Hebrews 1:1-3 “God’s Best Word”

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[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

That is what we want to do all the time, every time we're together, to turn our eyes upon Jesus. That's why our very first commitment as a church is that we're committed to being Christ-centered. Always to be depending upon Him, honoring Him, keeping Him central to our lives.
And so as we start a new year, of course, we want to keep the main thing, the main thing. And the main thing, I hope this is not a surprise to you at this point, the main thing is Jesus and our relationship with Him.
He is worthy of our attention, of our affection. Even more than that, though, He's the one that we desperately need, isn't He?
[1:15] Even when we're not sure that's true. And that's what Paul, or another early church leader, wants to say to the Hebrews.

These Christians in the first century who were starting to get really discouraged. Perhaps because persecution of Christ followers was ramping up.
Perhaps because following Jesus hadn't made their lives easier or more successful all of a sudden. Perhaps because they never really grasped the centrality of Jesus.
Whatever the case, the writer sends to them a sermon. That's really the form that this letter takes. It's a sermon to say, stick with Jesus.
He is the one that you need. He is greater than anything else. Anything you might consider. Don't consider self-reliance.
[2:20] Even if you're considering other gods. Even if you're considering giving up. No, Jesus is greater. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, He says.

Let's do that. Not just turn them for a glance at Christmastime. We enjoy doing that. But let's keep them on Him.
Yes, yes, again, in case you're wondering. Yes, another one of those sermons. Yes. Keep your eyes fixed on Him. Like a little child not wanting to lose sight of his mother.
Jesus, Jesus, keeping my eyes fixed on Him. Pastor Andrew Murray says that the writer of Hebrews unceasingly placed their weakness and Christ's person side by side.
He was sure that if they knew Christ, all would be well. Man, I would love that if someone felt that way about my sermons.
[3:30] My whole life and ministry for that matter. Our need and Christ's provision. Our insufficiency and Christ's sufficiency side by side all the time in every moment.

Because if we have Jesus, no matter what happens, all will be well. These next few months, we're going to be looking at the book of Hebrews.
Yes, I said months. It takes a while. We're going to be looking at how Jesus is greater than anything else. I really love creative people who can picture so well for us.
This message, even that alligator mouth that you might remember from math class that's right there beside Jesus. It means greater than for those of you who've been out of math for a while.
This is going to be in front of us so that we see, even as you see all sorts of things on this right side that Jesus is greater than, and maybe you'll see some things in your own heart that you can put over there.
[4:44] It's going to be a reminder for us visually. I'm going to seek to keep that reality in front of us with spoken words as I preach.

But let's especially ask God to write the truth of the greatness of Jesus on each of our hearts as we listen to his word in Hebrews.

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Let's pray together before we open God's word. Father, we are people who've heard of Jesus. Many who've loved Jesus, who've even this morning sung to Jesus. But you know we have hearts that are so prone to wander, to sleeping.
We have eyes distracted by many things. We have minds that are prone to look for life and all sorts of things in this world.
[5:44] Father, we have an enemy, you know this, who wants us to believe that Jesus is not enough. And so would you open our minds, our eyes, our hearts afresh, turn our eyes upon Jesus.

Even today, even in these moments, even as we open your word, would it show us your written word, show us your living word. We ask it in his name.
Amen. Amen. Amen. The introduction to the sermon to the Hebrews. Right here immediately, the theme and some of the most wonderful realities in all of the Bible, in all the world.
Hebrews 1. 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 whom also he 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.
[7:12] Don't miss the wonder of these opening words. It's that the God of the universe speaks to us.

