

God Has Spoken

Hebrews 1:1-4

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Hebrews 1:1-4 is a traditional reading for Christmas Day. But I want to look at it on this first Sunday of Advent because it says such amazing and marvelous things about Jesus. This text helps us better understand what Christmas was about and leads us to celebrate with great joy.

The writer of Hebrews says that in the past God spoke through the prophets in many and various ways. This refers to the entire Old Testament. God spoke through his actions, through commandments, through history and prophecy, through songs and poetry. Verse 4 speaks of Jesus being superior to the angels. We might wonder where that came from—why the mention of angels? But Jewish tradition saw the Law coming through angels. So they were another way that God spoke to the people of old.

One way to get a handle on the story of God's dealings with humanity in the OT is to look at the covenants God initiated and made with people. There's Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. We can think of the big moments in the Bible's story. There's creation, the fall, covenant, community—Abraham and Sarah's family and the nation of Israel. All of this leads to Christ and is redeemed and fulfilled in him. Then comes Christ's community, the Church, and, finally, the consummation, the new creation.

Through all of this, God makes himself known, he reveals himself and his will. There's a storyline of God's purpose, of redemption and restoration in the Bible's story. When the writer of Hebrews says God spoke through the prophets, he probably has in mind Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Elijah and others, as well as those prophets whose writings are preserved in Scripture.

The reality of God's speaking in the past gives us a strong sense of continuity. It affirms that God did speak to the people of Israel in the OT. There's a connection between Israel and the Church. God began with Israel and now works in the church and what the church believes. We can see unity in God's revelation as we move from the past into the "incomparable present" (Donald Hagner, *Hebrews, A Good News Commentary*).

Though there's continuity and connection with what's gone before, now God has spoken in a new way. God's speaking in the past in many forms through the prophets came in segments or episodes. It wasn't continuous. Now, the many voices and sounds of God's revelation have been joined into a single voice that always speaks. "In these last days God has spoken to us by a Son."

The coming of Jesus marked the beginning of the "last days." God's ancient promises began to be fulfilled. The kingdom of God began to enter the present age. The old world started dying and a new world started coming. Theologically, we've been in the last days since Jesus. Chronologically, we don't know what time it is—that is, we don't know when *the* last day will be.

The bigger point here is that God has spoken by his Son or in the person of his Son. God has focused his revelation, God has spoken fully and decisively and finally in Jesus Christ. Hebrews here is very similar to the Gospel of John (1:1-18) and to Paul (Philippians 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20). Really, all the Gospel writers and the entire New Testament exalt Jesus and declare that God is revealed in him. God has spoken his final word in Jesus.

You and me we use so very many clumsy words
The noise of what we often say is not worth being heard
When the Father's wisdom wanted to communicate his love
He spoke it in one final perfect Word

And so the Father's fondest thought took on flesh and bone
He spoke the living luminous Word, at once His will was done
And so the transformation that in man had been unheard
Took place in God the Father as he spoke that final Word

And so the Light became alive
And manna became Man
Eternity stepped into time
So we could understand

He spoke the Incarnation and then so was born the Son
His final word was Jesus, He needed no other one
Spoke flesh and blood so He could bleed and make a way Divine
And so was born the baby who would die to make it mine

(Michael Card, "The Final Word," *Immanuel* 19)

Hebrews now shows us the uniqueness and superiority of the Son. God's Son, incarnate in Jesus, is the *heir of all things*. As the unique Son of God, he possesses all that God has, which is everything.

He's also the *one through whom God made the universe*. At the beginning, in creation, and at the end, in inheritance, Jesus the Son of God is central. Like other NT writings which borrow from Jewish ideas about Wisdom, Hebrews portrays Jesus as the agent of creation. God created through God's Word or Son to make all things. In becoming human, the Son of God came into the world he had made.

