

Images Of The Son

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[0 : 00] Well, it's a great delight to see you all and to share with you. I don't know whether to be glad or sorry we're finished with the hungry and the thirsty and the stranger and the sick and the prisoner and whoever else it was.

But I got a lot out of it. I think I'd be ready to talk about it now if somebody asked me. You were just recently confronted by, just to show you, this is...

If I'd ask you if you'd seen one of those today, what would you say?

Well, I wouldn't have known. It says Hendiatus. You've actually all seen one. It's in the scriptures. I just found this out of a commentary and I couldn't resist to share it with you.

If you look at the passage, the Hendiatus is in the first line. And it's when it says, many and various.

[1 : 17] And Hendiatus apparently is a way of using two words to say the same thing. But the fact of the matter is that when they're talking about this passage, this one that's been read for us this morning, the suggestion is that it isn't that, but that it really tries to denote the fragmentary way in which God has spoken to us.

You know, that there was a prophet Jeremiah who went with the people through the fall of Jerusalem and told them what was coming and they didn't believe him.

And then there was the prophet Ezekiel. And he went into captivity with the people of God and told them the trouble they were in and how they were to cope with it.

And then there was Jonah who went to the city of Nineveh to tell them the good news. Or the bad news about who they were. And to find out what the good news might be.

There was the prophet Isaiah who was the royal courtier and who spoke to the highest people in the land to try and interpret to them the events of their day.

[2 : 36] Those were what the book of Hebrews says, the fragmentary or many and various ways in which God spoke.

To our fathers, that is, our ancestors, by the prophets. So that that was what they depended on was a word.

You remember when you get to Samuel, there was no open vision. There was no word from the Lord to interpret the events of the day. And when you get to Amos, he talks about people having clean teeth because they were so hungry for the word of God.

And there wasn't any. And their clean teeth was because they were starving for some word from God. So that in various times and in various places in history, there has been a prophet who spoke for God.

God spoke through that prophet. Now, most of us are scouring the media these days to see if there is a prophetic word that can make sense of the dilemma of our world today.

[3 : 52] And I want you to know I have it for you today. Your cynicism is representative of the universal reality of humankind.

You know, that is there a word from God for our day in the midst of the confusion in which we find ourselves and in which we are caught? How do we interpret what's happening?

And the fact that God has spoken or that, you know, the passage that we're reading says that God spoke of old to our fathers. Well, why does he not say something to us is the fundamental problem.

I think it's the fundamental problem because we have a lot of questions that if anybody stood up and did say this is what God is saying in our day, they would be laughed out of court because we're not even sure there is a God who is any more than the subjective experience of the private individual.

And if you happen to know a God whom you have created in your own subjective experience, well and good, and I will respect that, but don't try and impose him on anybody else.

[5 : 12] If there is a God, we ask the question in our society, does he speak? And the only conclusion you could come to is, yes, he does.

He tells you exactly what you want to hear. And, you know, if it's a holy war that you want to hear, he says it, you know.

If it's the cause of truth and righteousness that you want to hear, he says it. If it's permission to depart from some kind of moral rectitude, he says it.

You know, it's the God who says what we want to hear, and we call him God to give him the authority so that we can obey him without any qualm of conscience. In our world, we have come to a place where if people ask the question, is there any meaning in what's happening in our world today, a lot of people would say, no, there is no meaning.

There is only the necessity of endurance so that suicide in any way that you can get out of it is great.

[6 : 28] I heard something yesterday which shook me to my boots. I heard of somebody who was sick and in hospital, and the family went to them and said, no, we don't want you to use any heroic interventions to save the life of this patient.

You know, that's a noble thing to do. But the patient wasn't that sick. Well, yeah, that's all very noble.

But we get into trouble because life has lost meaning for us, and we were looking for a way out. If people were asked, is there any hope for our world, our world by and large says no.

And the difficulty is... Goodness gracious, it's all been done for me. The difficulty is...

I don't even know what it is. Well, let's make something of it. Here's that. This is a...

[7 : 53] This is a... What do we call it? Yeah, this is a television camera. Let's see.

And... If you are in front of the television camera, you're big and important. I was on TV last night, you might say.

