

THE GOD WHO SPEAKS
Hebrew 1:1-4
December 4, 2016

You should go ahead and open your Bibles to Hebrews Chapter 1, verses 1-4. But before we get into the text, I want to build some foundational points for perspective for the text.

God is the God Who Speaks!

This is my first major point -

I. God Speaks!

God is God of Revelation! He chose to reveal Himself! This is not a need of God, but an attribute of God! God declares Himself, shows Himself, makes Himself seen, heard, tasted, smelled, felt, perceived, ... able to be known, enjoyed, worshipped and glorified.

A. Why Does God Speak?

What is the chief end of man? *To glorify God and enjoy him forever!*

Why is this true?

*Because, **what is the chief end of God? To glorify Himself and enjoy Himself forever!***

(This is because there is no one or nothing greater; He would not be true to Himself if He did not glorify that which the greatest and most worthy of glory!)

You remember the video we have watched where **Piper defines God's "glory" as "the going public of His holiness!"**? Well, His glory is really the "going public" of all of His attributes – His entire nature and being! The radiance of Who He is *is His GLORY!*

1. To reveal Himself and communicate His glory

To be glorious and glorified God must be revealed! Revelation is synonymous with glory! God reveals Himself and we behold His glory! So, a foundational point for any basic theology or faith about God must be that God is glorious, therefore He must glorify Himself, and therefore He *must reveal* Himself or "speak" to show or communicate His glory!

2. To enable His creation to know Him

Another obvious foundational point that naturally follows is that if God did not reveal Himself, we could not know Him! We could not ponder, dream, speculate, or conjure up the truths or attributes of God by our own limited reason and abilities, especially since we are trapped in this physical dimension and world! Without taking the time to prove it, please accept the obvious truth that we can only know about God that which He chooses to reveal to us! **ALL** we know about Him comes from that which He reveals to us!

Therefore, we must ask,

B. How does God reveal Himself?

Broadly, in two ways – **General and Special Revelation!**

General Revelation is divided into two types – Inner and Natural Revelation. The Inner revelation we call Conscience. The Natural or External Revelation we call Creation.

Romans 1:19-20 (NASB)

¹⁹ because **that which is known about God is evident within them**; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world **His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.**

So the general revelation of God is given to all men, such that within them in their Conscience, and external to them in Creation, that which is known about God is evident, clearly seen and understood, such that they are without excuse. This general revelation is sufficient then to hold them both **accountable** and **condemnable**.

But what if God desired to reveal Himself even more, to make Himself even more glorious, to display not only His justice and wrath, but to display His mercy, grace, love and redeeming power? Such revelation would be “special” and could only be received if God specially enabled men to receive it! We who are believers and recipients are here today only by His gracious **Special** revelation!

The Special Revelation of Jesus Christ is given to us through the Scriptures of the Law, the Prophets, the Apostles and ... through **the Incarnation** – the coming of God the Son in the flesh. That is what we pause to consider and celebrate in this season of Advent, (which is simply Latin for “coming.”)

Think of God’s revelation from this perspective: We are trapped as humans in this “box” - a physical world governed by linear time, 3 dimensions of space, matter and energy. We cannot comprehend or know anything outside this “box” we live in, unless it is made known to us. All religions are the result of man going to the edge of the box and trying to peck out a hole through which we can see into the supernatural. But all our ponderings, ideas and imaginings on what we see and experience in the “box” are meant to lead us to desire more, to want to know the God Who created. But the Creator is more than His creation and our conscience – He is a Being, a Person and a supernatural One at that! We cannot know that which we cannot apprehend. So God in His grace has bursted into our blind box, and revealed Himself to us! That is the only true “faith,” and its called Christianity!

