

Hebrews 1

A Sermon by Robert Jackson

- Hebrews is the most unique book in the New Testament other than Revelation. This sermon will give an overview of Hebrews, and then focus on Hebrews 1:1-4.
- Author/date/audience/place of Hebrews all a mystery – these aspects are all so mysterious that there's little point even guessing about them.
- What kind of book is Hebrews? No name, introductory comments, no greetings, no personal remarks: *No* marks of being a letter at all!
- Go to **Hebrews 13:22** – a “word of exhortation” – this is a religious designation. It referred to a *sermon* in a Jewish synagogue. What we have in the book of Hebrews is a kind of *transcript* of an early Christian sermon. This gives us valuable insight into their priorities, their use of the Bible, their style of preaching...
- This is why it's so impersonal: a sermon is about the *message* of God, not the *person* delivering it. I should not go on about myself; I am replaceable – the word of God is irreplaceable. My role is simply to hold out God's word.
- The book addresses a church in transition: **Hebrews 2:3** – This very explicitly refers to the 2nd generation church (those who received their teaching from those who were with Jesus). We are in the 100th generation of the church! But we can still learn a lot from back then.
- The church being addressed is in crisis – they are losing sight of God's mercy and favour. They are tempted to go back to old ways – back to Judaism, the Law of Moses, the sacrifices – everything Christ came to free us from. They were thinking they hadn't gained much in Christ – and became sentimental about their past. “Are things any easier now that we're Christians?”
- The response of the author is to inspire them with Jesus' majesty and power; to remind them of how incredible salvation is... and also to fire off warnings from time to time about the consequences of turning away.
- Hebrews is the book of *better things*: A better covenant, a better sacrifice, a better hope, a better priest – it seeks to remind us of the joy and fulfilment of our life in Christ.
- Hebrews 1 – the focus of this chapter is that Christ is superior to the angels – an unusual point to make! But it shows that the church had such a diminished view of Christ – people were openly teaching that Christ is inferior to the angels. It's scary to think of the false doctrines that can spread so early, so easily...
- But this is often the case – we go off track. All that matters is that we go back to the Bible – make sure the Bible is the authority in the church – it will always get us back on track.
- That's the introduction. My text is **Hebrews 1:1-4**. A very dense passage – overwhelming, in fact! This passage sets up all the major themes of the book. Eg: Jesus as our purification – the book will go on for chapters about the power of Jesus' sacrifice – this is true of everything mentioned in these 4 verses.

1. The End

- Whenever Paul writes to a church, he establishes that church in a dynamic tension between what has *already* been achieved and what is *yet to come*. Peter does the same, and from the first verse we see that the Hebrew author is no different.
- Things from the past define us; God's promises for the future inspire us. Eg: Jesus' resurrection is said and done – a completed act, but it gives us new life every day. Our resurrection is something we can't even imagine, but knowledge of it drives us every day. We are caught between the things God has *achieved* and the things that God *promises* – a dynamic tension.
- We live in the last days – also called the Messianic Age – because Jesus *has* come and *has* preached his message – a message of good news that salvation is open to all; and of the coming destruction. We are between times.
- The whole Old Testament looked forward to Jesus – in Luke 24, Jesus refers to the entire Old Testament as the “Scriptures which testify about me”. But now, Jesus has come and gone – we are at the end of prophecy: v1: “in the *past* the prophets spoke”; Scripture is now closed. This is because Jesus is the *full* and *final* revelation of God. He is the Word: All that God wanted to say to us.
- In this new age, we look forward to the end of the world by fire, and our consummation and resurrection.
- We live in the last days – the end of all things is near. “*On call*” illustration: In many occupations (such as in health care, the fire department or emergency services), you go “on call”, meaning that you can be paged at any time. This is an illustration of our lives as disciples: At any time, God could call us, and we'll be gone. This is not a cause for despair, but hope – it's the ultimate reason that we should make the most of the time that we have! We're in the last days – every moment we have is a precious gift.