And it makes me something big and important. If, on the other hand, you're just watching television, what happens to you is you get smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller.

Like I go and watch the National at 10 o'clock at night. And I go in there six feet tall and I come out about that high and sneak up the stairs and hope that nobody sees me because...

Or steps on me even. I... Because you're so totally diminished by the meaninglessness and powerlessness and irrelevance of your own life in the world.

[8 : 54] It doesn't... You know, it's very frustrating. And I think that's partly because... Because God isn't speaking.

When God speaks to you, suddenly you become 10 feet tall. And that's really why you need to read the scriptures.

Because otherwise you will be just reduced right out of any significance at all to your life. But when you read the scriptures, you suddenly find that in the sight of him who is the creator of the world, your life has eternal meaning.

And that's, you know, that's what we're really struggling for. As you come down to the city every day, the possibility for you being reduced to zilch is very strong.

And you know that as a kind of prevailing anxiety and fear that could take over in anybody's life, that that could happen. And you very much need, we all need the word of God to restore us to some sense of stature as those who are, even just in our basic humanity, people who have eternal significance in the mind, heart, and purpose of God.

[10 : 18] So you get this problem here when it says, in many and various ways, God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets.

We desperately need some word from God. Something that gives meaning to our lives. Something from outside of ourselves.

We can't go on pumping up our own ego all day. You can't do it year after year. You know, it just does nothing happens.

You can't keep at it. We need some word of God that gives meaning to our lives. And if we haven't got a God, except one of our own imagination and of our own subjective consciousness, then that's not, that's just pumping up our own ego.

That doesn't mean anything. And if there is no truth and there is no meaning, one of the ways that God has spoken of old is a lot of people see God speaking in nature.

[11 : 23] But not many people know what he's saying, you know, because human beings, as many of the great literary people of our world have pointed out, human beings seem to be a contradiction of the whole order and beauty and rhythm of nature.

The only thing at variance with it all is human beings. God speaks through the moral law.

And yet, we've come to a place where we're not even sure if there is such a thing as morality. You know, that wonderful illustration, which I've used many times, about the Boy Scout standing on the corner with an elderly lady who's trying to get to the other side.

And in our enlightened 20th century, we have made a great discovery. One thing the Boy Scout can do is to say to the lady, may I help you across the street?

And in so doing, fulfill the Scout law, so that he will take her across the street. The other thing, which we've discovered in the 20th century, is that he could also take from his pocket a short piece of lead pipe, hit her over the head, put her out of her misery, and in fact may have done more for her by doing that than if you'd taken her across the street.

[12 : 46] Because her life wasn't worth much anyway. And he relieved her of it. Now, that's one of the great insights of the 20th century. You know, life is sufficiently meaningless that to do one or the other, one of them is still, thankfully, against social convention.

We don't take out lead pipes and hit people over the head on the street corner. But in the absolute world in which we live, it probably wouldn't make much difference. And so, desperately, what needs to happen is that God needs to speak.

And what the epistle says here, this first chapter of Hebrews, is that in many and various fragmentary ways, God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets.

And the whole of civilization is totally indebted to the Jewish people for having preserved those writings.

These are the oracles of God. The record of God speaking to at certain events in history and interpreting those events to the people of those times through the prophets.

[13 : 57] And that is probably one of the greatest heritages of our, if it isn't the greatest, I don't know what to do with superlatives, but you get caught in them anyway.

But the significance of this is way beyond measure. We have the record of God speaking to the fathers by the prophets. And that undergirds much of our civilization.

So God speaks through the prophets. He speaks through nature. He speaks through reason. He speaks through the moral law. All those things happen.

But somehow it's inadequate. The first line means that God has spoken in a fragmentary way. And what we need him to do is we need him to say something to us which is, in a sense, a finished way. Something which is a complete revelation of himself. And that's what it goes on to say. That in these last days, and what they mean by the last days in the New Testament is what one commentator calls the days following the Christ event.

[15 : 10] The Christ event is Jesus coming into the world, being born, being taught, being teaching, being tried, dying on the cross, and being raised again. That is the event of history.

