

The Medium is the Message

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[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads and pray as we stand. Our Father, we ask tonight for the gift of spiritual sight, that we would see Jesus Christ, God of God.

And we ask that seeing Him, we may receive and believe and become Your children completely. And we ask this in His name. Amen.

Amen. Well, if you would like to follow along, I'm going to look at this passage that was just read on page 3.

So if you could have that available, that would be terrific. And when I was a young teenager in Australia, in my early teens, I knew three famous Canadians.

Pierre Trudeau, Marshall McLuhan, and Dudley Durite. And from Dudley Durite, I learned that the Mounties always get their man, although snidely whiplash always seemed to be able to get away from things.

[1 : 20] We knew Pierre Trudeau, despite the booze. He came to us, he was the first Canadian Prime Minister to come to Australia, and he had a sort of a rock star entry into Australia.

But of the three, it was Marshall McLuhan's work on media that had the most influence in Australia. I don't know if he's known so well now, but he was an enormously creative man, a seminal thinker, who turned thinking on communication on its head, and you know his famous aphorism phrase, the medium is the message.

Ours more than just a sound bite, it was central to his life and work. The basic idea is that the message and the medium of the message are not disconnected.

They are joined together in a relationship in such a way that the very medium, the form of the medium, embeds itself in the message.

The medium influences the message itself. The medium is the message. And I couldn't help thinking of McLuhan this week as I was looking at this passage which is set for Christians all over the world on Christmas Eve.

[2 : 41] It is one of the most majestic and mind-blowing depictions of Jesus Christ ever written. It's incredibly beautiful in the Greek.

It's all one sentence. And explains Christmas in terms of the medium and the message. Because what God wants to communicate to us, with us, is not a piece of information.

It's not a sound bite that you could Twitter. It's something way more important and significant. He wants to communicate his very self.

And so you see, the coming of the Son of God into the world is the perfect medium for the perfect message. That's why the text begins with God speaking.

Let me just read the first line in a bit. Long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

[3 : 42] But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God is a speaking God.

And the writer says, he's spoken to us in two ways. In the past, in the Old Testament, through all sorts of prophets, in all sorts of ways. But now in these last days, by his Son, and they are the last days, because the Son is the final word on God.

In other words, if you take the whole ministry of Jesus, his birth, his life, his compassion, his miracles, his power, his death, his resurrection, it's all summed up in this one thing, God has spoken to us by his Son.

And that means that God is not a mathematical puzzle that we reach through intellectual reasoning. He's not a vague force that you experience when things are spooky.

He's a person. And he relates to us by speaking and we relate to him by listening. It's one of the reasons why every gathering we have here in this building, we always read from the Bible.

[4 : 55] That's why the pulpit is put in this building. And the job of the person in the pulpit is not to give you my opinion or to be witty, but as to tell you what God has said.

I would never have the nerve to stand up and tell you my opinion unless God had spoken. I mean, if God has not spoken, we may as well go home. We really are wasting our time.

If God had not spoken, we wouldn't know anything about God. Your opinion, my opinion, the third person's opinion would be of equal value. We would never know whether God was an old grandfather in the sky.

We'd never know whether he was good or evil or a mixture. We wouldn't know whether he was blue or green or evil or weak or capricious or a life force or you wouldn't know if he was a he or a she or an it or a whole gaggle of gods or even whether he was alive or dead.

But the writer says not only can God speak, not only has he spoken, but what he has said is so important that the only medium adequate for him to speak it is his only son.

[6 : 11] You think about that for a moment. Since God has truly spoken, it makes him both vulnerable and unsafe. Let me put it to you this way.

If you have a God who cannot speak or hasn't spoken or you've got no record of it, that God can never challenge what you think or what you do.

That God's never going to tell you something you disagree with. He's never going to say something that will offend you. That God is harmless, safe, tame and useless because that God has no power to change you.

In the same way, if your God cannot speak, he can never make himself truly vulnerable to you because it's when we speak we give ourselves away, don't we?

And that's what God has done. We speak with one another, we reveal our true selves to each other and when we make, when we reveal ourselves to each other, we make ourselves vulnerable to being misunderstood, to being ignored, despised, rejected.

[7 : 20] See, that's what the vulnerability in Bethlehem is about. It's not about babies and animals. I mean, that's nice, you know, but the vulnerability in Bethlehem is not just any human like you and me.

It's an infinite vulnerability of God taking on human flesh and it leads to his death on the cross. So you see, God is not just passing information.

He's coming to us humbly, personally, graciously. He's literally giving himself away. So I want to just ask two questions of this passage.