Therefore, to summarize my foundational point – God’s going public of His holiness, His attributes is His glory! His glorification of Himself means He chooses to reveal Himself. The God of the Bible has chosen to reveal Himself. He is not an idea to be pondered, a concept to be speculated, or a thought to be developed in the minds of men. He has decided and purposed what He wants revealed about Himself to us. In all such revelation, whether General or Special, what is the *mode* or *means* or the “metaphor” used for *how God reveals Himself??*

He speaks! He speaks through Creation! He said “let there be ...” and there was and is! He speaks through Conscience! He says this is inherently right or wrong in our consciences, by the still small voice of His word inside us!

The Special revelation of the OT Scriptures was much greater than the General revelation of Creation and Conscience. **But, is there something even greater than that? What if God desired to “speak” to us in an even more personal, intimate and knowable way?**

Hebrews 1:1-4 (NASB) ¹ **God**, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² 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. ³ 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, ⁴ having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

These words, broken into sentences and verses in our English Bibles, are actually one long sentence in the original Greek. One commentator has described them as **the most perfect Greek sentence in the entire New Testament**. Notice *how dramatic and profound this sentence is* – no usual introduction to an epistle or letter, identifying the author or the audience, no greetings or salutations. He gets right to the point of the whole epistle!

Let’s examine the basic structure of this one long majestic sentence: What is **the verb** of the sentence? **“has spoken”** in verse 2. And what is **the subject** of that verb in verse 1? **God!** There are many phrases and clauses that modify and expand the sentence, but basically, at its heart, it comes down to these three words – **“God has spoken!”**

The greatest Being (God) has done the greatest thing (He spoke) and met our greatest need (to hear and know Him)!

It is often said that “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Well actually, **a “word” is worth a thousand pictures!** Especially a word from God, that is perfect, infallible, inerrant, full of power, grace and truth! Such a word is much more informative, more communicative, and more revealing to us than anything else God could have given us! But, ..., **this Word gets even better!**

- **Paul Harvey Christmas story of the birds**

The Jewish people have an old saying: **“The word must become flesh.”** The meaning is that God intends people to be affected by His words *when they see those words lived out* in the lives of others. The Jews believed that this was the mission God had for them. They recognized that it’s not enough to speak the Word or communicate it in some way. That’s important, but the Word actually has to be in human flesh. **It has to be demonstrated.**

Back to the text in Hebrews – So, God has spoken, but **How exactly in this text?**

C. How is God “speaking” in Hebrews 1? This is beautifully answered in three sets of contrasts.

1. First, the *When* of God’s Special Revelation in His Word:

What is the first time period given in verse 1? **“long ago”**

In the days of the Old Testament or Covenant, God spoke long ago, from the time of Adam to the time of Malachi.

But, then the contrast – when is the contrasting time period in verse 2? “in these last days”

When are “these last days?” They began with the coming of God in Jesus Christ into the world at His birth. But they did not cease at His death and resurrection! They continue on until today! We are *still in the “last days,”* and will be until His “coming” is complete, at the end of this “present age!”.

2. Second, the *Recipients (the Who)* of God’s Revelation in His Word

In verse 1, we are told plainly that God spoke to the **“fathers.”** These are the “patriarchs” and preceding generations of Jews all the way back to Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. They were spoken to “in” or through the “prophets.”

But notice the **contrast** in verse 2. In these “last days” He has spoken to **“us!”** And, by implication and the fact that we are still in the last days, He has spoken to **US! (You and me!)** We no longer have the good news delivered second hand through someone else, but God has delivered His revelation message in a letter with our name on it! God’s revelation is not only progressive, it is **personal now!** No longer only a select few patriarchs and prophets get to hear directly from God, but in the last days we all can hear from Him directly and personally.

3. Third, notice the *How* of God’s Revelation in His Word

When He spoke before, He did so in **“many portions and many ways.”** This is also translated “many times and many ways” or “sundry times and divers manners”. Many portions, many books, many manners, dreams, visions, burning bushes, a cloud of fire, a voice from heaven, even a donkey! From Genesis to Malachi, from many authors, many parts, many times, and many ways! It was all the preparation in shadow and picture for the coming of the Messiah.