He speaks. He's not hiding himself from you. Even if you feel that way this morning or you've felt that way before, he is communicating.
He is revealing himself. He is speaking. He's initiating relationship with you. If that's something that you think you might want here at the beginning of a new year for the first time or in a way you've kind of lost sight of for a while, just know you're not in competition with him for that.
He wants that too. He speaks to us. He wants relationship with you. But up to the point in history of the first Christmas, he has spoken in a variety of ways through creation, through human messengers, all offering these little bits and pieces, glimpses of who God is, of how to relate to him, of what the good life is about.
I mean, Yahweh's Old Testament people could certainly know him, okay? But only from a limited perspective. Many of you like me have already made it to the gym in the past few days or maybe you're thinking, this is the week I'm going to do it.
[8:55] I'm going to start a new workout program or a new diet or whatever it is. Maybe there's a fitness or nutrition expert that you follow. And you have her program for a new you.

Perhaps you've even adopted her philosophy of life, whatever it is, you know, that the good life is eating green stuff and waking up early and walking backwards and that will make you who you want to be.
Whatever it is, you've got that philosophy. But if a program or a philosophy is all you have, you don't really have all you need to know that person, do you?
To be like that person that you'd like to be like. You don't know how they adjust when they work your job or when they strain a muscle.
You don't have someone there with you to drag you out of bed when your alarm goes off and you hit snooze again or to spot you when you can't lift all the weight.
[10:05] You don't understand how they deal with the emotions of feeling like all of the effort you're putting in to become a new person just isn't really making any difference. How would she respond?

What would she say? How would she do it? You don't know. Unless that person shows up and starts living with you.
You know, moves in as a roommate sort of situation in your world. Unless that happens, you're going to remain limited, right? Imagine the difference if she moved in with you, if she worked with you, if she worked out with you, if she worked through emotions with you.
You really got to know the real her, not just the Instagram version. Wouldn't that make a difference? A relationship with a person takes you well beyond a mere program or philosophy, right?
The writer means something very similar to that here at the beginning of Hebrews. He's saying, look, God through the prophets has given us the program, the philosophy for life, for the good life with him, but pieces here and there of what Yahweh is like, of how we relate to him.

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[11:31] But it's like staring at the half-finished puzzle maybe you did over the holidays. And you're just not sure where all the pieces fit together. Until Jesus, until the Son of God, God shows up in a person.

Now this is it. Not merely the last piece in the puzzle, but truly the puzzle box top, right? That's what's happening. He moves in with us.
And God repeatedly says, listen to him. I am speaking, God says, the word made flesh.
Here it is in, we're in the last days, the dividing line of human history. They've come. It's when God himself enters into the world that he's made.
Isn't this beautiful? Aren't we so thankful that now we have a person to reveal God to us, to show us who he is, how he responds, what it's like to relate to him.
[12:40] Jesus is God's best word to us. The ultimate way that he shows us who he is, how we know him. He is everything God wanted to say to the world wrapped up in a person.

Glenn Scrivener says. We get a person, right? We get a relationship. Now that's a wonderful reality. And it's a hard reality. See, see that personal revelation means that we don't get to make up who God is, do we?
We don't get to say what he's like. He is who he is and who he tells us and shows us in Jesus. And we have to adapt our understanding and our lives to that reality, that personal reality in order to have a relationship with him, a person.
See, once the fitness expert moves in with you and sleeps through the alarm twice a week, you can't say, well, I like to think of her as someone who never sleeps through her alarm.
[13:59] You wouldn't be relating to the real her, would you? We can't have a relationship with the real, just, and holy God if we say, well, I like to think of him as just loving.

We have to deal with who he really is, who Jesus has shown him to be. See, God's saying here in Hebrews 1 that not only is no further revelation of him needed, no further revelation of him is helpful, is allowed.
It's not a vision of Muhammad or of Joseph Smith or your friend. That's not the last word.
It's not a way that you like to think of him. That's not the last word about God. It's not a conclusion that you draw from decades of life experience about what God's like.
No, that's not the last word about God. The eternal God enters into time and space to speak to us finally and fully who he is and how we relate to him.
[15:17] So now, in order to have relationship with him, we have to adapt to that personal reality, that ultimate truth to shape our lives based on him, on Jesus, not on our own ideas.

