

## **CHRISTMAS AND THE GOD WHO SPEAKS (Hebrews 1:1-3)**

There was an old missionary who had worked alone on the foreign mission field for many years. Finally, he received a letter from his mission board informing him that they had raised the money to send him an assistant. They sent him a young man who had just finished seminary.

When the newly appointed missionary arrived at the mission station, a meeting was called. The chief and all the people of the tribe among whom the missionary worked came to greet him. After showering him with gifts and expressing their appreciation for his coming, they asked him to speak. Since he had not yet learned their language, the seasoned missionary translated for him.

The new, seminary graduate stood up and said, “We mortals must always remember that there is an infinite and qualitative distinction between the eternal gospel and all the historical manifestations of it under the varied contingencies of human existence.”

The old man stared at the young missionary for a few moments in disbelief. Then, in the people’s mother tongue, the wise missionary said, “Friends, he says he loves you, and he is glad to be here!”

That is the message of the Bible, and it is the message of Christmas. Through Christmas event, the coming of His Son, God is saying to us, “I love you, and I’m glad to be here.”

Beginning today, we are going to embark on a new study of one of the most difficult letters in the NT. For many years, I avoided preaching through the letter we know as Hebrews. In the introduction to his commentary on Hebrews, New Testament scholar N.T. Wright wrote something that I believe we will find to be true in our own experience of this journey through Hebrews. He wrote:

People often find it to be a bit difficult, because it uses ideas that are strange to us. But, like meeting a new friend, we will find as we get to know it that it is full of interest and delight, with a powerful message that comes home to today’s and tomorrow’s church as much as it did to yesterday’s.

Turn with me to Hebrews 1:1-3. We are going to focus on four truths about the God who speaks.

### **God Speaks When He Has Something to Say**

According to our text, there are two phases in which God has spoken. First, He spoke before His Son came, and then He spoke through His Son’s coming. Before Jesus came, whenever God had something to say He used a variety of means to do so. Sometimes, He inspired prophets; at other times, He gave visions or performed wonders.

Think for a moment about the varied ways God spoke before His Son came. God spoke:

to Job out of a whirlwind,  
to Joseph in dreams,  
to Moses in a burning bush,  
to Balaam through a donkey,  
to Joshua and many others through an angel,  
to Samuel in a voice in the night,  
to Elijah in a still, small voice,  
to Daniel in visions, and  
to not only His people but also to the wicked through  
God-chosen, God-inspired prophets.

Whenever God had something to say, He always found a way to communicate His message.

Following the ministry of the prophet Malachi, God was silent for some 400 years. During that time there was no prophetic voice until John the Baptist appeared on the scene as a lone voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord."

God spoke in numerous ways before Jesus came, and then He spoke through the coming of His Son. It is clear that God is still speaking through the coming of His Son. Just as John prepared the way for the coming of the Lord, Jesus prepared the way for the coming of His Spirit. Because Jesus came and then left, His Spirit came. Whenever God has something to say His Spirit communicates that word to us. He may use Scripture, a person, circumstances, or some other means, but when God has something to say, He can and will make His message known.

Have you ever met anybody who apparently likes the sound of his/her own voice? Sure, you have. Every one of us knows individuals who are talkers. They have the gift of gab, and they make full use of it. It doesn't matter what the subject is, they know something about it or least pretend to and feel compelled to share their views and thoughts on the subject.

Some 33 years ago, I was a chaplain at Baptist Medical Center in OKC. One day, I walked into the room of an elderly woman. I greeted her, introduced myself to her, and held out my hand to shake hers. She grabbed my hand and wouldn't let go. What is worse is that she started talking, and she wouldn't stop. I was her captive audience. Now, I'm sure she was lonely and possibly scared, and as a chaplain, I have always tried to be empathetic, but after 20 minutes I didn't care anymore. I just wanted to get away. Finally, I had to forcibly remove my hand from hers and tell her I had to go. She was still talking as I walked out the door.

God doesn't do that. He doesn't talk your ear off.

You might say to yourself, "Yeah, but the Bible is an awfully, big book." That's true, but remember, God didn't give it all at one time. The 66 books of the Bible were compiled over a span of 1500 years having been written by some 40 authors. God could have made the Bible a lot bigger book had He wanted to. He could easily have made it much larger than all the volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Given the large time-frame during which the Bible was written, I would say God was rather selective.

The point is: God speaks when He has something to say. Our job isn't to get God to talk; our job is to listen when He does. Are you listening? Are you seeking to hear and heed His voice?

We've looked at the **timing** of God's communication. Now, let's consider the **audience**.

## **God Speaks to Those Who Need to Hear Him**

I want to suggest that the greatest need of your life, my life, and anybody's life is to hear God. We simply need to hear God. Unfortunately, most people are listening to something else or to someone else.

- Some people want to hear what Wall Street has to say.
- Some people listen for what Hollywood has to say.
- Some listen for what the fashion magazines have to say.
- Some people listen for what newspaper or the TV or cable news has to say.
- Far too many of us are listening to what our family, friends, and others on social media have to say.

