

'Hebrews' Monday - Part 1 (Keswick Convention 2003)

by Charles Price

Charles Price explores the supremacy of Christ in divine revelation and his sufficiency in the Christian experience through the letter to the Hebrews.

Duration: 20:35

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Hebrews 1:1-4, Hebrews 3:1, Hebrews 12:2

Topics: "Keswick Convention"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by discussing the use of drama and personal experiences in conveying God's message. He then introduces the letter to the Hebrews and emphasizes the importance of studying the Bible. The speaker explains that God has spoken to humanity through various means in the past, such as prophets, but now Christ is the superior revelation. The sermon highlights the superiority of Christ over the prophets and emphasizes the need to pay attention to the obvious truths that we often overlook.

Transcript

I just opened a bottle of water and spurted it all over my Bible and my notes. So I'll just wipe them off and hope they don't smudge too badly. But it's great to be with you, not just this morning, but this week, and to be able to share with you from the Word of God some truths, which I hope won't just give us more information, but which will equip us to live lives that are godly and effective and fruitful.

And it's going to be my privilege in these five mornings to lead you through the letter to the Hebrews. And if you have your Bible with you, and I hope you'll bring it with you to every session, because these are Bible studies, and you need to know that what we're saying is there in the text. I'm going to read just the first four verses of Hebrews chapter 1. Hebrews chapter 1, verse 1 to 4, I'm reading from the New International Version.

And the writer says this, In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the exact, sorry, the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven and so he became as much superior to the angels as the name he inherited is superior to theirs. That's as far as we're going to read for just a moment. You may have heard the story of the occasion that Sherlock Holmes and his sidekick Dr. Watson came on a camping trip here to the Lake District.

After they'd set up their tent, they had a good dinner and decided to retire for the night. And some hours later Holmes woke up, nudged his faithful friend Watson and said, Watson, wake up. Watson opened his eyes and Holmes said, Watson, what do you see? Watson looked up and said, I see millions and millions of stars.

What do you deduce from that? Holmes asked him and Watson pondered for a moment and said, Well, astronomically it tells me there are millions of galaxies and billions of stars. Astrologically I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically I deduce it's about quarter past three in the morning.

Meteorologically I suspect we're going to have a beautiful day tomorrow. Theologically it tells me God is great and all powerful and we're just insignificant parts of his creation. Why, what does it tell you, Holmes? And Holmes was silent for a moment and said, Watson, you idiot, it means somebody's stolen our tent.

Now why do I tell you that story? Is it because I'm competing with Steve Brady? I don't know. I'll tell you why I'm telling that story. Because there are some things that are so obvious that we miss them.

Just take them for granted. In our journey through the letters to the Hebrews I want to look at something that is so fundamental and actually it's so obvious that in actual fact many of us miss this and the significance of this and in a nutshell, in a nutshell it is the supremacy of Christ in divine revelation. We're going to talk about that a little this morning and the sufficiency of Christ in Christian experience.

You see, Christ, the writer of the Hebrews will tell us is not just a contributor to divine revelation. He is the arbitrator of divine revelation. That is, he is the ultimate and the final expression of truth.

We'll talk about that today. But he's also sufficient in Christian experience. He's not just playing a passive role in our Christian lives.

He's not just an onlooker or a spectator. He is its central participant and we'll see why. Sometimes you relegate Christ to being little more than the patron of our theology.

We do it all in his name. But it's become detached. Sometimes you relegate him to just being the teacher and we're left here to work out his teaching.

Sometimes you relegate him to just being the example that we try to emulate and follow and the elements of truth and all of that, of course but that's also the role that Mohammed plays in Islam. And he's dead. It's the role any religious leader plays in any new religion, any cult that he may start but the role of Jesus Christ is so much more and so much fuller and so much more active.

And we're going to look at that as we explore this letter to the Hebrews. And I want to suggest two key statements in this book which will guide our thinking in these next five mornings. The two statements, first in Hebrews chapter 3 and verse 1. Therefore holy brothers who share in the heavenly calling fix your thoughts on Jesus the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

Fix your thoughts on Jesus he says there. And in chapter 12 and verse 2 let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. And I want in these five mornings that we fix our thoughts on Jesus and we fix our eyes on Jesus and we'll discover this to be incredibly practical.

Now let me first make a few introductory comments about the letter. I'll do this fairly briefly and I'll begin by acknowledging two important things we don't know about this letter. First of all we don't know who wrote it.