In these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, this unique person who alone reveals God to us. Listen to him. Okay, you see where he's pointing us? This sermon points us to Jesus, God's best word to the Hebrews.
Right here at the outset, he holds Jesus up in just a couple of verses. He helps us to marvel at his unique greatness. The preacher gives us six, seven brilliant facets of who Jesus is.
Thank you, kids. Yes. Come on. I couldn't help it. I mean, I really honestly couldn't decide whether to group it as six or seven and most sermons only have three points, so how often do you get to bring it up?
[16:34] Sorry, kids. Kids, that's meant to make you laugh, right? You understand the intent of that? I want you to understand the intent of the verses we're about to read.

What we're about to read is meant to make you go, wow, to marvel, to wonder at who Jesus is, to worship him, okay?
Don't miss these things. Stay with me for a few minutes. I want you to fill in these seven blanks, okay? Six if you prefer, but there's seven in your outline, and I want you to write beside each one of them something to help you remember what it means.
pay attention, don't miss these things. Let's turn our eyes upon Jesus. Why is it that he is so worthy of our attention as God's best word?
In these last days, he has spoken to us. Amazing. He's spoken to us. Listen, he's speaking to you by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things.
[17:52] The heir is the one who owns, for whom the things exist, right? In this case, which things?

All things. The nations, the ends of the earth, the galaxies, the plants and animals, you and me. Jesus holds the right to control and to use for his purposes all human intelligence, all governmental power, even all evil forces in the whole universe.

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for from him and through him and to him are all things, Romans 11. All things created by him and for him.
Jesus, y'all, is why we exist. It's for him. That's how worthy he is of all things, so certainly of my worship, of my time, of my obedience, of my love.
[19:10] Jesus is also the creator through whom he created the world. Not only for him, but by him all things created, Colossians 1.

Without him, nothing was made that has been made. That's John 1, right? He made all of it. You may have thought more often of Jesus as a baby in a manger, especially recently.
But long before Jesus became flesh, he created all flesh. He spoke life and time and space into existence.
He made galaxies appear where there were no galaxies. he spoke them and they were. But that's something only God can do, right?
You're exactly right. These next two facets are connected as they help us gaze at Jesus' divinity.
He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of his nature.
[20:25] The radiance of God's glory like the rays of the sun. The same substance, the same essence, but the way that we experience and feel and see sun is through the rays, right?

Jesus is the same essence of God, fully God, the way we experience his Godness, his glory.
Now hold on. This is frightening, especially to a Jewish person reading this letter.
This is the glory that was the most intimidating force in the whole Old Testament, expressed in the Old Testament only partially, but burning in a fiery cloud, right?
stopping whole armies in their tracks, entering the temple and literally knocking people onto the ground, utterly overwhelming them, even with the partial glory.
[21:37] The most inescapable, unavoidable, insurmountable reality in the universe, God's glory.
When John gets even a vision in revelation, Jesus is like the sun shining at full strength.

Can't look to the point that John falls down as though dead. And now, the radiance of God's glory.
We have seen his glory, right? When the word became flesh, we felt the fullness of it in the face of Jesus Christ, this inescapable reality.
Don't get away from it. You don't need to. Don't want to. He's the way we experience the full reality of God. And he's the representation as well as the radiance.
He's the perfect image of the invisible God, Colossians 1. The way you see what you otherwise can't see. The word here in Hebrews is character.
[22:48] It's the character like a coin impression, right, of a face. It is the actual face like a wax seal. It's exactly what's there.

It can't be different in any way from the thing making the impression. It's an exact imprint, a perfect representation. God is not revealing himself through Jesus halfway.
Or with any misleading confusion or any magic tricks. No. Jesus is the incomprehensibly divine other made knowable, visible, tangible to us.
Why? So that we can somehow have relationship with someone otherwise utterly beyond and above and apart from and different from us.
Jesus says, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. Wow. Wow. Wow.
[23:58] Then show us more of Jesus, right? right? Okay. He upholds the universe by the word of his power.

