

Jesus Speaks, Saves, and is Superior (Hebrews 1:1-14)

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[0 : 00] But it is a joy to be here. Amen. I am so thankful to be able to gather together again.! It's one of those things you don't realize how much you miss something until it's taken away.

And I am incredibly grateful that we're able to gather today. We're starting a brand new series today, going through the book of Hebrews. And on your way in, you probably saw a lot of journals that were outside that have the word Hebrews on there. And so that is for you to grab. Hopefully you're able to grab one on your way in. If you didn't grab one, please grab one on the way out. Hopefully this will be an opportunity for you to be able to follow along as we go through this incredible book.

And then also there's space beside it to take notes. So please feel free to grab one of those on your way out if you have not gotten one already. The book of Hebrews has always been a book that has challenged me in my walk with Christ. It's often a book that gets overlooked in the Bible and there's pressing questions in this that we won't necessarily have an answer to, like authorship who wrote this. It's challenging in different areas to think through some of the theological statements that it's making. In fact, William Barclay says, he says, when we come to read the letter to the Hebrews, we come to read what is for the person of today, the most difficult book in the whole New Testament. It comes with its challenges, but it is a book that is rich in Christological truth. It's a book that tells us so much about who Christ is and what he has done for us.

And the book of Hebrews gives us an extraordinary sense of clarity and understanding about Jesus. As you read through this book, you'll quickly learn that the author is deeply in love with Jesus.

As you read through this book, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that the author has a high view of who Christ is, that is deeply in love with him and is deeply changed by that relationships.

[2 : 08] He thinks that Jesus is amazing. He thinks he's extraordinary. He's wonderful. He's the creator who lays down his life for creation. He is the one and only who is worthy to be praised. The author loves Jesus more than anything. And it is our goal that as we study this wonderful book, that we will fall more and more in love with Jesus as we go through it, that we will truly see that he is better than anything in this world. And so many times, this is what we need to be reminded of. So many times, we just need to be reminded of a truth that we already know. Oftentimes, the Christian walk is not understanding something new for the first time, but it's being reminded over and over again of something that we already know that Jesus is better. Michael Kruger, he knows, he says, we all experience times when we've just have our nose to the grindstone, following Jesus out of duty and obligation instead of delight in how wonderful he is. And let me let you in on a little secret. This is true of pastors as well.

This is true of all of us as our walk with Christ is there are times in our walk that that we find ourselves following Jesus more out of out of habit and obligation than we do of delight. We will all have times that following Jesus is done more out of that habit than anything else. And when you have moments like that, let me encourage you to find comfort in the truth of the gospel, the truth of who Jesus is, the truth that Hebrews reminds us over and over again, that Jesus is better. And so if you ever find yourself feeling this way, as you're reading through God's word, as you're studying scripture, as you're following a reading plan, let me encourage you to take a pause, take a step back, read through Hebrews, at least just the first chapter of Hebrews and realize and understand in a greater sense that Jesus is better. Now I realize that this is is something that's often hard for us to do, right? We like to accomplish things. We like to to read the Bible through in a year. We like to check those boxes and make sure that we're following along those things. But let me encourage you, if you're finding yourself in that time where where you're just doing it out of duty and obligation,

fall in love with Jesus over and over again. Read these words. I'm I'm convinced that as we that sometimes that it would benefit us all to stop seeing reading the Bible as a task to be completed, but see the Bible as a gift that God has given us to be enjoyed. And so many times what we need to see clearly is that Jesus is better in order for us to do that. And this will be the theme and the truth that we continue to come back to over and over again as we work our way through this book. It's a truth that is is vital to our walk with Christ.

We must see Jesus clearly in order to serve him joyfully. We must see him clearly in order to serve him joyfully. I've heard it said that discipline without direction is drudgery. Discipline without direction is drudgery, meaning that that if we're disciplined, but we don't see Jesus for who he is, then then so much of that discipline can become drudgery for us. John Piper famously says, he says, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. And it's my hope and prayer that we may be so satisfied in Jesus that our service to him is life giving to us. It's my hope and prayer that as we read through this, that we may be so satisfied in who Christ is that serving him is life giving to us. And so as we work our way through this book, you'll hear me say oftentimes that the author of Hebrews or the author of Hebrews will say that over and over again. I say this because the truth of the matter is we don't know exactly who wrote this. We know that this book was probably written in the mid-60s and it was probably written during that time. And it's a book that many people have often tried to guess at who wrote it, but it's ultimately we don't know. And however, this uncertainty of who wrote it does not affect our confidence in the fact that this is God's word.

