

Images Of The Son: The Creator

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[0 : 00] Thank you very much. Thank you, ma'am.

The passage that usually says in many and diverse manners, God spoke unto the fathers by the prophets and hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son whom he has made the heir of all things and by whom he created the world.

Well, that second verse is considerably expanded here to give you some of the range of meaning that's built into it. So it says, look at verse 2 again of Hebrews chapter 1.

In the last of these days, he has spoken to us in the person of a son whom he appointed heir and lawful owner of all things.

And then the part that I want to talk about today is from there to the end of the verse. Also, by and through whom he created the world and the reaches of space and the ages of time.

[1 : 21] That is, he made, produced, built, operated, and arranged them in order. And I become increasingly aware, as I talk to you about this passage, how completely alien it is to the world in which we live.

And to be able to say this in the middle of a downtown area like that of a sophisticated west coast city like Vancouver, raises, I think for anybody in our society, enormous problems.

It's like asking you to get on your jogging suit this afternoon and go to the top of the lions. You know, it's an inappropriate way to prepare yourself to make such a journey.

And if you're trying to journey your way through Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 2, there are staggering claims that are made that most of us, in the circumstances of our daily life and understanding, can't begin to confront.

And so what I'm trying to do is the preposterous task of explaining to you what this means when my own understanding is very limited.

[2 : 37] And the only thing I hope for is that yours is even more limited. Otherwise, this is totally a farce. But the thing is that it starts out that God, I mean, it makes the claim that God has spoken to us.

You know, and anybody who makes that kind of claim in our society is immediately suspect of being a little deranged. I mean, it's, you're just, you don't make that kind of statement.

You can say the Financial Times says it, or the Wall Street Journal says it, or the Economist says it, or something like that.

But if you say that God has spoken to us, you really are way out on the fringes of our culture and society that can't really imagine what you would possibly mean by saying that God said anything.

And so you get in trouble for that. The fact that he spoke to our fathers is all right. And most of us have a kind of childhood recognition that somewhere way back in history, it was perhaps not inappropriate for God to have spoken.

[3 : 59] But the idea that he speaks to us here and now on a contemporary basis is just unimaginable. Unimaginable to us. You know, that lovely line in John chapter 4 where the woman says, We know that when the Messiah comes, he will teach us all things, but not now.

And Christ's wonderful answer, I that speak unto you am he. And he says, right now, right here. And you see, the preposterous thing about this statement is in fact that it means that right now, right here in the circumstances in which you are living out your life, God is speaking to you.

And that's hard work to come to grips with that in our culture because our culture has built enormous resistance, intellectually and philosophically, against the possibility of that happening.

And you remember that wonderful illustration of that was when somebody in one of the medical journals put in that story about heart patients who have somebody praying for them tend to last longer than heart patients that don't have somebody praying for them.

And this was in a very respectable medical journal. And I understand it was put on the notice board of one of the hospitals there. And somebody scratched across it. This would put medicine back 250 years, you know, because we're past that kind of thinking.

[5 : 28] So even to suggest that God speaks is not a happy concept. It's not one that our culture can accommodate. That he spoke to the fathers by the prophets.

Well, all right, historically, but nothing contemporary. We live in a world which is the kind of scientific world where there is a kind of universally identifiable reality.

And this is the sum total of my scientific knowledge that E equals MC squared or something like that. And you all know that that's a kind of hard reality that science can deal with.

Russian scientists can deal with it. Arab scientists can deal with it. You can check it out in South America or North America. You can check it out in Malaysia or Australia.

Wherever you go, it always turns out that E equals MC squared. We all accept that. But most of us live by other kinds of formulas which are only personal to us.

[6 : 40] And once you get beyond the scope of our life, they have no meaning at all. You know, that I thought of. This is. What was it I was going to say?

Yeah. E equals me to the power of zero. That's what you call a state of depression described scientifically.

But those things are highly personal and only relate to us individually. And we have the great confusion of the times in which we live, in which we all watch.

I guess we all watch the story of the Gulf War. And, you know, how does the Arab mind work? You know. We think we know.

I mean, I suspect I know how George Bush works. I'm not. I haven't any idea how Saddam Hussein works or how he thinks. I have no idea how the people of a man in Jordan work.

[7 : 47] I have no idea how these things would seem to be the passionate concern of people who are concerned for the ultimate meaning of life and will get out in the streets and protest about it.

I just can't imagine where they're coming from. I don't know what news they've been fed. I don't know what facts they know. I don't know what's wrong with my position.

Because if one of us is right, I think it's me and they think it's them. And the world comes to an end. Because we can't do it. How does the Islam says that God has spoken to the Arab world through the prophet Muhammad?

I presume that the Western world, the coalition people, think that God is speaking to our world through superior technology.

And if we look at that, that's a very frightening thing to depend on. Since superior technology could belong to anybody. That the politicians believe that God speaks through the pragmatic lie.

[9 : 00] That is, it's all right to lie as long as it produces the results you want. And so you tend to think that way. Aboriginal people say that God speaks through the Great Spirit and we're in touch with the Great Spirit and we know it.