I hope you're beginning to feel some sense of amazement. I don't know which one of these is more amazing. That he once upon a time created it all.
That's amazing. or that now he for millennia has held it all together. Every molecule, every atom, every cell, every body held together by the word of his power.
He's the sustainer. He's constantly speaking things into continuing existence. Actively engaged with this world or it would crumble in an instant.
Mountains would disintegrate. Stars would disappear. Oceans would evaporate. Gravity would cease.
[25:13] And yet in Jesus all things hold together. Isn't it good news that there's more than random chance, more even than a powerful force that keeps things spinning, that holding things together toward a purposeful end is a person.

A person actively involved in shaping it all. Even the parts of your life that seem absolutely to be spinning out of control. We all have parts of our life like that.

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they may be beyond your control. They're not beyond His. Don't we need to know that? Can you process that with that place in your life right now?
That He upholds the universe and our little corner of His world by the word of His power.
He's holding it together. the next sentence. After making purification for sins.
[26:25] Just stop right there. It's almost mentioned in passing what He does with all His glory, divinity, perfection, and power. He makes purification for sins.

Y'all, that is a huge statement. Don't miss this. He is the Savior. Okay? That's number six. Savior. Or to be more specific to this text, He's the cleaner.
This past week, I cleaned a kitchen floor. Don't get too excited. I'm not great at cleaning. But occasionally, I help. A floor that has been subject recently to extra foot traffic through the holidays. things, especially from little kids. Extra baking in the kitchen, extra coffee spilled and animal hair shed and dust blown in.
You know the stuff that gets on floors. You should have seen the rag that I wrung out afterwards. Oh, filthy, disgusting.
[27:37] part of it was so nasty, I just threw the rag away rather than trying to get it clean to use again. See, in order for one thing to become clean, something else has to get dirty, doesn't it?

For the floor to be purified, the rag had to take all of the impurities onto it. Transfer to spiritual reality, sin is cosmic level filth.
Yes? Devastating dirt beyond what we can handle, beyond anything we've seen on a rag. It makes a mess of every person and of all of creation until Jesus makes purification for sins.
The pure one, the righteous one, is the propitiation, 1 John 2, the atonement, the one to take the dirt, the sacrifice to cover and wipe away the filth of all our sins.
Y'all, that's a massive undertaking. For all have sinned, Romans 3, fallen far short of God's glory and purity, and yet there's a savior, a redeemer, a justifier who becomes sin, who takes the dirt of our sin in his own body on the cross so that the impure becomes purified.
[29:27] Listen, please know this, don't go into this year thinking wrongly. you're not left this year with a cleaning program to fix your life.

You're not being left with a philosophy on how to shine brighter in 2026. Please know that is not what Jesus gives you. You have a person, a savior, who comes to make you clean.
He's come. He's made purification for sins. Praise Jesus. Amen. Finally, after doing all of that life-changing, eternity-changing work on our behalf, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.
high. In other words, he's resting and he's ruling. Your heads all go down when the last blank comes up. Got it.
Check. All right. Sermon over. No. No, listen. He's seated. It's not far from over. It's just not quite over. It is finished, is what that means.
[30:48] The work of making purification for sins is finally complete. See, there were no seats anywhere in the Old Testament temple because the work of the priests was never done.