The author tells us in chapter two, he says that the message was declared at first by the Lord and is attested to us by those who heard. People have suggested a number of authors. They say, well, maybe it was Paul, maybe it was Barnabas, maybe even Apollos. And I tend to think that the Lucan authorship argument is a pretty sound argument, convincing argument, but ultimately we don't know.

Even Origen in the first couple hundred years after this book was written says, God only knows who wrote this book. What we do know is that from very early on, it was widely accepted as coming from the apostolic community. Even if it wasn't directly from an apostle, from very early on, it was accepted as scripture. And so that is where we're coming to it today. We're understanding that these words are God's words for us. And so as we begin to see over and over again that Jesus is better, I want to invite you to, if you have a copy of God's word with you, to open with me to Hebrews chapter one. And we're going to read this first chapter together as we begin our study in Hebrews. Hebrews chapter one says this, 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 him. Also, he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

[8 : 33] 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 that he inherited is more excellent than 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 to him a father and he shall be to me a son. And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, let all God's angels worship him. Of the angels, he says, he makes his angels winds and his ministers a flame of fire. But of the son, he says, your throne, oh God, is forever and ever. The scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore, God, your God has anointed you with oil of gladness beyond your companions. And you, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment, like a robe that will, they will roll them up like a garment.

They will be changed. But you are the same and your years will have no end. And to which of the angels has he ever said, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet? Are they not all ministering spirits sent to serve for the sake of those who inherit salvation? And so as we begin this, let's pray and ask God to give us clarity, to give us understanding of his word and clarity and understanding of who he is. Father, thank you so very much.

Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for what your word tells us about him. And so, Lord, I pray that as we work our way through this incredible book, Lord, that you would open our eyes to help us see you more clearly, to trust you more fully, and to give our lives over to you with everything we say

and do.

We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. As we seek to find clarity in this passage, there's three statements that I want us to quickly take a look at this morning. I want us to unpack. To begin with, I want us to clearly see in this passage that Jesus speaks. Jesus speaks. And we see this right out of the gates. It says, 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, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world. Oftentimes, people will try to make the argument that God doesn't speak to us, that he's silent. If God is real, then it sure seems like he doesn't have a lot to say to us. And at the same time, there are many others that will say that God speaks to us through anything and everything.

[11 : 45] Every religion, every spiritual guru, everything is a crystal ball needing interpretation. And there is no one way that God speaks. Rather, he's an open channel, sending all kinds of messages in any number of avenues. Both of these are problematic. Both of these need to be corrected. The truth is, we have a God who does speak. And according to verse 2 here, at the present time, he has spoken fundamentally through Jesus. Michael Kruger notes that the author of Hebrews begins by showing that Christ is the superior revelation of God. In the first three verses, we see that Jesus is the best word from God we can get. He is the fullest, final, ultimate revelation from God. In fact, the revelation of God through the prophets was to pave the way for the coming Messiah. In fact, all the words that God had given through the prophets in the Old Testament, all of those words are paving the way, are making room, are making it available for us to see that Jesus is the fulfillment of everything.

He's the long-awaited Messiah. Tim Keller once famously put it this way. He said, Jesus is the true and better Adam, who passed the test in the garden, and whose obedience is imputed to us. He says, Jesus is the true and better Abel, though innocently slain, has blood that now cries out, not for our condemnation, but for our acquittal. Jesus is the true and better Abraham, who answered the call of God, to leave all the comfortable and familiar, and to go out into the void, not knowing whether he would create a new people of God. Jesus is the true and better Isaac, who was not just offered up by his father on the mount, but was truly sacrificed for us. And when God said to Abraham, now I know you love me because you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love for me.

Now we can look to God, taking his son to the mountain and sacrificing him and say, now we know that you love us because you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love from us.

Jesus is the true and better Jacob, who wrestled and took the blow of justice we deserve. So we, like Jacob, not only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and to discipline us.

Jesus is the true and better Joseph, who at the right hand of the king forgives those who betrayed him and sold him and uses his new power to save them. Jesus is the true and better Moses, who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant. Jesus is the true and better Job, the truly innocent sufferer who intercedes for and saves his stupid friends.

