

THE GREAT COMMUNICATOR

SERIES: THE SUPREMACY OF THE SON

by Steve Zeisler

Hebrews is a majestic book which makes a powerful statement about the exalted person and work of Jesus Christ. Chapter 1 opens on a thundering note as we hear that “God has spoken to men.” Look at Hebrews 1:1-3:

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...

This book, indeed all of Scripture, is not about the groping of humans to find God, the long, arduous process that many have undergone seeking to have God hear them. This is not what we find before us in these words. Rather, we learn that God has spoken to us. It is his burden that we know him, and it is his seeking that has found us. God has spoken over the ages in many ways through the prophets, but now he has spoken to us in his Son.

My six-year-old son, David, has battery-operated walkie-talkies with a range of about 30 to 40 yards. Recently, I heard my wife Leslie and he using them. He was on the outside of the house and she was inside. It is funny to watch him because he does not always remember how they work. He forgets to press the button in to talk and release it to listen. He would start talking and halfway through remember to press the button so Leslie would only get the end of a sentence. Then she would talk and realize that he could not hear because he had forgotten to release the button or had drifted out of range. When David plays with the walkie-talkies, some communication takes place, but you do not get all of the information. If you listen very carefully, the general point can be understood, but it is not as clear as if he were standing in front of you talking about whatever it is that concerns him.

The writer of Hebrews says that long ago God began speaking through the prophets. Through the Law, the prophets and his own activity in history, he communicated with man to reveal what he is like. And his message grew increasingly clear through the centuries. Communication took place from the beginning, but finally at the crescendo of history he made his message perfectly clear.

Finally, he supremely filled out his communication to us by becoming a man himself. God the Son was born into history so we could see what he was like. Then we could hear what mattered to him and could understand the divine character, the divine nature. In the last days at the end of the process of telling us what he was like, God became a man and entered into our experience so that we could know and understand him. The “last days” have continued for almost two thousand years now. Men and women can see Jesus in Scripture and in the lives of their brothers and sisters. He is the great communication of God.

Chapter 1 of the gospel of John tells us that the word, the speech of God, was with God at the beginning: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Genesis begins with the speech of God creating the spheres, the light and darkness, the animal world and finally humanity. Everything was created by his word. He spoke all of creation into place.

It was God who spoke from the heavens to Abraham and set him off on the great adventure that was his life. It was God who spoke to Moses in a burning bush and to Elijah in a still small voice. He spoke in the words of prophets who denounced the rebellion of kings and prayed in repentance for the sins of the people. He spoke over and over again in many ways through the prophets, and finally he spoke to us in his Son, the greatest of all communications from God. In Heb.1:1-3, there are seven statements about the person of Jesus Christ, explaining why he is an adequate and effective channel for God to use to speak to us. What a powerful and dramatic note on which to begin this book!

Before I consider in detail these seven statements about Jesus, let me tell you about the document we are studying. I want to give you a little background information. The word "little" is the operative word because we do not know very much about the book of Hebrews. This is one of the more mysterious books in the New Testament.

In fact, no author is mentioned in the book. Most of the letters of the New Testament name the author in the document itself. But the writer of Hebrews did not do this. One commentator speculated that he did not give his name because he wanted to strongly emphasize the speech of God. We will read quotations from the Psalms, the law and the prophets, introduced with the phrase "God said." Thus, his clear and present concern is that we hear these words as coming from the Lord. It may have been for this reason that the human instrument left his own name off the pages of the document.

In any case, we have before us a book that is difficult to place. The best guess is that it was probably written to Rome or to Jerusalem before Nero's persecution that occurred in 64 A.D. Clearly, there is a tremendous concern for Judaism in this book and the people who received it must have had a background in the Jewish faith. They were under pressure to go back to Judaism as their hope for salvation and knowledge of God. Thus, Jerusalem would be a fitting location for receipt of such a letter. But there was a large Jewish community in Rome as well, making it a strong possibility.