And since that event, we talk about the last days. In these last days, in these end time days, he has spoken unto us by a son.

So that what happens is that we get a declaration of who God is in word and in event.

But the difficulty for our world is, is this person in whom and through whom God has spoken, the person of Jesus Christ.

Now, it used to be, when we lived in the isolation of our own culture, when we lived within the religion of our own land, when we lived in the kind of classical world, as we imagine it to have been, where everybody knew who God was and everybody knew how he had spoken and there was no question about it.

[16 : 28] But now we live in a very different world. We live in a world of Muslims and Hindus and Confucianists and Buddhists and Christians and agnostics and atheists and all sorts of other people.

And so what the Christian church has tried to do in this event is to try and modify the person of Jesus Christ so that he can be held up before such a world.

You know, that this Christ has to be a Christ who is acceptable to the Hindu, acceptable to the Buddhist, acceptable to the Muslim, and acceptable to the humanist, acceptable to everybody.

And so what we've tried to do is to modify the person of Jesus Christ so he is acceptable. And we have, in the process of doing that, completely lost sight of who Jesus Christ is.

You know, that may happen to us, that, you know, when you're in business, you're a different person than when you're at home. But it's inconceivable that it could happen to Jesus Christ.

[17 : 40] And the difficulty that we run into is that there are certainly aspects of Jesus which are acceptable to everybody in the world. His love, some of his teaching, his kindness, his suffering.

Lots of things about Jesus are attractive to a lot of the people in the world. But the fundamental reality of who he is is not acceptable.

And that's where we're, and what we're trying to do is, the difficulty we have is that our culture, the society we live in, does not take Jesus Christ for who he is.

We try and make him into somebody who is acceptable to the pluralistic society in which we live, as though somehow he was changed because he's now in a different context.

And therefore, he needs to be a different person. Well, I think this is why the Christian church at the moment seems to be hanging on by its fingernails to a society that has almost totally rejected it insofar as it is unwilling to compromise on the person of Jesus Christ.

[19 : 02] But if you are within the Christian church and within the community of faith, you recognize that there is the Jesus Christ of the New Testament and no other.

There isn't any other Jesus Christ. You can't modify him or change him or adapt him. He belongs to history. He doesn't belong to the spiritual imagination of thousands upon thousands of people over countless generations.

He belongs to history. The only way we know him is through the apostolic teaching. The apostolic teaching is the teaching of that community of people who shared his earthly life with him and bore witness to what he taught and what he did and recorded his words for us in the Gospels and recorded the understanding of himself that he gave by his teaching to those who were his companions.

There is no other Jesus Christ. And if he is unacceptable to our society because of the nature of our society, then we as Christians are forced to say, well, what am I going to do?

And I think we don't know what to do. You know, how do we accommodate a society which rejects Jesus Christ? Now, there probably is a profound sense which historians, like some of you no doubt are, could tell us that this has always been the case.

[20 : 45] There has always been a profound offense to people's sensibilities in terms of the New Testament picture of Jesus Christ.

And many of the religions of the world are, in a sense, created by offense, the offense of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When the Christian missionaries went into India, there was a profound revival in the old religions. Why?

Because they were not prepared to accept the person of Jesus Christ. There had to be an alternative. And this created a revival of the ancient religions because of him.

And one of the most provocative realities in your personal life is if you were to encounter the person of Jesus Christ as you can meet him in the New Testament, something has to change.

[21 : 52] You have to diminish him so you can cope with him or else diminish yourself so as to make room for him in your life.

And that's why, you see, when the epistles of the Hebrews starts out with these brave words, it says, in many and various ways, God spoke unto our fathers by the prophets, and in these last days, he has spoken unto us in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

God, that was a mistake. Being who you are, you shouldn't have spoken that way. Or, somehow, we have to do it.

And yet, this is what it says. That's how he did speak. He spoke by a son whom he has appointed the heir of all things. Now, what I, and I just want to outline this for you so you can see it and you can worry about it a good deal, I hope.

So, to the extent that you don't get any work done this afternoon, if you want. I'll give you permission. Then, what happens, you see, is God, the eternal God, becomes man in the person of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 13] In the person of Jesus Christ, he represents God saying to the whole of history, this is what humanity is above.