What is the medium and what is the message? What is the medium? Well, if you look at the very last sentence in the passage, the writer mentions angels and he says, Jesus is much superior to angels in comparison.

And if you go home with the Bible and you read the rest of the chapter in Hebrews 1, he speaks about angels repeatedly Why? Because the word angel was a media word in the ancient world.

[8 : 32] In fact, it was the media word. Angel literally means messenger and the message was the angalia, angel and angalia. The primary mode of communication in the Roman Empire was to send an angelos with an angalia.

And throughout the Old Testament, God used angels as his messengers to bring messages to people. And I never tire of saying this, but the angels in the Bible are not like the angels on the Christmas card.

They're not soft, fluffy, sentimental, sugary, cuddly toys. They were terrifying. They would appear with a flaming sword with incredible power.

And what's the first thing they'll always say to people? Do not be afraid. And I think that's one of the reasons why the angel appearances cluster around the birth of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus. Because, you see, when God sent his only son into the world at the first Christmas, the medium he uses for this message is so utterly remarkable that all heaven, and even the best communicators in heaven, the angels themselves, have never seen anything like this happen since creation.

[9 : 46] They cannot help themselves. They break open. They want a courtside seat. Not just because the message is so important, but the messenger, the medium, so precious.

And while they are terrifying individually as angels, a whole army of them are nothing next to the sun. They are nothing next to that baby lying in the manger.

You listen to how Jesus is described. Look down in the second line about a third of the way along. Jesus was appointed, whom God appointed, the heir of all things, through whom also he created

the world, and at the end of the next line, and Jesus upholds the universe by the word of his power. If you go back to the beginning of space and time, it is Jesus who is the agent of creation. It's through Jesus whom God created the world, and the world here is not just the physical universe, but that includes time and eternity.

As we read from the gospel, all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. Everything we have, everything we are, comes from Christ, Christ, Jesus, and belongs to him.

[11 : 12] And if we go to the end of the history, you find Jesus is the heir of all things, all things, all the universe, all the world, and everything in it belong to him.

And to say he is the heir means that he is the purpose, he is the goal, he is the reason for which God made everything through him. It's astounding.

He's the key to the universe, he's the key to life. And in the middle we read that Jesus upholds the universe by the word of his power.

The universe was not just wound up like a clock and set running. It requires the active, sustaining word of Jesus Christ to maintain in its being.

This is not like Atlas who's carrying the world on his shoulders. It is literally that Jesus keeps the planets in orbit. He holds the molecules of your body together. The breath that's in your lungs belongs to him and is sustained by him.

[12 : 12] And if Christ were to stop deliberately sustaining you by his powerful word for a second, you and I, we would cease to exist. This is what the passage is saying. Or as it says elsewhere in the New Testament, by him all things were created, there's by Jesus, things in heaven and things on earth, visible and invisible, all things were created by him and for him.

He is before all things and in him all things hold together. It's completely mind-boggling, isn't it? I mean, I can't begin to understand it really.

But compared to the universe, you and I, we're dust, not worth very much at all. And if we draw a line through reality and we put on one side creation, everything that's made, and on the other side creator, divinity, and God, which side of the line are you and I on?

We're on the creation side. But the writer says that Jesus Christ is on this side. And if that's not enough, the little phrase that I skipped in verse 3 says, he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, the glory of God, the shining out of God's beauty and majesty and perfection.

Jesus is the only way that God can make himself known in this way because in itself, in himself, God's glory is way too much beauty for us.

[13 : 51] As we are, the fire of his loveliness and his kindness and his righteousness would not just dazzle us and blind us, it would consume us.

That is why the Son has to be the medium. That's why he became man. It's why we've gathered here tonight. In Jesus Christ we can now not just see, but we receive the glory of God in a way that doesn't just overwhelm us, but leads to life and joy and peace.

In Jesus Christ, God literally gives himself away. And I think that's one of the reasons why in the gospel narratives the birth of Jesus is covered with glory, glory, glory.

Jesus is the exact embodiment in human flesh of God. 100% human, 100% God. It's why if you want to see what God is like, you look at Jesus.

If you want to know what God is like, you look at Jesus. If you want to love God, you love Jesus. One of his disciples once said to Jesus, Lord, show us the Father and we'll be satisfied.

[15 : 01] And Jesus said to him, have I been with you so long and you don't know me? Philip, he who has seen me has seen the Father. So Jesus is the medium for God's word.

And when we listen to Jesus Christ, we listen to God. God. And when we worship Jesus, we worship God. And when we honor him and we love him and we know him, we know God.