If you have an authorized version it may well say at the top of the page the epistle of Paul to the Hebrews. But there is no certainty of that. It was certainly written in Paul's era but the book itself does not claim Pauline authorship and a number of reasons why we would seriously doubt that Paul was the writer.

Number one he signs his name to all his other letters right at the beginning. There is no name of a writer in this epistle. Secondly this author claims to be a second generation Christian.

In chapter 2 and verse 3 he speaks of this salvation which was announced by the Lord was confirmed to us by those who heard him. So the writer says I'm second generation. They're folks who heard Jesus, they passed it on to us.

Now if you read the letters of the Galatians Paul specifically claims he did not receive this message from any man. He received it directly from the Lord Jesus Christ himself and therefore that would be in conflict with that statement of Paul. The literary style too is different to Paul's.

Therefore it's extremely likely that Paul wrote this. In the absence of any certainty there are lots of folks who have speculated and we won't waste our time doing that this morning because if we do at the end of our speculation it's only speculation anyway. It's true when experts differ.

Fools are allowed an opinion so I do have an opinion but I won't bore you with it because it's just an opinion. But that's the first thing we don't know about who wrote this. First thing we don't know about this letter we don't know who wrote it.

Secondly we don't know who received it. We don't know who it was specifically written to. We know it was to a local church somewhere.

It wasn't a general letter as some of our New Testament letters are because in chapter 13 and verse 23 Paul says, the writer rather says let's just leave you awake. I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon I will come with him to see you.

So it's clearly a group of folks living in a specific geographical location. Timothy's coming when he's released and I'm going to come and join him as well. But the big question is who were these folks? And the big answer is we don't know.

Again there's lots of speculation. But the title that we know this letter by, the letter to the Hebrews has been known since the second century. It was probably not part of the original document but it's been known as that since the second century and it is most likely to be the accurate description, the consistent references to the Old Testament, the run right to this letter presupposes a thorough familiarity with the Old Testament Scriptures and that strongly suggests it's Jewish believers to whom he was writing.

Now some have suggested other possibilities but we won't take time looking at those. I'm going to assume that the epistle to the Hebrews is called the epistle to the Hebrews because it's an epistle to the Hebrews.

Is that a reasonable assumption? Well who are the Hebrews? Well of course they were the chosen people of God.

God had set them apart as a nation in Abraham. And when he called Abraham he said, I'll make you into a great nation and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. And this promise, not just to set them apart as a distinct people but through them to bless the world, was dependent on the coming of a Messiah.

The whole of Old Testament history from Abraham on orientates around the fact there's going to be a day in history when the Anointed One of God, the Messiah, will step into our history. The prophetic writings repeatedly look beyond the immediate circumstances of the people to whom they're addressing and saying but one day, one day, one day there's going to come a Messiah. Because until he comes their destiny would remain unfilled but the tragedy is, as John explains in John 1 verse 11, that he came to that which was his own and his own did not receive him.

They missed him. Why did they not receive him? Because they had misunderstood some fundamental things about him and this letter was written, I suggest to you, to address some of the fundamental misunderstanding about Jesus that the Jewish people had. He's writing to correct their ignorance of who Christ was and writing to explain how that Jesus Christ completes and fulfills Israel's history, Israel's law, and Israel's ceremonial rituals and Israel's priesthood.

These are some of the themes that run right the way through this letter. That's why Hebrews is the clearest exegesis of the Old Testament scriptures that we have in the New Testament. During these five mornings, I want to look at five issues.

We'll go progressively through the book. We, of course, cannot give equal time to every section. We'll have to miss out some sections but we'll go progressively through the book and my theme this morning is the supremacy of Christ in Revelation.

It runs from chapter 1 verse 1 to chapter 3 and verse 6. That is, God's revelation of himself comes to its climax and its completion in the person of Jesus Christ. That's why he begins, verse 1, in the past God spoke. Let me pause there, pick it up halfway through the verse.

In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. In the past God spoke, as a prophet, many ways, different times. In these last days he's spoken in his Son.

Now the writer takes one key thing for granted there and it is this, God speaks. Now it's true that through history God has always spoken but the very first introduction we have to God in Genesis chapter 1 is as a God who speaks. Genesis begins, in the beginning God, it makes the assumption, doesn't explain him, doesn't prove him, just assumes him.