You don't want to know what it means to be a person. Look at Jesus Christ. That's what it means to be a person. And as a person, his business was to hear God speak.

To live for the fundamental reason of hearing God communicate. He wanted to hear what God had to say. He wanted to obey what God had to say.

And that's why it speaks again in his epistle to the Hebrews that Jesus recognized that his business was in the flesh, in the human body that he had been given, was to hear and obey God.

And by hearing and obeying God to show people what it means to be a human being. One who hears and obeys God. And so he listened and he obeyed and he obeyed even unto death.

[24 : 27] His obedience was unacceptable to his generation just as he is unacceptable to ours. his obedience to the Father.

You know, because the reaction of us in our sinful, rebellious humanity is that that cannot be what God is saying. And yet, you've got to go to the record yourself and see whether, in fact, the gospel isn't saying this is what God is saying to us.

He's saying it. Now, whenever God spoke in times past by the prophets, he spoke, as I said, the prophets interpreted the event.

It wasn't just that they spoke in a kind of spiritual trance, they spoke in terms of the history in which they were living. When Christ comes to speak, to be the means of speaking, God speaking to us, there is what he teaches and there is the event of his life, trial, death on the cross and resurrection. That's the event. So you have to hear what he says in order to understand the event. The two things go together. And the whole thing is summarized in terms of God spake unto us by Christ when you get Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself even unto death, death on a cross.

[26 : 08] And God has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

So you see, what happened was that God spoke through him who was made the heir of all. Jesus as man enters in to the inheritance of the kingdom of God.

He is the one to whom God gives the kingdom. It's given to Jesus Christ. It's not given to George Bush. It's not given to Saddam Hussein.

It's not given to any of the great men and tyrants of history. it is given to Jesus Christ. He is the inheritor of the kingdom.

He is the one through whom God has said this is what I'm doing. Now what that means then is when you come to be baptized they will baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and you will become a child of God, a member of Christ and an inheritor of the kingdom.

[27 : 22] Why do you become an inheritor of the kingdom? Because you are in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ has been made the heir of all things.

He is the one through whom God has spoken. Now the reality of it is and I'll quit but the reality of it is this that just this thing has happened this event of Christ's death on the cross Christ has humbled himself and become obedient and God has spoken fully and perfectly and completely and in a final way in that person Jesus Christ so that when the cry goes up from our hearts as it might well in the times in which we live why doesn't God say something?

The answer of the New Testament is God has said something finally and fully and completely and in terms of the eternal purposes of history he has said it in Jesus Christ and he is the one who has inherited the life to come he has humbled himself unto death he has been raised from the dead and he is the one who becomes the heir of the kingdom the kingdom is given to him and we share in the kingdom as we are fellow heirs with him as we are in Christ and that's that's how it works that's what the New Testament I think is teaching and that's what the New Testament has to say to our hearts that as we examine the witness of the New Testament confront the person of

Jesus Christ come to put our faith and trust in him as the one in whom God has spoken definitively to us then we come to be inheritors of the kingdom through Christ because we are in Christ and that's true for everybody everywhere it's not true for all Christians anymore and it's and it's it's it's it's when I say it's not true for all Christians I mean that lots of people who come within the general pattern of Christendom don't have any awareness of what it all means and we have to discover in our pluralistic society we have to discover in our confusing world that God has spoken clearly and definitively in Christ and if we want to hear God speak then

Jesus Christ is what he say in word and in event in the things he taught and the life he lived and the death he died and it's as we encounter him that we as we come to believe in him that we are believing in the one through whom God spoke and the one through whom God speaks to every generation and to every human life the one through whom you and I who are reduced to pin sized midgets in terms of our significance to our world are suddenly exalted to huge people in terms of God's purpose for us in his kingdom as heirs together with Christ of the kingdom let me say a prayer our God we thank you that you have spoken to us you have spoken to us finally definitely fully and completely in the person of

[31 : 44] Jesus Christ and we can't change him to be who we want him to be so that he fits into our lives we can't open our lives to your changing us so that we may be found in Christ give us grace to do this we ask in his holy name amen to our saying ■ go to