That is why God chose Jesus as the medium for us. Secondly, and very briefly then, what's the message? Second last line, about three or four words in.

I have to tell you a story before I read this. I heard a wonderful story this week about cuteness.

A guy went to his door and there were two young girls who lived in his neighborhood selling pot plants for five dollars each. And so he bought four of them and gave them twenty dollars because they were so irresistibly cute.

[16 : 11] And he took them out to the backyard and discovered that the girls had dug up his own plants and were selling them back to him. I tell you that story because I think that's a great picture of the way we treat Christ.

If Christ has made us and owns us and owns the world, it all belongs to him in the first place. Okay, what's the message? After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

This is an astounding thing to say and we only have time just to touch on it briefly. It's speaking about the death of Jesus on the cross. The medium has to become the mediator for us to know the message.

Jesus brings purification and purification is an ecology word. We're more and more aware, aren't we, of the damage that we have inflicted on ourselves and pollution and pesticides and toxic chemicals and deforestation and greenhouse gas and consumption.

The World Health Organization estimated last year that 25% of deaths in developing countries came about because of pollution. Some other organizations put higher figures on it.

[17 : 29] And it's an increasingly unavoidable major factor for all of us. The purification of water, the purification of atmosphere, the environment, is taking precedence in a lot of political dialogue.

But there's another problem in the universe that needs cleansing. It's not a physical contamination. It's the spiritual contamination of sin. The Bible says that our lives are polluted and toxic with this thing called sin.

When God created us, he created us to share his glory. We were made for glory. We traded his glory for all sorts of things, good things, careers and respect of others and attractiveness.

But when we treasure anything above the glory of God, it chokes our spirit, it contaminates our true selves, and so we become deaf to God's speaking. At its root, sin is simply not listening to God's word.

It's rejecting what God says, or even worse, ignoring it. It's preferring other things above Jesus. It's not having Christ and his glory as the most precious thing to us.

[18 : 48] It's not treating him as though he's the source and sustainer and goal of life. It's not living a life as if Jesus is God's final word. See, the Bible says Jesus is the key to life.

You may say, well, he's not the key to my life. That would only mean that you are deaf to him or blind to him. Since Christ is the air and since God will give all things to him, God is utterly committed to giving Jesus Christ not a broken down, clapped out old world, not a world where the people he created are too busy consuming to have any time for him, but a new heaven and a new earth, cleansed of every contaminant.

This is the message, but you will not hear God speaking unless God purifies your sins. And when you begin to hear his voice, he points us straight away to his son who purifies us.

That's why we're here. The God of the Bible is not hiding. He speaks so that we will know him and receive him and enter into that eternal friendship with him and participate in his glory.

And I think one of the problems is that when you live in pollution for long enough, you begin to think it's normal and even enjoy it. The shock of the birth at Bethlehem opens the universe to the glory of God and to true purity.

[20 : 19] And the test of our own level of toxicity is how attentive we are to his word. The reason Jesus took on flesh at that first Christmas was to purify, to take away everything hazardous to us, to stand in our place, to bring cleansing to us, become the mediator, the message for God.

His speaking and his saving, they go together. His communicating and his cleansing, they go together. His revelation and his redemption, they go together. And I discovered this week, something I didn't know, that at the end of his life, Marshall McLuhan's wife recorded a conversation with him.

And this is what McLuhan said. Christ, just keep listening, Christ came to demonstrate God's love for man and to call all men to himself through himself as mediator, as God's medium.

And in so doing, he became the proclamation of his church, the message of God to man, God's medium and God's message. And you know what he had inscribed on his tombstone?

The words of Jesus, the truth shall make you free. And I think he was very aware of the most wonderful medium and the most perfect and wonderful message, the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

[21 : 50] And it would be a tragedy if we just admired Jesus and didn't listen to him. Christmas gives us the opportunity to see God in the flesh, to be cleansed by him and to receive his glory.

Because both the medium and the message say to us, you don't need to be cut off from God. He's willing to have us in his presence, willing to bring us into his family.

There's no need to be far away and on your own. Jesus Christ, he's not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. Listen to him. And if we were allowed to see into heaven right now, we would see a man sitting at God's right hand, Jesus Christ.

And he sits because he's done all that he needs to do. And he's there for us on our behalf. until God gives him all things as his inheritance.

Let us pray. Our Father, the things that we have been thinking about are too vast for us.

[23 : 03] We praise you for your glory and for the Lord Jesus Christ, our medium and our message. message. We ask tonight that our hearts might be open and our eyes that we might see and hear and love and be loved and know him and know your glory.

Not just now, but for all eternity. And we ask this in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.