There are many guesses as to who wrote it, and no one candidate stands out clearly. My guess, if you are interested, is that Barnabas wrote it. In the second century, Tertullian said that he did. And according to the book of Galatians, Barnabas did have an experience in Antioch in which the Jews were being pressured to return to Judaism and to reject unity with the Gentiles. These are the very issues at stake in Hebrews. We do know that Barnabas knew about these tensions because he failed in some of the same areas early in his Christian walk. Also, in the book there is a long description of the Levitical priesthood, and Barnabas was a Levite. And he was a self-effacing man, the kind of man that might easily have kept himself in the background even in his own book. So, for those and perhaps other reasons, Barnabas is a good candidate. But there are others equally as good.

In any case, we have in Hebrews a book that centers more on the person and work of Jesus Christ than perhaps any other in the New Testament. It is also a book that is filled with warnings about the dire consequences of spiritual neglect and shallowness.

There are exhortations, warnings, and encouragements given to make us attentive to the truth concerning Jesus. Look at Hebrews 2:3 as an example. A poignant question is asked: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" Look at Hebrews 3:12: "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God." And Hebrews 4:1 reads, "Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it." There is great concern that we not only hear these truths but that we not neglect them. We must not drift from them or treat them as unimportant.

Now let us consider the seven statements that tell us about Jesus in these first three verses. First, the Son through whom God has spoken is "heir of all things." Second, he is the one through whom the "world has been made" And he is "the radiance of God's glory." Fourth, he is "the exact representation of his nature." He also "upholds all things by the word of his power."

Sixth, he has “made purification for sins.” Last, he “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” In these statements, we find in Christ divine concern for creation, for God himself, and for humanity.

We are first told about Jesus’ ministry and his involvement in creation. He is the heir of everything, the destination for which this cosmos was made. Yet he is also the one through whom it began the origin of creation. We are also told that he is the one who upholds everything by the word of his power. He is the one who sustains everything all the way through its existence from the beginning to end. We are told that, regarding God and the communication of his person, Jesus is the radiance of his glory and the representation of his nature. Finally, when he speaks of man, the author says that Jesus purifies us of our sins. Thus creation, God and man are all in view here.

Think first, then, about what we are told concerning creation. The passage says Jesus is its originator, its sustainer, and its destination. He is the heir of all things for which creation was established. A bride--the church--is being prepared for Jesus Christ. And the dowry to be given to him is the created cosmos which is being fitted and made ready for him. He is the direction to which everything that has been created is heading.

A recent movie, *Back To The Future*, tells the story of an ‘80’s teenager who travels back to the ‘50’s where he encounters his parents as teenagers. One of the funny lines comes out of his trying to convince someone that he is from the ‘80’s. When they asked who the president would be, he replied, Ronald Reagan.” No one would believe him because obviously Ronald Reagan in the ‘50’s had never held political office. In fact, he was an ordinary actor who sold shirts and cigarettes in advertisements. The notion that this minor figure would become the most powerful man on earth was ludicrous! People could not imagine what changes the intervening thirty years would bring in Reagan--his political interest, the effectiveness of his governorship of California and his policies that would represent what a majority of people in this country cared about. Nobody could have predicted in the mid-’50’s all the changes that would come about in Reagan or in the course of events in this country. They could not imagine that the focus of history would be such that Ronald Reagan would be the political heir of the events that preceded him.

In the same way, most men and women of our day do not see that the complex universe in which we find ourselves is on schedule in its preparation to be inherited by one who was born in a stable and died on a cross almost 2000 years ago.

When you look at the created world, you should realize that everything is being readied to be inherited by the Son of God. We ought also to see his purpose and plan in all the things that have been made because he was there establishing them at the beginning. And he is the one who sustains them, being present in the midst of everything now. We ought to discover Christ everywhere in creation.

I do not know how you interact with this world. Perhaps you are a scientist fascinated by the physical laws of the created world. Maybe you work with the physical properties of creation and find the order and beauty in it. Or perhaps you are a gardener who just likes to watch plants grow and who loves how the sun, rain and nutrients bring about flowering beauty. Or maybe you are a parent observing your own children grow and develop new awareness as their physical stature is filled out. I do not know what in creation appeals most to you, but in whatever means you interact with it, you should see your Lord.