In the moose and the bear and the whale and the owl and the wolf and the tree and the forest. All those things are means by which God speaks to us.

He doesn't speak to you because you don't listen to him. But he speaks to us that way. And that's, our world tends to bow its head and says, yes, that must be true.

And when that fellow who was very keen on drugs, the professor at Harvard, whose name I've forgotten, and went out and said that he could talk to the trees, you know, and somebody asked him, well, what do the trees say back?

And he was a bit short on answers for that question. But the idea that in some highly subjective and personal sense that God speaks is something which we all, in a sense, allow other people to believe, but the fact that God speaks in a way that science speaks, in something that is always and everywhere and invariably true for the whole of the history of this planet, is arrogance beyond belief for most people, way beyond belief.

[10 : 29] In the Bible, you have Samuel having difficulty when the Lord spoke to him, and he didn't know how to answer until old Eli the prophet told him, you, next time you hear it, say, speak, Lord, for your servant hears.

You remember, but Moses was confronted by God who wanted to speak to him and through him. And Moses had to say, well, what's your name? And Paul, who was confronted by him on the road to Damascus, said, who are you, Lord?

And John the Baptist, who came with the special ministry of being the forerunner of the Messiah, said, sent word to Jesus, are you he that should come or do we look for another?

There is this terrible uncertainty about who this God is and how he has spoken. And if we get beyond private judgment in the matter, we are in deep trouble.

You know that our society, our Western society, is full of Christian sects or groups that are founded by people like Alan White or Judge Rutherford or Mary Baker Eddy or Allah Baha'i or Joe Smith, any one of those who has taken, in a sense, the religious tradition of the scriptures and said, but this is what God has actually said.

[12:03] And so they have become interpreters to the Jehovah's Witnesses or to the Christian scientists or to the Mormons or to, what did Alan White get?

The Seventh-day Adventists. That they have said, this is what God is saying. They put aside this word of God from Hebrews in which God has spoken to us by his son and said, now, in fact, this is what he's saying.

And so the vehicle of the word of God has been taken over by various individuals who said, this is what God is, in fact, saying.

And they give an authoritative word. And people of strongly religious inclinations like an authoritative word. And so it becomes one of the great realities of our Western world.

Well, you see, the difficulty for the Christian in our culture, in our society, is that Christians are convinced that God has spoken through Jesus Christ.

[13:12] And that can so easily be dismissed. Christians believe that there is a God, and they believe that only because of Jesus Christ.

They believe that Jesus himself is God, and they also believe that Jesus is a man. And so you get these statements, which anybody can say quite easily are libelous, they are blasphemous, they're the manifestation of ignorance, and they can bring all sorts of charges against them, as they do in our society all the time.

If you were caught believing in this, you would be unacceptable at many levels of our society. And that's increasingly true, that you would be unacceptable if you believed these kinds of statements. And so you have to be quiet, discreet, and polite about it. But what can I do? I mean, I can't tell you anything that diminishes in any way from the claim that is made by the Christian community because of the scriptures about the person of Jesus Christ.

We cannot make him socially acceptable. And what you do when you go on to this passage in Hebrews is you make two completely stupendous claims about this person, Jesus Christ.

[14:49] The two stupendous claims, one of which I dealt with last week, that he is the, that God has spoken through a son whom he has made the heir of all things, which this passage that you have in front of you expands to say, whom he appointed heir and lawful owner of all things, everything belongs to him.

And that was, that was the claim that, that we looked at last week. It's the claim that, remember, we went to Philippians chapter 2 where it says, being in the form of God, he counted 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 and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. That this is the picture of Jesus, who is the heir of all things, humbling himself in the circumstances of human life.

And so that we believe of this person, when we say that he is the heir of all things, we believe that all the treasures of every age and culture and world religion will find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. That's what we're called upon to believe by the New Testament. That it will all find its fullness in the person of Jesus Christ. Now, there is, I mean, there is every reason in our society simply not to believe that.

[16:23] To say that's quite unacceptable. That is not recognizing the limitations of human experience to make that kind of claim.

To say of that, that it's libelous, blasphemous, a treasonous statement, but it doesn't mean that it's not true. And, you know, all the way down through history, there have been blasphemies, which have turned out to be true, and libelous statements, which have turned out to be true.

And, uh, so that, that's, that's what, that's what Christian, what the Christian community is based on. The fact that that's in fact who Jesus is. That he is the heir of all things. The second thing that, well, uh, just let me remind you of something that I think, uh, you remember that, uh, there was this one thing that sort of illustrates this a little bit, and that is, and, uh, you, this is a raft at sea.

That's the sea. And there's the raft. Well, uh, Plato said that that's, that, that is what human experience is all about. He said that, uh, you are on a shoreless ocean, and you travel in whatever direction the wind is blowing.

[17 : 59] So that when you are born into a materialist, secular, West Coast society, that's what's happening while you were on the raft.

And that's what shapes your life, and shapes your thinking, and shapes everything about you. Is that, that's the raft you're on, and you are blown by that.