And seven times in Genesis 1 it says, and God said, let there be light, and God said, let there be an expanse between the waters, and God said, and God said, and God said, seven times God said. If you know nothing else, at the end of reading Genesis chapter 1 you know this, God speaks. Now if God speaks, it follows he's got something to say.

Something to say that lies outside the realm of natural knowledge. Now there is a natural revelation of God. Psalm 19 tells us, The heavens declare the glory of God.

The skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech. Night after night they display knowledge.

There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world. Now the word says, the psalmist says, God speaks every night the stars come out because you look across the vastness of the universe and you say God is speaking about his greatness and his power.

Every time a little money spider runs across your table you say God is speaking about his detail and his minute interests. Creation reveals God. But if God speaks generally, he also speaks specifically.

And in these opening two and a half chapters of Hebrews, he talks about four key means by which God has spoken in the past and why these four key means are actually inadequate in themselves. And in these four key areas, Christ becomes the superior revelation. Let me explain them to you.

First of all, he is superior to the prophets. That's in verses 1 and 2. In the past, God spoke to our forefathers, to the prophets many times in various ways. Now amongst the Hebrews, of course, the prophets were the aristocracy of their history.

The role of the prophet was very simple. It was to speak to people on God's behalf. You read Jeremiah 23 sometime? Jeremiah says to the prophets of Israel, or God says to Jeremiah, if you would only listen to me, then you'd speak my word.

Because that was their job, to listen and speak. And they communicated God's message to people in various ways, it says. They communicated through preaching.

That was a common way. Thus says the Lord, they would say as they stood up and preached. They communicated through poetry.

There's lots of poetry in the written prophets that we have. They communicated through music. In Isaiah 7, you've got the song of a vineyard.

They communicated through drama. Don't think these are novels of our day, by the way. Ezekiel was a great actor.

Once he had to eat a scroll. That was pretty hard work, I would think. He carried on one day a 15-month one-man theater.

Ezekiel one day had to draw a picture on a clay board of Jerusalem and then make some toy soldiers and some toy batching rams and get a frying pan and then lie on his side with the pan between him and this model for 390 days, 13 months. And after 390 days, get up, turn over, lie on your right side for 40 days in front of the same model to demonstrate that after 390 years of Judah's rebellion, God was going to take them into exile for 40 years of punishment. So he spoke through drama, there's lots of drama, and he spoke through personal experience.

Hosea was a prophet, you know, who was told to marry a woman called Goma and Goma became a prostitute. And Hosea's heart was broken and God said, how do you feel about your wife? Hosea's response, it hurts. God said, that's what I feel about my people.

They hurt. You see, Jeremiah could stand up and say, God, sin is an offense to God. Jeremiah could preach that.

Hosea's message was, sin hurts God. Jeremiah didn't know that in the same way Hosea did. Because God communicates through personal experience.

However, at the end of every prophecy, the prophet would go home, sit down, scratch his head, and say, something isn't right. Something is missing from this. Now, we love the message of the prophets and they live today, but I'll tell you in a moment why Christ is superior to the prophets.

The second category, which he implies here and develops later in the epistle, is that he is superior to the priests. That is implied, or the priesthood, that's implied in the second part of verse 3, where he says there, after he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. Now, this is the theme of the priesthood.

And it's developed, as I say, more fully later, especially from chapters 5 to chapter 10. Now, the prophet and the priest were different, but they had contrasting roles. The role of the prophet was to speak to people on God's behalf, but the role of the priest was to speak to God on people's behalf.

God's message to people came through the prophets. Man's appeal to God came through the priest. And you know, there was a priesthood based on blood sacrifices that sought atonement to satisfy the just wrath of God.

And the primary function of the priest was to approach God for the purification of the sin of his people. But the problem with the priesthood, although God ordained it, was that the priest's work was never done. You find later, chapter 7, verse 27, it says there of the priest, he offered sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, then for the sins of the people.

It sounds tedious reading, doesn't it? Day after day, first for his own sins, then for the sins of the people. It was a tedious role. But here in this verse, it speaks of Christ as the priest.

When he provided purification for sins, he sat down. The priest of the Old Covenant never sat down. And so the priest had a vital role to play.

At the end of every sacrifice, at the end of every day, down at the tabernacle, or later down at the temple, the priest will go home, sit down, scratch his head, and say, something is missing. Something isn't right here. We love the message of the priests.

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