But, look in verse 2 at the **contrast** for how He spoke now in these last days – **“in (or by) His Son!”** This is the most dramatic shift and change of all in the revelation!

But the emphasis of the text is not only on the change in person, but **the change in mode!** The original text does not include any definite article before the word for son (*huios*), and there is no personal pronoun for “His” (that was added by the translators). The text is clear that God spoke before **“by”** or **“through”** the prophets. But here it is simply and literally, God has now spoken to us **“in sonness!”** He has changed His mode completely and

supremely to the ultimate and final revelation! ***He was speaking through the prophets; now He is speaking in His Sonness!***

The prophets were mere men like us, but there is nothing “mere” about the Son. This was explained and clarified by God the Father Himself, on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Matthew 17:1-5 (NASB) ¹ Six days later Jesus *took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and *led them up on a high mountain by themselves. ² And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. ³ And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. ⁴ Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "**This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!**"

Moses and Elijah symbolized all of the Old Testament lawgivers and prophets, but they only spoke in shadows and types. Jesus speaks in substance and Person! **He is a Revelator and a Speaker in a category of One!**

And, the message of advent and Christmas is that **He is *still speaking* as He is *still coming*!** As the Scriptures tell us, we are most blessed to be still in the last days! We are in the age of His coming! He is not just the Promised One Who has “*come*,” He is the Christ Who is (still) ***coming*!** All the Old Testament prophets saw only one age of His coming, not two distinct events, but one coming in the last days, not seeing the valley of the interval between His first coming and the second. As Martha professed to Him even while standing face to face with Jesus, “*You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.*” (John 11:27)

The Christ Who was promised came and spoke. But, the Christ Who came is still coming and the Christ Who spoke is still speaking!

So, point one is that God Speaks! He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets, but now in these last days He has spoken to us in His Son! And He is His ultimate, supreme final revelation! Not that the previous Old Testament revelation was flawed or lacking in any way, but that His “Sonness” is the completion of the progression of perfect revelation! *It doesn't get any better or louder than Jesus Christ! He is God's ultimate and final Word!*

If point one is that “God Speaks,” what might we logically assume point two might be? “*What Is He Saying?*”

II. What is God Saying?

We've looked at the When, the Who and the How of God's Revelation. Now let's look at the “What.” **What is God revealing, - what is He saying in and about His Son?**

Verse 2b of our text begins a seven-fold string of phrases about the supremacy and preeminence of Christ over all others and all things! The Jewish audience would have

recognized the significance of the perfect number of seven, and they would have recognized these proclamations are showing Christ to be the perfect complete fulfillment of the OT offices of King, Prophet and Priest!

*This is truly a majestic and glorious statement, and tells us so much in so few words about Jesus Christ! **What is God saying about Jesus Christ?***

1. Heir of All Things

Notice the first modifying phrase *“Whom He appointed heir of all things.”* Heirship naturally follows sonship. Since He is the One and Only Son of God, He naturally and logically gets it **all!** This presents Christ as the rightful King over His kingdom, which includes all things! Jesus already has rightful claim to all things, all people, all angelic beings, ... *everything!* *But*, all things are not yet “subjected” to His rule, reign and heirship. But that is the great consummation to which we are all headed, in wrath or grace, cursing or blessing – that Great Day at the end of these “last days.”

That is real hope as we are co-heirs with the Heir of all things!

2. Creator of All Things

The next phrase is *“through Whom He made the world(s).”* As Carlton Brown will teach us in two weeks from Col. 1:16, *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.* Jesus Christ the Son was the agent through Whom God the Father created all things. Again, He is the true King because of His Divine role in the act of creation.

I use “worlds” plural, as the root word used here is not the usual one for world in the Bible – *cosmos*. The word used here is *aionas*, which is literally interpreted “ages” or “all that exists,” including the time, space, matter and energy continuum.

Just our galaxy is so vast it takes light 100,000 years to cross it, and contains over 100 billion stars and “worlds.” Scientists now think there are over 100 billion galaxies, with at least the same number of stars. And the numbers grow with each advance in our ability to “see” them. And yet, God the Son said “let there be” and there was all this we know and much more!