[14 : 44] Jesus is the true and better David, whose victory becomes his people's victory, though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it. Jesus is the true and better Esther, who didn't just risk leaving an earthly palace, but lost the ultimate and heavenly one, who didn't just risk his life, but gave his life to save his people. Jesus is the true and better Jonah, who was cast out into the storm so that we could be brought in. Jesus is the real rock of Moses, the real Passover lamb, innocent, perfect, helpless, slain, so the angel of death will not pass over us. He is the true temple, the true prophet, the true priest, the true king, the true sacrifice, the true lamb, the true light, the true bread. You see, Jesus is all throughout the Old Testament and all of those prophets were paving the way for his coming. He truly is the fulfillment of everything. And so how did God speak long ago? It says that long ago that God spoke.

Well, first we see that God is a God who speaks right from the beginning in creation. It says that God speaks the world into existence. He speaks at Acts and the Lord out of nothing. God speaks and everything is formed.

But it also says here that at many times, in many ways, he spoke to us through the prophets. That is, that God used to speak through intermediaries. Not just anybody could speak for God. You had to be appointed as a prophet inspired by God to speak for him. These chosen individuals were God's mouthpieces for Israel in speaking to his people. The author is getting ready to tell us that Jesus is better than all of this. The author is getting ready to tell us that Jesus is better than this, but

I don't want us to misunderstand what he's saying here. The author is not saying that the old way, the Old Testament is irrelevant or wrong. He's not saying that in any kind of shape or form. The words of Moses, the words of David, the words of Isaiah, the words of Jeremiah, the rest of the Old Testament, these words are inspired. These words are infallible. They are important. They're just incomplete. Think of it like this. They are a play without a final act.

Has anybody in here ever gone to see a play before? Okay, many of us. How about a movie? I mean, I'm going to say, okay, there we go. More of us have seen a movie. And think of it like this. If you go to a play and there's acts in that play and you go through, let's say two out of three acts and you decide to leave, you're missing the final act. You know, there's nothing wrong or untrue about the first two acts, but you're just missing the final act. And so the final act is what brings all of it together. The final act is what helps us to understand the whole. And so when we see the New Testament and God speaking to us this way, we realize that this is the final act. This is the completion of the play here. Kruger reflecting on the Old Testament describes it this way. He says, it is a single coherent story that ends with a cliffhanger, a story that needs an ending.

[18:09] God spoke to his people and the cliffhanger is the promise to send a redeemer for them. When Jesus came, he resolved that cliffhanger. Now we see God's new way of speaking, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. For generations, the Israelites have been eagerly waiting and longing for the last days. That special time when God would intervene in the world and would bring the redemption that he had promised. Well, the last days doesn't tell us how much time we have left, but rather the kind of time that we are living in. To say that we are living in the last days is to say that we live in the time before Jesus returns again. This is an incredible time.

All those promises the Israelites have been waiting for for thousands of years, all of those things that they have been waiting for, all the things that they've been waiting, longing for God to do have now been completed in Christ. One commentator put this way, he says, this is a time not to put our feet up, but to spread the gospel faithfully. We're living in a time not to sit back and relax, but to share these words with a lost and dying world. The message that God has spoken to us in the last days is to us.

It is for us. This message is not just a message for someone somewhere. This message is for us today as well.

Rest assured, we are included in this. The major difference in how God spoke in the past and how he speaks now is how he speaks. In the past, God spoke through intermediaries, but now he has shown up in person. He's shown up in person and speaks. And so what we see here clearly is that Jesus is better than the prophets. But the next statement that I want us to look at and understand from this is that Jesus saves. Jesus speaks, but we also clearly see here that Jesus saves. Verse 3 says, 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.

Now, there is so much that we could be said about this passage, and we're going to hit on some of that a little bit later. But honestly, we could have spent several weeks just looking at the first three verses of this. Now, I know I would have had an uprising if we spent that much time going over just three verses. But there's so much rich theological truth that we find in this passage.