The sacrifices were ongoing, never finished, never enough in themselves. But Jesus offers his sacrifice for sins and he sits down to rest.
But not off on a cushy sofa somewhere. Where's he sitting? on the throne of heaven, at the right hand of God himself in all his glory so that we will know he's ruling actively over everything.
Yes, he's holding it all together, but it's not merely keeping things spinning. Now we realize in his greatness and glory, he is the king. As we see in Revelation, the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever.
Jesus, the radiance of God himself is not only the prophet that we need to show and tell us the truth about God.
[32:08] He's not only the priest we need to make the perfect sacrifice for our sins, but he's also the king that we need to make protection, defense for us, to lead and reign over us so that we can depend upon and follow and trust someone who really does have the glory, the worth, the power to be counted on in any and every circumstance.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Jesus, he is more than any of us can take in, isn't he? That was a really quick run through, just several pieces of who he is.
Every one of those alone boggles our minds, right? The heir, the creator, the radiance, the representation, the sustainer, the savior, the ruler, all of them together in one person, and that one

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person has come to us so that we might know and love and live with him.
Y'all, it's too much to take in. It's too good to be true. It's too wonderful to express. yes. But don't because of that turn away.
Don't think, wow, that's a lot, Jesus, and turn away and settle for dabbling in football or fitness, finance, fashion.
[33:51] God's going to keep telling us, fix your eyes on Jesus. Today, this year, always. As we get started in Hebrews, I want each of us to consider our own hearts and lives before such a Jesus as is revealed here.

Bigger than what you may have considered before. Is he not too mighty to relegate to a personal assistant who just kind of runs and coordinates your agenda for your life?
is he not too magnificent to relegate to an afterthought in your busy days? Everything else we obsess over, pursue passionately, prioritize in our lives is less glorious, less worthy, less wonderful. is he not too expansive to relegate to some side dish that you get to taste some days or some weeks or in some situations when you feel like it?
You can't live without him. You weren't made to live without him. He won't have you living without him. I've realized lately in my own life and in talking with some of you that there's a common reason that we get weary, that we consider giving up, that we conclude that we're disappointed or we're disenchanted with life or with the Christian life, just, and it's not, as you might think, that we strive for too much.
[35:47] It's that we settle for too little. Many days we settle for less than Jesus as a result less than full glory, full radiance, full rest that he provides and is to us.

There's good news for people like us. Just like for the Hebrews, there's something better. See, this God who demands that we adapt to him, to who he reveals himself to be, in order to have relationship with the real God, remember?
We have to take him for who he is personally to relate to him. he's also adapted to us. In order to have relationship with real sinners, the holy God adapted himself to sinners, if you will.
Not by demanding we get it together, y'all fix it. Not by demanding we become something else, but by sending his son to earth and to the cross to make us holy and make us his, to invite us into the meaningful life that we're made to enjoy.
That's what he's done. He's adapted to us that we might know and have relationship with him.
Wherever you are today, Jesus is greater.
[37:28] greater. He's greater than exhausting yourself in religious performance, hoping to attract God's attention. No. He's greater than desperately trying to find life in the possessions and experiences of this world.

He's greater than dabbling in Christianity while assuming real intellectual meat is outside the things of God. He's greater than drifting through life aimlessly with God as some distant unknown concept. he's greater than seeking to avoid insignificance or aging or limitations, ultimately death.
He's greater than routines and rituals that seem disconnected from your daily realities. He's more than that. He's greater than a reservation or fire insurance for one day someday.
Oh, he's more than that. He's greater than a bullet on your resume as you navigate life. looking for significance somewhere else. He's greater than living overwhelmed by guilt and shame and just seeking to numb or cover or ignore those feelings.
[38:39] He's greater. Jesus is the heir of all things, the creator of the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

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.
Let's pray. Jesus, you are greater, more glorious, more wonderful than we can comprehend and certainly than I could explain or articulate this morning.
But as we glimpse you, we worship you. As we see just the edges of your garment, we grasp for them. We want to know you.
We want to live with you. We want not to lose sight of you ever. We need you. We find life and hope and joy in you.
[39:53] Thanks for meeting us. Thanks for giving us your word to show us. Thanks for loving us and becoming like us that we might become like you.

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work in us even this year. Keep our eyes and our minds and our hearts set on you, we ask in your name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.
Thank you. I'll see you next time.

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