Psalm 121:1-2 (NASB) ¹ I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From where shall my help come? ² My **help comes** from the LORD, ***Who made heaven and earth.***

Knowing that your King is the Creator of all things is very comforting when you need and depend upon His help. There is no doubt in His ability or His care for you by considering His “speaking” of and care for creation, as in the example of the sparrow.

3. God’s Radiance

Moving to verse 3, the next phrase of His supremacy is *“He is the radiance of His glory.”* The word for “radiance” means “brightness, beams or rays, effulgence, or shining forth.” We are right back to our discussion on God’s “glory.” For it to be revealed it must “go forth.” And His “glory” is the “weight” of Who God is.

A great analogy is our sun. The light, heat and energy we receive from the sun is not the sun. The sun is a boiling mass of hydrogen bombs churning in millions of degrees hot plasma. We not only can’t “see” the sun, we don’t want to either! But the radiation from the sun travels the 93 million miles to us, penetrates our atmosphere and by it we live, as we feel its heat, see its light and benefit from its energy it imparts to earth. Its radiation and shining is not the sun, but is the same as the sun!

Likewise, the Son is not the Father but, as He told Phillip, “If you have seen me, you’ve seen the Father.” “I and the Father are one.” He is the radiance of His glory. This points to His fulfilment of the Divine role of the Prophet, unlike any other, Who shines forth the truth of God.

Try thinking of that when you face some problem or temptation or sin. Do you really think you can succumb to that temptation when your Savior is the radiance of the glory of God, the brightness of which would dim a billion suns! We stand by grace with Him in the blaze of the glory of God, how can we ignore that and live in the darkness of our flesh and this world?

4. God’s Being

Next, we see *“the exact representation of His nature.”* This is an interesting phrase because of the two root words for “representation” and “nature.” The first is the only time in the Bible the Greek word **character** is used. (In Col. 1:15, the root *eikon* is used when it says “He is the *image* of the invisible God.”) Character often referred to a stamp or die used to make **the seal or imprint** of the King. This means He is just like God in His “nature” or “being.” The next Greek root is **hupostaseos**, which literally means **“the under-standing.”** So Christ is the express and exact perfect representation of God’s very nature, being and understanding. As we are told in Col. 2:9, *“in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”*

Again, this is part of His fulfilment as Prophet, representing the character and nature of God to us, His people.

We often think we need to “hear from God” on something major in our life. I sure have before and cried out in desperation to God about my burdens to hear from Him. But perhaps we may often forget that we can but **look to Jesus to see what we need to hear.** As one Reformer once said in reverse, *“There is in God no un-Christlikeness at all!”* Hear and see exactly Who God is in Jesus Christ!

5. Sustainer of All Things

Next, we see that He *“upholds all things by the word of His power.”* Again, in the role of the Prophet, His power and position is maintained in His word. As Luke 1:37 literally translated means, *“with God, not a word is without power.”* And the root word for power, in both places is what we get our word for dynamite from!

As expressed in Col. 1:17, *“in Him all things hold together.”* God the Son is not only the Creator of all things, He is also the Sustainer of all things. Contrary to Deism, He did not create all things and then let them run their own course with no intervention or involvement from God after creation.

In fact, science itself tells us that our creation should not exist. Even the most basic element of matter, the atom, should not exist. In the nucleus, all the protons are positively charged and should repel each other, blowing the atom apart in a nuclear holocaust. Yet, scientists have long been forced to admit there is some strange unexplained “force” that holds all matter together. They even call it the “God force.” It’s like God the Son said “let there be,” and then went to saying “hold!” One day He will say “let go” and all we see shall be consumed by “burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat.” (2Pe. 3:12)

God doesn’t wind the clock up and let it go on its own. As R.C Sproul said, if there is one random atom in this universe, free of God’s sovereignty, then God is not God and we have no guarantee that any promise of God will ever be fulfilled. But God clearly tells us, *“He upholds all things by the word of His power.”* That includes the daily details of our life that we try to handle ourselves, (as if we can).