2. The Son's Glory

Heir:

- The overwhelming focus of this passage is the manifold glory of Christ. I've mentioned that Jesus is the word: The full and final revelation of God. The next thing is that Jesus is the *heir* of creation. The idea is that one day Jesus will take ownership of the creation.
- This is like the time of the Conquest under Joshua. God said to Joshua “Canaan is *mine*, take possession of it; it's been devoted to Me.” And so, Joshua took it, destroyed everything, and devoted it to God – it became the site for the new kingdom of God on earth.
- This was a prophecy of what is to come. One day, God will forcibly take possession of the entire world. Right now, we do not always see God's authority – the world is going in the complete opposite direction to God's heart of peace and love. But Jesus is the heir of creation! One day, he will assert his authority – and on that day, there will be *no doubt* about who is on the throne.

Maker:

- Then, the passage mentions that God made the world *through* Jesus. Briefly, this refers to how Jesus is the medium (or go-between) between Father and us. Eg: In salvation, God *sent* Jesus. So, salvation originated with the Father – it was his plan and his heart; but it was Jesus who was sent to give the sacrifice. The same kind of separation of roles can be determined in everything that God does. The Father is the originator and the Son is the mediator (or agent).
- The bottom line of all this is that Jesus was there in the beginning – he was involved with creation. He’s our creator; he designed us along with everything else in the universe. A song:

**“You spread out the skies over empty space. Said ‘Let there be light’
To a dark and formless world your light was born.
You spread out your arms over empty hearts. Said ‘Let there be light’
To a dark and hopeless world your Son was born...
What a wonderful maker, what a wonderful Saviour
How majestic your whispers, how humble your love
With a strength like no other, and the heart of a father
How majestic your whispers, what a wonderful God...”**

Radiance/Representation:

- **v3a:** Radiance of God. A patristic wrote that Jesus was like a sun ray that glided to earth – into the womb of Mary – and became whole. A sun ray extends from the sun, but it is a *part* of the sun – we see the rays of light when we look at the sun. This is a perfect illustration of how Jesus shone out from the heart of the Father – separate but united.
- Jesus represented God on earth. Great illustration of this in *A Sneaking Suspicion* by John Dixon: Jesus as God’s photo. Read page 91. A great way to think. Jesus was the *living image* of God on earth – he showed perfectly God’s love, God’s heart, mercy and passion to all.

Sustainer:

- The whole universe exists because God is speaking it. All things hold together in Christ. If it weren’t for God the whole universe would fall apart. Our life force is sustained by God. God didn’t just set things in motion and then leave them like a machine (that’s a false doctrine called Deism). He takes an active role in the creation – he gives us *breath*. Imagine if God forgot about us for one second!
 - If we could add all this up: Jesus is the final *revelation* of God, the *heir* of creation, our wonderful *maker*, the *radiance* of God, the *representation* of God, *sustainer* of the universe... what response can we have but awe and wonder?

3. The Perfect Sacrifice

- **v3b:** The megatheme of Hebrews is the unique glory of our salvation in Christ; the perfection, completeness and finality of Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins.
- This verse describes Jesus as a priest making atonement for our sins. This reminds us of the Temple and the sacrifices to cleanse the people. In the Temple, there were

many things: alters, candles, curtains, the ark, pillars... but there's one thing you'd never find: *a seat*. No priest was ever permitted to sit down in the Temple – no sitting down on the job! There was always more work to be done. Always more sacrifices, more prayers, more festivals...

- What kind of priest was Jesus? A priest who gave the perfect sacrifice, and then sat down in the heavenly temple. That's it! He sat down because his work was complete.
- Jesus' atonement, his death, is enough to free you from all sin. The cross is more powerful than your sin; it's so powerful that it can break sin's hold on your life; it can cleanse you of guilt, it can free you and bring you to a life of confidence and mercy.
- Our response to sin ought to be gratitude for God's amazing mercy. So often, my response is to bring out all the old sacrifices – beat up on myself, get downtrodden and weary, dragging my feet – I go through this whole sacrificial system, and I forget that Jesus' sacrifice was perfect and complete – it cannot be improved upon or added to. Jesus suffered enough, so we could be free – so we can stand in grace, upheld by God's mercy.
- Jesus' sacrifice was a perfect sacrifice – the ultimate and complete solution to our sin and guilt.

Summary

- Today I looked at the end times – how we live in a tension between what God has achieved and what he promises;
- I overviewed many aspects of the incredible glory of Christ;
- And I reminded us that Jesus' sacrifice was perfect and complete, so that we can have confidence to live in God's mercy.