. 1.5 For to which of the angels did God say? 1.6 Let all the angels worship him. 1.7 And of the angels, he says.

1.13 But to which of the angels did he ever say? 1.14 Are not all angels ministering spirits? 2.2 For if the word spoken to angels. 2.5 For it was not subject to angels, the world to come.

2.7 You have made them a little lower than angels. 2.9 We see Jesus made a little lower than the angels for a little while. 2.17 For surely it is not angels he helps.

[14 : 36] Why the reference to angels? 2.11 2.6 What does this have to do with God the Father speaking about and to Jesus?

Well, people of the first century lived in a universe filled with angels. So do we. It's just that they knew it.

For people of the first century, Jews and Gentiles alike, angels served as the agents of communication between God and humanity.

For people of the first century, angels were a kind of FedEx core. It was thought that the angels both brought God's word to humanity and brought humanity's word to God.

Imagine the diagram. God up in heaven, humanity down on earth. And it was thought that God mediated his relationship with humanity through angels.

[15 : 37] Angels carried God's messages to humanity and angels carried humanity's messages to God. The author of Hebrews, the preacher, wants people to realize that although that view of the world might in some sense still be true in the coming of Jesus, something changed.

Although angels may still be around and although angels may still be useful to God and humanity. Hebrews 1 14 are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.

Nevertheless, things have changed. Jesus is now the mediator between God and humanity. Jesus is now the one who brings God's word to humanity and brings humanity's word to God.

Jesus is the one who carries God's messages to humanity and who carries humanity's messages to God. Jesus is now the one sufficient mediator between God and humanity.

This is what being the high priest is all about. It's going to be the dominant image of the rest of Hebrews. Jesus, the great high priest.

[16 : 56] The one final sufficient priest surpassing and replacing all other orders of priesthood. Jesus, the high priest, comes from the presence of God and then takes us into the presence of God.

He is the only priest we need. He is the only mediator we need. Thus, the author of Hebrews, right from the beginning, preaches the gospel.

1 4. Jesus has become as much superior to the angels as he has a more superior name than they. Why? Why is Jesus superior to the angels?

Why is Jesus a superior mediator? Why is Jesus more able to serve the role of mediator? Because, and here now we come to the heart of what the preacher is preaching in chapters 1 and 2, and why the two chapters have to be held together.

Jesus is the superior mediator because, unlike angels, Jesus knows both what it is like to be God and what it is like to be human.

[17 : 58] Jesus can mediate God to us because he knows God and he knows what it is like to be God. And Jesus can mediate us to God because he knows us and he knows what it is like to be us.

The Latin word for priest is the word pontifex. Now, what's interesting about that word is pontifex comes from the engineering world.

It's an engineering term. Pontifex, in particular, means bridge builder. A pontifex is a bridge builder. A priest is a bridge builder. A mediator is a bridge builder.

Now, in order to build a bridge, the builder of the bridge has to know both sides of the canyon over which the bridge is going to go, right? Jesus is the great bridge builder because he knows both sides of the canyon between God and humanity.

He knows the divine side because he's divine and he knows the human side because he's human. In the first chapter of Hebrews, the author, the preacher, demonstrates that Jesus is superior to the angels because he's God.

[19 : 13] And in the second chapter, which we'll listen to next week, he demonstrates that Jesus is superior to the angels because he's a man. The man. Now, in Hebrews 1, the author makes a brilliant move.

Instead of just stating the facts like I have just stated them, the author brings God into the picture and has God state the facts about Jesus.

The author of Hebrews quotes a number of significant texts from the Old Testament in which God speaks text, which his readers would have known. And when the author of Hebrews quotes these texts, he quotes them as God speaking to Jesus.

Somehow, the spirit of God who inspired the Old Testament text enables the author of Hebrews to hear in the text the father speaking to his son.

It's brilliant in every sense of the word. So for the next 15 minutes or so. Just listen to the father speak about and to his son.