6. Redeemer of All Things

In verse 3, the next phrase is *“when He had made purification of sins.”* This phrase is focused on His role as the perfect High Priest. His life and death perfectly satisfied the wrath of God, as only God could endure His Own wrath. And yet, only a perfect man could die for our sins.

And notice that the verb is in the past tense – *“had made!”* This means the redemption has been accomplished, the work is done, or as He said from the cross, *“It is finished!”*

This purification accomplished not only redemption for us, but also for all things. As we know from Romans 8, all creation groans and suffers under the weight of our sin. But His saving work accomplished redemption for all creation, that will be realized when He makes all things new!

Do we just know this in our head, but fail to live it out in our lives? In other words, do our thoughts and feelings betray us in that we really don’t accept the fact that “it is finished,” and we cannot do anything to save ourselves or to keep us saved! We should reject the temptation to get into the mode that thinks we can add to what only He could do. We are saved *only* by the life and work of Christ!

7. God’s Exaltation

The last phrase is found at the end of verse 3, *“He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”* When you study the tabernacle or temple descriptions in the Old Testament, you notice there are lamps, tables, altars, pillars, bowls, lavers, stands, etc. But one piece of furniture **missing is a chair!** As Hebrews 10:11-12 says, *“Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,”*

Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high!” The right hand of any ruler was the seat of honor and the symbol of his greatest power and authority. That is why I entitled this “God’s Exaltation!” Christ has purchased and earned His exaltation by His purifying and saving work of redemption! **He does not sit to rest, but to rule!** And we look forward to the day when all His enemies are put under His feet!

But He is not only sitting in ruling majesty at God’s right hand, He is also interceding for us as our Great High Priest. When we don’t know how to pray, need Him to defend us from the enemy, have no hope but in Him alone, can see no way out but through Him, ... when we need Him most He is there for us – interceding and sending His Spirit for comfort and help!

In summation, notice that the **result** of this wonderful seven-fold preeminence in verse 4 is that Jesus Christ has inherited a more excellent name than any of the angels. This goes back to the Jewish audience who greatly respected and revered the angels. But God is declaring that His Son is much better than any one or all of them. As a result, He has a **name that “above all names.”**

In summary, there are two major points to this message from this text –

- I. **God Speaks!**
- II. **What is He Saying?**

In closing, the third major point is obvious in response to these –

- III. **Are We Listening?**

If God is speaking to us, and He is declaring Who Jesus Christ is – His Son, and what He’s done; shouldn’t we at least hear and listen to Him?

Number 1, He’s God, He made us, and owns us, so how can we choose to not hear or listen? Number 2, He is speaking to **us**, individually and personally, so how can we ignore that condescension and loving grace? Number 3, our very lives depend on it! We have no truth within ourselves, no hope from within ourselves, and are helplessly lost without His word of power in our lives.

Not only for future eternity, but now in this life, not one word of God is without power! His word is truth that can set us free. His word is life that can deliver us from death in many ways.

What is He “saying” to you or to me today? IF we don’t hear Him, it’s because we’re not listening, because He’s SPEAKING! Remember what we are told in Heb. 3:7, **“...the Holy Spirit says, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS...”**

And, I remind you of the words from God the Father in heaven on the Mount of Transfiguration: **“This is My Beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!”**

Is it a “word” of conviction, of repentance, of belief or faith, of obedience, of peace, of comfort, of reconciliation, of encouragement, or of hope?

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!

What more can He say than to you He hath said,

To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

What “more” can He say to you? He sent His Own Son!

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

BLESSING: I don’t know what God may be saying to you today, but I know for certain something He is saying to us all. I will say to you what God in Christ said to us in His final words of His final revelation: ***The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.*** (Rev. 22:17)

He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. (Rev. 22:20-21)