To whom and for whom are you listening?

Our greatest need is to hear God and to listen for His voice. Is God speaking to you? Are you listening? Can you hear Him? Jesus identified Himself as the Shepherd and His people as His sheep, and He said that His sheep know His voice. Do you know His voice? Can you discern His above all the others that are clamoring for your attention?

God speaks when He has something to say, and He speaks to those who need to hear Him. All of us qualify on that score, but only those who belong to Him truly hear Him.

There are some who seem not to want to hear God. I think that is because they do not know how much He loves them and cares for them. Those who know how much God loves them, long to hear Him and intently listen to Him.

Some years ago, I read a book written by Calvin Miller. I've said before that Calvin Miller grew up in Enid, OK. He graduated from Enid High School. I've read several of his many books. This book was entitled, *The Empowered Communicator*. It was written by a preacher to preachers about how to become a better preacher. In the introduction of the first chapter, he included a fictional letter from the audience to the speaker. Listen to a portion of that letter.

*Dear Speaker,*

*I would very much like to hear what you have to say. I am afraid, however, that my attention is locked to all who want to speak to me but have no desire to know who I am . . .*

*I know you want me to listen to you. I will begin to do it, as soon as I sense that my needs are more important to you than your words. I am plagued with fears, but I promise to hear you the moment you help me feel secure and unafraid. I will listen when you prove to me that you can help me by wrapping my anxieties in peace.*

*Your speech will never reach my ear until your eye has seen me as I really am.  
I am loneliness waiting for a friend.  
I am weeping in want of laughter.  
I am a sigh in search of consolation.  
I am a wound in search of compress.*

*If you want to unlock my attention, you have but to convince me you want to be my friend. When you make me feel like I am the only person in this vast audience, I will give you what I have given to very few: the unbroken focus of my mind.*

—Your Audience

God is the greatest Communicator, and He wants to be your friend, your Father, your Savior, and so much more. Do you know the lengths to which He has gone to show you how much He cares for you? That is what Christmas is all about! With that in mind, give Him your undivided attention.

We have looked at God's **timing** and His **audience**. Now, let's consider His **medium**.

### **God Speaks by the One Who Is the Word**

The word of God comes primarily in three forms. There is His spoken word . . . His written word . . . and His incarnate word. All three of those are different forms of what we call special revelation. There are two broad categories of divine revelation: special revelation and general revelation. When God reveals His existence to everyone, that is known as general revelation. One form, probably the chief form, of general revelation is Creation.

Listen to Psalm 19:1-4 in the NLT:

- <sup>1</sup> The heavens proclaim the glory of God.  
The skies display his craftsmanship.
- <sup>2</sup> Day after day they continue to speak;  
night after night they make him known.
- <sup>3</sup> They speak without a sound or word;  
their voice is never heard.
- <sup>4</sup> Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,  
and their words to all the world.

That Bible passage, which is special revelation, describes how God speaks through general revelation. Since there is a creation, there has to be a Creator, and that Creator speaks through His creation.

Another form of general revelation is the conscience. Intuitively, we know there is right and wrong. Since there is a moral law that exists, there has to be a moral Law Giver, and that Law Giver speaks through our conscience.

Special revelation, however, is different from general revelation. General revelation is for all people everywhere, but special revelation is given to a smaller number of people. General revelation teaches us there is a God, but only special revelation teaches us how to

have a relationship with this God. No matter how many beautiful sunsets you see and regardless of how often your conscience accuses you, you will never know that Jesus is the Son of God, that He lived a perfect life, that He died on a cross to pay the penalty of sin, that He arose from the dead, and that if you repent of your sin and turn to Him in faith as Savior and Lord, that you can have a relationship with God. That only comes through special revelation.

It is possible for God to reveal Himself through a vision or through the visitation of an angel. Both of those are found in Scripture, and both are forms of special revelation, but the most common forms of special revelation are Scripture and the coming of Jesus Christ. The first is the written word, and the second is the Living Word.

I believe the Bible is the word of God. It doesn't just contain God's word; it is God's word. I have committed my life to the task of preaching and teaching the Bible. I believe in the truthfulness of the Bible—its reliability and authority. I believe in its complete trustworthiness, and any adjective you want to use to convey that truth is fine with me.

But make no mistake about this, when it comes down to which is more important, Jesus as the word of God or the Bible as the word of God, I'm going with Jesus. We must never elevate the Bible above Jesus; that is wrong.

It is not the Bible that saves us; it is Jesus who saves us. I don't worship the Bible; I worship the Jesus to whom the Bible infallibly and authoritatively points.

According to the writer of Hebrews, it is through Jesus that God has finally and fully spoken.

I like what Joni Eareckson Tada wrote. She pointed out:

Just think, every promise God has ever made finds its fulfillment in Jesus. God doesn't just give us grace; He gives us Jesus, the Lord of grace. If it's peace, it's only found in Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Even life itself is found in the Resurrection and the Life. Christianity isn't all that complicated . . . it's Jesus.