All of creation is being prepared for him and was made by him. It is even being sustained by him presently. When you marvel at the way colors and music harmonize and when you interact with all that is wonderful, attractive and fascinating about the created world, a note of thanksgiving ought to well up within you. You should thank the one through whose the world was made, for whom it was made and by whom it is held together. In Colossians, Paul wrote of the same theme: “For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16, 17). Jesus is the Word of God, the Speech of God, and the Presence of God in creation.

Further on in these verses in Hebrews, we hear that not just creation but God himself is spoken of in the person of Christ. Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God, and he is the exact representation of the nature of God. The glory of God expresses the worth of God--the majestic weight of God. When the glory of God is displayed, we find ourselves melting before him, wondering at the awesome depth of His person. Jesus is the supreme communication to us of the weight, worth and majesty of God.

You can know many of the physical characteristics of the sun. It has a certain diameter and produces so much energy every second through nuclear reactions. At times, you can look at it with the naked eye if there is enough cloud cover. You can determine its course and know where it will be on the horizon. The sun can be a source of study, but there are also times when it is an over-whelming source of beauty. Every one of us has had the experience of seeing the setting sun fill the sky brilliantly with clouds ablaze with changing colors. There is a remarkable symphony of color, beauty and quiet in a sunset. And you realize that the sun is more than just the weight of its molecules and the pouring out of its energy. It is also glorious--incredibly beautiful, majestic and wonderful.

The same is true of God. There are times when we can know many facts about him and lose sight of how wonderful he is. Yet in Christ we can once again meet the glory of God. Jesus is the radiance, the outpouring of the majestic wonder of God. When his voice stilled the storm, when he was transfigured on the mountain, when he hushed those who were his opponents or when he banished disease from a sick body, then we caught glimpses of the power, majesty and glory of God. It is in Jesus that we see the glory of God.

More than that, we not only see glory, but also the nature or character of God. Jesus is the exact representation of the nature of God. What is God like? What is in his heart? What things concern him? Who will tell us what God is like, and who will display the heart of God to us? Christ will, for he is the exact representation of the essential nature of God.

What concerns our Lord? When we see Jesus embrace lepers, we learn about God's merciful concern for outcasts. When he cursed the hypocrites, we learned about the nature of God being committed to truth and righteousness. In watching Jesus live out his convictions at whatever cost to himself, we discover something about the faithfulness of God. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus Christ.

He is the speech of God. He is present in the creation at its beginning and its end and is its sustainer. He is the word about God to us, displaying the radiance of his glory and communicating the nature of his character. Lastly, he is the answer for the desperate need of humanity--our sinfulness. He has made purification for sin.

The book of Hebrews will discuss at length what it means to have our sins dealt with by a high priest who ministers faithfully--putting away all those things about us that we fear and hate. Since he identifies with human beings, we never have to carry guilt or self-hatred for what we are becoming or have done. Jesus makes purification for sin. This will be one of the great themes of this book.

Finally, we are told that he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He finished everything--he fought all the battles and completed all the processes. There is nothing left to be done. Once and for all, completely and undeniably Jesus has done everything that needs to be done. Thus, he could sit down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, resting in the completeness of his work. He is worthy of our praise and worship because all the enemies have been conquered and all the battles won. Since all that needs doing has been accomplished, we, too, are invited to rest in the finished work of Christ.

The Boston Celtics used to have a coach named Red Auerhach. One of the best basketball coaches of all time, he put together the Celtic dynasty that won championship after championship. He had a habit that always psychologically destroyed

opposing coaches ante players. He would conclude at some point in a game that the Celtics were far enough ahead that the opposition could no longer catch up. Until then Auerhach would coach energetically pacing and waving his arms. Then, at that point, he would sit on the bench, light his cigar and watch the rest of the game. When Red sat down, the game was over. Nobody came back against the Celtics. Once he perceived that the team had won, he would sit down. This was psychologically devastating to the opposition because they knew that nobody beat the Celtics once Red sat down and lit his cigar.

Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. All opposition is conquered, all questions answered, all needs met. There are no doubts about what will be the end of history. We only wait to see in time the heavenly reality of the reign of Christ.