[20:55] There's so much that could be said here, and we're going to focus on some of that here in just a moment. But but for the time being, let's look at the end of verse three. It says, after making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. I want you to put yourself in the shoes of those first century Jewish Christians that would have heard these words.

what this is saying is that Jesus has achieved what all of Israel have been longing for throughout the generations, the real, full and final forgiveness of sins. Their understanding that Jesus brings the real, full and final forgiveness of sins. This is all the more amazing in light of all the things that were just declared about Jesus, that he is the ruler of the world, the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of God's nature. This is the one that we have offended. And now he's bringing salvation to us. But the good news doesn't stop here. It's really easy for us to miss this. But the text says that he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. In the Old Testament, while the priests were doing their work, making sacrifices for the sins of the people, they never sat down. They never sat down. In fact, there wasn't a chair for them. Why? Why wasn't there a chair for them? Because their work was never complete. Their work was never done. They were constantly having to make sacrifices for the people. Peter O'Brien notes, he says, that Christ sat down as

priest after his work of purification for sins shows that his work was finished. Do you know what the word finish means?

It means done. It means it's complete. It means it means it's finished. It means there's nothing left to do. If something is finished, then it means that there's nothing you and I can do to add to it or to take away from it. It's complete. It's done. And if you're saved, then your sins, past, present, and future are paid for by Christ. There's nothing that you can do to make God love you anymore. There's nothing you can do to make God love you any less. Because if you could do something to make God love you more, then that would mean there's something you can add to what Christ said is finished, is complete.

And if there was something that you could do to take away from what Christ has done for you, then it would mean that it wasn't finished. It wasn't complete. It wasn't accomplished. This is the part of the good news that makes Romans 8 come alive when we read it. This is the part that just that makes it come alive when we read it. When it says, what then shall we say in all these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us, how will he not also graciously give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? [24 : 01] It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that was raised. Who is at the right hand? Who indeed is interceding for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword as it is written? For your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things that come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God and Christ Jesus our Lord. Because our great and glorious high priest is seated at the right hand of God, it means that his work is done and it means there's nothing that can take us away from God. It means there's nothing that can separate us from him. It means the power that sin had over our lives is powerless now. It means that God loves us. It means that work is complete. And it is what gives us the boldness to say that for I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And so the final statement that I want to draw our attention to is this, that Jesus is superior. Jesus is superior. Jesus speaks, Jesus saves, and Jesus is superior. Having become as much superior to the angels as the name he inherited is more excellent than theirs.

You see, for the remainder of the chapter, the author is making the case that Jesus is superior to the angels. Kruger notes, he says, in the context in which this letter was originally written, the Jewish audiences were also chasing around after other things, being more impressed by them than by Jesus. And today we're doing the same thing. We're trying to chase around all kinds of things. We're impressed with job security. We're impressed with money. We're impressed with houses and cars and any number of things. And one of the things that the early church was particularly impressed with was angels. Al Mohler notes, he says, many people in Israel considered angels to be both God's messenger and Israel's protectors. Many Jews looked to angels as those who would come as the army of God to rescue and vindicate the nation. And so angels were not seen as little, little naked babies flying around with wings that a lot of times we see them as today or depicted in artwork. That's not how these angels would have been seen. That's not how they would have been pictured. They would have been pictured as strong. They would have been pictured as terrifying. In fact, when you look through the Bible, almost every time that an angel appears on the scene, you know what the first words out of the angel's mouth is? Don't be afraid.

Evidently, there was something terrifying and strong and powerful about the angels when they were coming on the scene. And these people were looking to them as a source of hope and salvation. Some of the literature at the time also attest to the rise of the notion of personal angels or guardian angels.

There was a real fascination with angels that the author was clearly wanting to communicate that Jesus is far better than them. Jesus is far superior to this. Now, we don't typically put the same emphasis on angels today, but the point the author is making for us is this. He's saying, don't be so easily impressed with the things of this world, because once you see Jesus in his glory, the things of this world pale in comparison. They pale in comparison to who Jesus is. He is superior to all things.

You know, have you ever noticed that some people are really easy to impress? Some people, they just get impressed with the next shiny thing that's in front of them. When my kids were growing up, they were easily impressed. In fact, they thought I was the greatest at any number of things. They thought that daddy could impress them. He could just throw them up in the air.