Pastor and Bible commentator, John MacArthur, noted seven truths about Jesus in Hebrews 1:2-3. He discusses:

- **Jesus' Heirship**
- **His Creatorship**
- **His Radiance**
- **His Being**
- **His Administration**
- **His Sacrifice and**
- **His Exaltation.**

We don't have time to look at all seven. Let me simply point out the first and the last. First, we are told that Jesus has been appointed heir of all things. That means that Jesus is the owner of all things, not some things for a few things. He owns all things in heaven and on the earth.

That means, when you pray, you can pray in faith because you know that Jesus has

the ability and the resources to do exactly what you ask when you ask it for His glory, not your own selfish desires.

Notice the last thing our text tells us about Jesus in v. 3. After Jesus did what He needed to do to provide for our salvation, He sat down at the right hand of the Father. He didn't stand at God's side; He sat down. What is the significance of Jesus sitting down?

In the Temple, there were no chairs in which the High Priest could sit. There were many furnishings in the temple. There were pillars and bronze bowls. There was a table for loaves of bread. There were candlesticks. There was an altar of incense. There was the Ark of the Covenant.

But there was no chair. Why? What is the purpose of a chair? A chair is something you sit in when your work is done. And that is just it. A priest's work was never done. No sacrifice the priest made was ever enough. There was always more sin that required another sacrifice.

After Jesus made the sacrifice of Himself for sin, what did He do? He sat down. Why? He sat down because His work was done. There was nothing left to do. He made one, and only one sacrifice to bring atonement for all the sin of those who would one day place their faith and trust in Him. No more sacrifices would be needed.

A person sits down when the work is done and when the victory is won.

When I was a kid, Red Auerbach was the coach of the Boston Celtics. At that time, the Boston Celtics were the New York Yankees of professional basketball. It seems like they always won the NBA championship. Through the years, the Celtics have played in a total of 21 NBA Finals and won 17 of them. The majority of those occurred when Red Auerbach was the coach. He was an energetic coach. Throughout the game, he paced the sidelines, waving his arms, yelling at the players. Red had a curious habit. Whenever he sensed that his Celtics had the game in hand, that the opposition would not come back, he would calmly walk back to his chair, sit down, light up a big cigar and smoke it. That was psychologically devastating to the opposing team. They knew whenever Red Auerbach sat down to smoke his cigar the game was over. The fat lady had done sung. Nobody ever beat the Celtics once Coach Auerbach sat down to smoke his cigar.

When Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father, He gave a signal to Satan that it was over. No matter what Satan might do now, Jesus was and always will be the Victor.

Jesus sat down when the work was done. He sat down when the battle was won.

It was that Jesus through whom God fully and finally spoke. God spoke through Jesus then, and God still speaks through Him today. The most important thing is, "What is God saying?" We have looked at **timing (when)**, **audience (who)**, **medium (how)**. Now, we turn our attention to His **message (what)**.

## **God Speaks About What Matters the Most**

God spoke through Jesus, but what did He say? We are told in Hebrews 1 that God spoke through Jesus, but in Hebrews 2 we find a clue as to what He said. Look at 2:3. Jesus told us that God wants to save us, that He came to save us, and that if we will turn from our sin and place our trust in Him, He will save us. Jesus came to declare God's

love and how that love can be received.

Today, if you were privileged to tour the grounds of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York you could find the graves of the only two civilians to be buried there. They were two sisters who lived just across the Hudson River from West Point at a place called Constitution Island. Their names were Anna and Susan Warner.

Their uncle, the Rev. Thomas Warner, had been the Academy Chaplain, and the two sisters taught Sunday school classes for many generations of cadets. These young soldiers would row across the Hudson, and the sisters would provide lemonade and ginger cookies along with the word of God. It is believed that Dwight D. Eisenhower was one of the last cadets to attend Anna's Sunday School class. Susan had died years before. Eisenhower graduated in 1915, the same year that Anna passed.

When the sisters died, the Academy honored them by providing for them to be buried at the Academy cemetery, an unusual exception to the rules, a high honor, indeed!

Every month, Anna would write a hymn which she used to teach the cadets truths from God's word. One of those songs is the famous is the much beloved, "Jesus Loves Me." The words to this popular song were written originally as a poem in Anna's novel, *Say and Seal*. In the book, the words were spoken to comfort a dying child. In 1861, William Bradbury set the words to music and added the chorus, "Yes, Jesus loves me!" The joyful tune and simple words soon became favorites around the world.

Stories have grown up around this song. One is that someone asked Karl Barth, the great theologian, to summarize the essence of the Christian faith in a few words, and he responded, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Another is that, at the height of persecution in Communist China, a Christian sent a message to a friend. The message escaped the attention of the censors, because it said simply: "The *this I know* people are well." The phrase, the "*this I know* people" clearly identified the Christian community in China. It assured the friend that the church in China was alive and well.

Through Jesus, we too, are the "this I know" people. We know God loves us because the God who speaks told us.