[20 : 27] Don't worry about grasping at all. Just listen. Hebrews 1 5. To which of the angels did God ever say.

What he says to Jesus. You are my son. Today, I have become your father or literally you are my son.

Today, I have begotten you. We hear the father say something like that at Jesus baptism. When Jesus comes out of the water, the voice from heaven speaks.

You are my son. My beloved with whom I'm well pleased. We hear the father say something like this at Jesus transfiguration. When he is changed. When he glows with the glory of God.

This is my son. Listen to him. And now again, in the sermon to the Hebrews. The father says what he has never said to an angel. And what he has never said to any other would-be mediator.

[21 : 27] You are my son. Today, I have begotten you. It's a theologically loaded declaration. The author of Hebrews.

Here's God saying this to Jesus in Psalm 2. In Psalm 2, God declares that he has set his king on his mountain. In Psalm 2, the rulers of the world.

No longer wanting to acknowledge the sovereignty of God. Are throwing the fetters of God off. But God says that is futile. For he says, I have installed my king on my holy mountain. Then the king responds saying, God said to me, you are my son.

Today, I have begotten you. And goes on to remember God's promise to him that as his inheritance, he will inherit all the nations of the world. Many scholars argue that Psalm 2 was read whenever a new king was installed in the life of Israel.

That may be so. But what is so is that if that psalm was read over a mere human king, everyone realized that no mere human king ever fit the bill.

[22 : 37] So for centuries, the people of God realized that in Psalm 2, God was speaking to a king to come. He was speaking of a son to come who would finally be God's king in the world.

The author of Hebrews hears what the Holy Spirit intends in that text. The author of Hebrews hears God the Father speak about and to his son.

Jesus is the king who inherits the nations of the world because Jesus is the son. You are my son. Begotten.

Today, I have begotten you. Most contemporary translations render that verse as today I have become your father. Okay. But the author is careful to choose a very important word.

Begotten. Which is key for the New Testament understanding of Jesus. And although we do not, in modern English anyway, use this word begotten very much, we need to honor it in God's speech to his son.

[23 : 41] Begotten. Versus made. What we make is not us. What we make may be an expression of us.

A painting, a song, a quilt, or a computer. Such things say something about us, but they are not us. Right? However, what we beget is us in some sense.

Not just an expression of us, but us. Humans make furniture and automobiles, but humans beget babies. Humans beget humans.

So God. So God. God makes all kinds of things. Mountains, seas, giraffes, whales. Brains, brains, hearts, eyes, ears.

But what God makes is not God. An expression of God. Yes. Especially humans. Let us make humans in our image. But we are not God. What God makes is not God.

[24 : 47] But what God begets is God. God. You are my son. I have begotten you. The son is not made.

The son is begotten. The son is therefore not just like God. He is God. Today. Today I have begotten you.

The today is the eternal today of God. Which is why the Christian church in its creeds speaks of Jesus as the eternally begotten son. The creeds are wrestling with that claim first made by a man named Arius.

Arius said that Jesus the son has not existed as the son forever. As Arius put it, there was a time when the son was not. To which people like Athanasius responded, then there is a time when the father was not.

The father. But the father has existed as father from all eternity. And so also the son today eternally forget forever begotten, not made.

[25 : 56] And therefore eternally like the father God. You are my eternally begotten son. Hebrews 1 5 again.

To which of the angels did God ever say what he says to Jesus? I will be his father and he will be my son. The author of Hebrews here.

Here's the father say this in 2 Samuel 7. In that text, God is speaking to the Israelite king David. God's favorite earthly king. And David has expressed his desire to build a beautiful temple for Yahweh as David calls God.

But Yahweh says, no, you David will not build the temple, but your son Solomon will. And then God says, he will build a house for me. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me.

To Samuel 7 14. Now, there is a sense in which Solomon. Did I say Samuel? Solomon. There's a sense in which Solomon lives this son father relationship with Yahweh.