Somebody else lands up on the raft when another wind is blowing in another direction. And then maybe in the middle of your life, you're moving along in this direction, and another wind comes and blows you in another direction.

And Plato says, that's the human experience. And from long before, Hebrews was, written, he says, what we need is some word from God.

That's the philosophy. And you see, what the Christians decided about Jesus Christ is that, yes, this is true to human experience, on a raft being blown one direction or another by, in the various ages of man, and in the various cultures of man, and the various ideologies of man, we're moving in one direction after another, unless there is for us some word of God by which we can steer this craft to its proper destination.

[19 : 22] And then, the Christians said, well, that word has come, and that word is Jesus Christ. So that you get, you get this kind of thing happening, and you get fresh winds blowing in our society all the time, driving this raft in one direction or another, but never bringing it to the shore, because only a word from God could ever bring it to where it's meant to be.

And that's why Hebrews has been taken up to mean that, in fact, this word of God has come, and this word of God is Jesus Christ.

So you get, you get this amazing sort of statement that, that God, that Christ is the heir of all things. And then it goes on in the second statement, which again, if you look in the second part of that second verse on the sheet that you have in front of you, it says, this is the one through whom the world was created, and the expanded version reads, whom he, through whom he created the world, because the word is plural, through whom he created the world and the reaches of space and the ages of time, that is, he made, produced, built, operated, and arranged them in order.

Well, that's, that's what we're saying about this person, Jesus Christ. He has come in history, but he was there in creation.

[21 : 02] He is the one who has made, produced, built, operated, and arranged the whole world, and he is the one to whom the whole world will be his ultimate inheritance, that it will be given to him.

So those two statements are the statements which scandalize our world and make Christianity quite unacceptable.

Now, what, what happens to us as Christians? Well, what happens to us is that the good news about Jesus Christ is preached to us.

The gift of his grace brings repentance to our heart so that we believe in him. As we believe in him, and this is, remember, this is strictly that in the confusion and chaos of our world, I have chosen to believe that Jesus Christ is the one through whom God has spoken.

That's what it means to be a Christian. You can't hammer people into believing it. The only way they can come to believe it is through the gift of repentance and faith which comes from God.

[22 : 17] That you believe in this person Jesus Christ. You believe that the infinite, omnipotent, omnipresent God has somehow broken into history in the person of a human being.

Subjected himself to the restrictions of human life. And so believing that you are baptized, you make a stand.

You say, yes, that's what I believe. and you are baptized into the faith of Jesus Christ. And then you take the shortness and uncertainty of your human existence to explore the meaning of what God has said in Jesus Christ.

That's what you do with your life. What it means to you in how you use your time. What it means to you in how you use your intellect. what it means to you in terms of how you exercise your energies and your gifts.

You do that because you believe that God has spoken in Jesus Christ. That's how you live your life of faith. Now, you may be entirely and utterly wrong.

[23 : 38] And if you are a normal human being, that possibility probably occurs to you with some frequency. And God help you if it doesn't, I would say.

Because this is the faith in Christ into which you have been baptized, and having been baptized into it, you are required to explore the implications of it with the life that you've been given, in the time and circumstances in which you live.

and you have as landmarks of your faith that Christ is the inheritor of all things at the end, and the creator of all things at the beginning.

So you're somewhere in between Christ who created and Christ who will inherit, and you are living in the faith and obedience of Christ in the tiny segment of time that belongs to your conscious existence here on earth.

That's what happens to you. The creeds tell you that, the Christian philosophers say that, the church says that, and the scriptures teach it. And that's what you are baptized into.

[24 : 49] And that's the faith you accept in baptism. So that when you look at your life and say, who am I, what is my work, who is my partner, why do I suffer, why must I die, your faith in Jesus Christ becomes the answer to all those questions.

He is the one that leads you into all truth concerning who you are and what your life is meant to be. So that is the astronomical claim that Hebrews makes for you and me, that God has spoken to us in Jesus Christ.

God's purpose for the whole of history, for all the ages of time, God's purpose through all the cultures that have flourished on this planet, God's purpose through all the explorations of the human mind and heart, God's purpose for all that is summed up in the person of Jesus Christ.

And that's what you are invited to believe. And our society will give you every possible reason not to believe it.

[26 : 14] And you have to live in that society. and the scriptures and the fellowship of Christians will help you to work out your faith, which you acknowledge by your baptism into this faith, will help you to work out what it means.

So that the whole of your life and my life are in the midst of our chaotic and confusing world, in the midst of our country, which is torn apart by mosaic madness, as it's called, in our world, which has every technological advantage, yet one man can't speak to another.

In that world, you are called upon by God to work out what it means to believe in Jesus Christ.

That's what Christian faith is.

Let me pray. Our God and Father, our minds are too small and your purposes are infinite and eternal and majestic beyond our comprehension.

Stir us up that we may know what it means that you have called us to faith in Jesus Christ. Stir us up if, in fact, we are being called to faith in Jesus Christ and give us humility and grace and love and peace as those who would be in this world, the ones who seek by the whole of their lives to honor what you have said to us in the person of your Son, in whose name we pray.

[28 : 07] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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