[28 : 45] He could do the coolest magic tricks. At the time, I was the best athlete they had ever seen. They were impressed with everything. Now, nothing impresses them. Nothing. Well, except for a short sermon that still impresses Jacob. And well, he's not impressed today. But most people are looking at the world and trying to be impressed. Most people are looking out of the world and they're trying to be impressed. When we are younger, everything impresses us. But as we get older, we require bigger things to impress. But the book of Hebrews tells us not to be so easily impressed with this world. When we begin to see Jesus in his fullness, we realize what we have been focused on is nothing compared to him.

And so as we close right here, I want us to pause for just a moment and think about these first three verses. Look back at those first three verses. Long ago and 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 he also 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. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. It truly is amazing to think about the statements made about Christ in these verses. Numerous commentators note the theological density of these first three verses. How so much is said about Christ in such a short period of space here. And I encourage you this week, take some time, go back and read and reread and reread these first few verses of Hebrews. Reflect on what we are told about who Christ is. You see, in just a few words, we're reminded of a number of things. In just a few words, we're reminded that Christ is the Son of God.

We're reminded that Christ is the revelation of God. That he is the fulfillment of God's revelation in the Old Testament. Where he's the heir of all things. He is the agent of creation. Now I realize we're jumping into some deep waters here, but what is revealed here as well as other places in scripture is that the Father through the Son accomplished creation and continues to sustain it. We're told here that he is the radiance of God's glory. He is the expression of God's nature. He is the preserver of all creation. He is the purifier of God's people. He is the mediator for God's people. We are told very clearly that Jesus is the Son of God. The long awaited Messiah who came to seek and save the lost.

And so whatever you're looking to, to find fulfillment, whatever you're looking to, to find purpose, to satisfaction, salvation, Jesus is better. Let me say it another way. Jesus is not the only, this is not only a better way. Jesus is the only way. He's the only way to the Father. And so maybe you're here today and for the first time you're seeing that Jesus is better. And Jesus is the only way to the Father. And whatever it is that you've been giving your life to, to try to find salvation, you're realizing very clearly that Jesus is the only way. And maybe today you need to give your life to him. Maybe you've spent however many years trying to be impressed by things of this world, by spending all of your time, your resources, your energy, your efforts on things of this world, trying to get more, to impress yourself, to impress others, to just trying to be so focused on things of this world. And maybe today's the day that you need to refocus and understand that Jesus is superior to everything. There's nothing in this life that Jesus isn't better than. You could add up everything in this world and still it would pale in comparison to who Jesus is. And so let me encourage you today, as we look, as we begin to study the book of

Hebrews, give your life to better. Give your life to that which is superior. Give your life to Jesus.

[33 : 31] Father, thank you so very much for who you are. Lord, we thank you that we begin to get a glimpse of who you are here in these verses. Lord, we begin to just get a small snippet of who you are. And so, Lord, I pray that as we see just that small part of who you are, Lord, that it would reveal to us that you are so much greater than anything we could ever imagine. And so, Lord, I pray that you be with us today. Help us to give our life to things that matter. Help us give our life to you. Help us to focus our attention, everything that we have, on glorifying your name because you and you alone are worthy. We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm going to invite you to stand. We're going to sing a song of invitation here. If God is speaking to you this morning, won't you respond as we stand together and sing? How deep the Father's love for us. How blessed beyond all measure that He should give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure. How gray the pain of searing loss.

The Father turns His face away as wounds which mar the chosen one, bring many sons to glory. Behold the man upon the cross, I sit upon His shoulders.

Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice, call out among the scoffers. It was my sin that held Him there until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life.

I know that it is finished. How wonderful it is to know that it is finished. That when Jesus says it's done, it's finished, it's accomplished, He means it's done.

There's nothing that we can do to add to our salvation. There's nothing we can do to take away from it. And praise God, there's not because if it was up to us, we would fail over and over again. But Jesus says it's accomplished.

It's finished. It's done. And that is what we can rest in. And so it's my prayer that as we leave here today, as we begin to go to our Sunday school classes, as we begin to step out into the mission field that God has called us to be at this point in our lives, that we would go out with that confidence of knowing that we were bought and paid for with a price, and there's nothing that can take us away from the Father. And let us live in light of that each and every day.

[36 : 35] Live in light of knowing that Jesus is better. He is far more worthy than anything in this life. Lord, thank You so very much for that hope, for that promise that we have, that You have accomplished what we couldn't accomplish, the full final forgiveness of our sins.

And so Lord, help us to live in light of that each and every day. We ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.