[27 : 00] But as we read the Solomon story, we realize that he does not even come close to what is promised in that text. So, again, the people of God realize that God is speaking beyond David and beyond Solomon and beyond every mere king.

The words spoken to David about Solomon were clearly spoken about someone to come. And the author of Hebrews hears what the Holy Spirit intends in 2 Samuel 7.

The author of Hebrews hears God the Father speak about his only begotten son. I will be his father and he will be my son. And that is the key to the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

He lives his whole earthly career conscious that he is this unique son. Again and again and again we hear him say, Father.

A hundred times he speaks of father and son in the Gospel of John. From the beginning of his earthly life to the end of his earthly life. In the beginning he says to his mother and adoptive father, did you not know I needed to be about my father's business?

[28 : 06] And then at the end on the cross, Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. Again and again we hear Jesus say things like, I only say what I hear my father say. I only do what I hear my father do.

As David Gooding of Ireland puts it, no prophet, priest, poet or king ever spoke of God in such personal way about the father that Jesus did.

This is because no one else can. Jesus is the unique only begotten son of the father. Now the wonder of the gospel is that we who are made are adopted into that same relationship.

But that's another sermon. Hebrews 1.6 When God brings his firstborn, firstborn is a Hebraic way of saying the principal heir.

When God brings his son, who is the heir of all things, into the world, he says, listen, he says, listen, this is what God says. Let all the angels worship him.

[29 : 17] Amazing. God, who is alone, worthy of worship, says about Jesus. Let all the angels worship him.

The author of Hebrews is quoting Psalm 97. In Psalm 97, the psalmist is celebrating the sovereign reign of Yahweh. Yahweh reigns.

Let the earth rejoice. Then let those be ashamed who serve graven images and who boast in idols. And then the psalmist says, worship him, all you gods or all you angels.

Worship Yahweh, not images or idols. But the author of Hebrews hears something more. The author hears what the Holy Spirit intends in that text.

The author hears not only a human being exhorting other human beings to worship Yahweh. The author hears Yahweh exhorting the gods, the idols to worship his son.

[30 : 16] This is truly amazing. For one of the foundational truths of the whole biblical story is that only God is to be worshipped.

You shall have no other gods before me. It's the first of the Ten Commandments. You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only, Jesus says to the devil in the wilderness. When an angel shows the apostle John a vision of the new heavens and the new earth, John falls down at the angel's feet to worship him.

The angel is horrified and he says, don't do that. I too am a creature. I too am a servant. Worship God. And now we hear the Father.

God the Father. Say about Jesus his son. Worship him. Let all the gods, let all the angels worship him.

The Father wants angels and us to give his son what the Father deserves. Worship him. Worship my son. The Father has more to say about and to his son.

[31 : 24] Hebrews 1.8 To which of the angels did God ever say what he says to Jesus? Ready? Your throne.

Oh God. Oh God. The Father says to Jesus. Oh God. Your throne.

Oh God. My goodness. That's why the Father can tell the angels to worship him. Your throne. Oh God. The Father addresses Jesus as God.

Oh God. Yeah. The author of Hebrews is quoting Psalm 45. Psalm 45 is a love song.

A love song between an ideal king and his lover. And right in the middle of the song, verse 6, the psalmist exclaims, your throne. Oh God. Is forever and ever. The psalmist realizes that this ideal king is somehow going to participate with God on his throne.

[32 : 28] He's not addressing the king as God. He would never do that. But unknown to him. He is speaking beyond what he knows. And the author of Hebrews hears.

He hears what the Holy Spirit intends in this text. He hears God addressing his beloved son. Your throne. Oh God. Isn't that amazing?

That's why the author of Hebrews can say in the very beginning of his sermon, verse 3, Jesus is the radiance of God's glory. The exact representation of his being.

The word radiance means shining forth. It is the property of light to shine forth. Light radiates light. It's the property of God to shine forth.

God radiates God. And when God radiates God, that radiation turns out to be Jesus. Oh God. The word exact representation refers to an image stamped on a coin.