I am sure that many of you are acquainted with some if not all of the things we have been talking about. You know that God became man in Christ, that Christ purified us of our sins, and that he is the nature of God made plain in humanity. Although these may not be news to you, it is important to remind ourselves of them. And it is particularly important that we not treat these things lightly. We should never act as if these facts are wonderful to know but not important in terms of how we live or who we are.

Hebrews 2:1 says, "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." There is a pressure in this life to drift, to neglect the things that are important. Knowing that they are there and that they are true, we are tempted to not care about them. Chapter 12 has another appeal: "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." There are entanglements, distractions and the appeals of the flesh. Yet we need to deliberately make a choice to say, "If Jesus is the speech of God and the one who makes sense of creation, who declares the nature of God and who ministers to the need of men, then do not let me drift away from or neglect him. Do not let me fail in endurance or become entangled in something else."

We can be very religious and forget Christ. We can even get caught up in doing some wonderfully patriotic things. We can be working for the betterment of humanity and the success of the family--things that God cares about. They are important and wonderful, but they can be done without him. We can be busy with Christian activity and all manner of good endeavor, yet there may be little of Jesus in the midst of it.

Or we can compartmentalize our faith to Sunday and a midweek Bible study and leave Christ out of our business, homes and recreation. We can become unaware of God's presence in the daily things we do. Even though we know that our Lord upholds the creation and holds every atom together by his hand, we can walk through this creation ignoring him--drifting, neglecting, and entangling ourselves in other things.

We should hear the announcement of the opening verses of Hebrews and gird up the loins of our thinking to be true to them to let spontaneous praise of God come to our hearts at various times during the day. At any moment we should be able to say. "The Lord is here and I am having this conversation at his appointed time; I am protected by his presence, and he listens to what I think and do. I can thank him, can have periods of worship sewn throughout the fabric of our lives, not just saved for pre-determined, formal occasions.

Do not drift. Do not neglect. Do not get entangled. Do not let your life become aimless, listless and routine, allowing yourself to run around the same track doing and saying the same thing without a sense of his presence. Remember Jesus Christ is the Creator, the Heir, and the Sustainer. He is the radiance of the glory of God, the one who has represented his nature to humanity and purified us from sin.

There is much talk abroad in the world. You can go to a variety of spokesmen and receive expert testimony on any issue you like. If it is talk you want, talk is everywhere. In *My Fair Lady*, Eliza Doolittle complained to her teachers: “Words, words, words! I am so sick of words. I get words all day through, first from him and now from you. Is that all you blighters can do?” Conversation is everywhere, but God is not speaking mere words. He is speaking from his heart, acquainting us with everything that is important and necessary to us. He is reaching out to us, first through the prophets and now in his Son.

This summer my family and I explored a silver mine near Virginia City, Nevada. There are thousands of feet of tunnels and shafts that honeycomb the hills, created by men seeking the riches of the Comstock Lode. In the cramped, wet tunnel that we entered, there were holes that fell off into deep abysses. At one point, the guide who told us the history of the place turned off the light. The tunnel became pitch black! As she told us how the miners worked, she struck a match. The brilliance of that single match cut through the darkness. Then she lit a candle and put it on the wall saying, “This is how the miners worked.” And the candle was marvelous illumination. Then finally she flipped the lights on again, and the place became visible at every point making the dangers obvious. The fellowship among us tourists resumed because you could see to whom you spoke.

I was reminded of this experience while I was reading Hebrews. God spoke in ancient years with a match through the first prophets. Then a candle was lit and more truth was made available. Finally and fully, the light has been turned on through Christ. Everything we need to know about God has been told us in Christ. Everything we need to know about creation and about ourselves has been made plain. There are words everywhere, but the speech of God is made clear to us in Jesus. We need it desperately, and we need him at the center of our experience. We must grow more in love with him and more complete in our commitment and obedience to him.

Our Lord was transfigured before three of his disciples. They stood on a hilltop and watched the inner nature of Jesus display itself dazzlingly before them. The voice of God spoke to the disciples, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” That is God’s word to us as well. We need to hear him. Jesus in all his fullness is displayed before us in Hebrews. Hear him.

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