Recently, a survey about Americans' beliefs was released. I was stunned by one of the findings. Among believers who are committed to the centrality of Jesus and the authority of Scripture, 78% agreed that "Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God"

(<https://thestateoftheology.com/>). That belief is an ancient heresy that the Church rejected. God the Son, who was incarnate in Jesus, is not a creature of God's. He exists with God and as God from eternity. If Jesus isn't truly God, he's not able to save us. If he's not truly human, his salvation doesn't reach us. But he is truly "eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father" (*The Nicene Creed, The United Methodist Hymnal* #880).

This Son, through whom God has spoken, whom God has appointed and through whom God created, *is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's being*. As the sun's rays come from the sun and enable us to see, Jesus radiates from God and enables us to know God. Coins are stamped with an image. There's a press or a stamp that's the image coins are stamped with. Jesus is the stamp of God's image.

In October I was preaching at the church where I grew up. I had a few people tell me I look like my dad. And I do the older I get. On that Saturday

night when I got up to speak there, I got emotional. I've preached there before and not been choked up. But this time, memories and thoughts converged, and the fact that my folks weren't there contributed to my emotion. I got it under control and went on preaching. But while I was doing that, one woman said, "You're like your dad."

Now I accept that I'm like my dad. You could learn some things about him from knowing me—some of his characteristics and influences. I could tell you stories about him. But I'm not my dad. If you know me, you don't necessarily know him. But if you know Jesus, you do know God. Jesus said, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father" (John 14:9). If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. He reveals God, makes God known, shows us God's character, brings God close so we can know him. Philip Yancey asks, "If Jesus came to reveal God to us, then what do we learn about God from that first Christmas?" He answers with four words that come to mind to describe the God who comes in Jesus Christ: *humble, approachable, underdog, courageous* (*The Jesus I Never Knew* 36).

The Son of God who became human in Jesus is one who *sustains all things by his powerful word*. Philosophers ask what underlies reality. What force or power sustains the universe and makes sense of everything? Hebrews answers that the mighty word of God's Son sustains all things. If he became silent, everything would fall apart. But when he speaks, things come together.

Let's bring that down from the cosmic level into our lives. The writer of Hebrews knew about certain dangers that threatened the group he was writing to. He wanted to give a word of encouragement and exhortation to them (13:22). Presenting Jesus as the one who sustains everything by his powerful word showed that he was able to sustain the people of God whatever they were going through (William Lane, "Hebrews 1-8," *Word Biblical Commentary*). Jesus, who sustains everything, can sustain his people. When you feel like you're not going to make it, when you think everything will fall apart, when the pressure and stress threaten to overwhelm you — remember Jesus the Son of God still speaks his powerful word that sustains you. We have to get still enough and quiet enough to listen sometimes.

But he is speaking. He has power to sustain the universe. He has power to sustain you.

There's still more good news here. *He provided purification for sins.* Much of the rest of Hebrews will address this. Jesus was the great high priest, offering sacrifice for the sins of people. And Jesus himself was the final, once-for-all sacrifice.

Jesus became human for us. As our high priest, he was tempted in all the ways we are, but he didn't sin. Then he offered the final sacrifice so that our sins could be forgiven and cleansed. You don't have to make the sacrifice for your sins. Jesus has already done it. Here are a couple of great passages from later in Hebrews that describe what Jesus did for us:

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (9:14)

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.... (10:19-22)

The final declaration about Jesus here is that, after he had made purification for sins, *he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.* That is, he was exalted to the highest place of honor and glory. The writer will later point out that in the old covenant, the priests continually stood in the temple because their work was never finished. But Jesus sat down in glory because he finished his work of redemption and salvation. He is exalted. He's greater than the angels. He has received a name that is better than the angels because God calls him "Son." A little later in this chapter, Jesus is also addressed as "God" and "Lord." And when we're in Christ, when we know him as Lord, God calls us "son" or "daughter."

The One who is able to save has come to us, among us, as one of us—to save us. The One whose word sustains all things continues to speak the word that sustains and strengthens us. We're invited, we're called to trust him, to receive him, to stay with him and live all life in relationship with him.