[33 : 32] When you look at that image on the coin, you see something of the image of the person who's been stamped on the coin. When you look at Jesus, you see what God is like. You see that God is like Jesus.

When the father looks at Jesus, the father says, Oh God. There's more. Hebrews 110.

To which of the angels did God ever say what he says to Jesus? Ready? In the beginning. Oh Lord.

You laid the foundations of the world. In the beginning. Oh Lord. You. Oh Lord.

You. Oh Lord. The father addresses Jesus. Oh Lord. The author of Hebrews is quoting Psalm 102 this time.

[34 : 32] Now Psalm 102 is a powerful prayer in the face of decay and death. The psalmist cries out. Do not hide your face from me in the day of distress. And in the middle of the prayer, he cries out.

But you. Oh Lord. Abide forever. And then in verse 25. In the beginning. You. Lord. Lay the foundations of the of the earth. You. Oh Lord. Is the cry of Psalm 102.

Oh Lord. You. You remain forever. You remain the same. Oh Lord. Now. The Hebrew for Lord in that text is Yahweh. The sacred name of the God of Israel.

Oh Yahweh. The psalmist loves to call out that name. And the author of Hebrews hears. In the psalmist cry. The father calling out to his son.

Oh Yahweh. Yahweh. Yahweh. Calls out. Oh Yahweh. Yahweh. Calls Jesus. Yahweh. Oh Yahweh. You might know that in the past centuries.

[35 : 38] Yahweh was rendered Jehovah. Oh Jehovah. Mercy me. Jehovah. Calls Jesus. Jehovah. Oh Lord.

Oh Jehovah. Oh Yahweh. You. You laid the foundations of the world. The heavens are the work of your hands. Which is why the author of Hebrews can begin his sermon the way he does in verse 3.

Jesus the son is the one through whom God makes the world. Jesus is the son who upholds all things by his powerful word. Jesus made the world.

Jesus upholds the world. Jesus made you. Jesus upholds you. Jesus made me. Jesus upholds me. And always will. For the father says. You.

Oh Lord. Remain forever. Everything else will change. But you will remain the same. That's why the author of Hebrews can say in 13.8 that famous line.

[36 : 35] Jesus Christ is the same. Yesterday. Today. And forever. The author can say that because the father says it. You. Oh Lord.

Abide. Forever. How is your heart doing? Your brain. Okay. Whoa.

One more word. From the father to his son. Hebrews 1.13. To which of the angels did God ever say. What he says to Jesus.

Sit. At my right hand. Until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. The psalmist is quoting Psalm 110. Psalm 110 is the text of the Old Testament.

Which the New Testament quotes the most. Why? Because it speaks of Jesus as he is right now. Seated at the right hand of God.

[37 : 32] The right hand is the symbol of authority. To sit at the right hand. Is to be invested with the authority of the one on the throne. The father invests his son with his own authority.

Sit. He says. Royals sit. When the job is completed. Sit. He says. Jesus the son. Has finished the crucial work.

He came to do for the father. And for us. And so the author of Hebrews. Ties together chapters 1 and 2. With that great affirmation. 1.3. After he had provided purification for sins.

He sat down at the majesty at high. 2.17. He made atonement for the sins of the people. Sit at my right hand. Says God the father to Jesus.

You finished your work. Sit. My son. Sit. Oh God. Sit. Oh Yahweh. And one day.

[38 : 34] Everything that opposes you and your kingdom. Will lay at your feet. To be continued next Sunday. Let us pray.

Heavenly father.

Thank you. For speaking. And for telling us. Who your son is. What joy.

You must have. When you tell us. Who Jesus of Nazareth is. Will you.

Help us. Know. Jesus. As you know him. Will you help us. Love. Jesus. As you love him.

[39 : 39] And will. You. By your mercy and grace. Make. Our whole life. An offering. Of worship. To your son. Amen. Amen.