

Hebrews 1

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 March 2012

Preacher: James McIntosh

[0 : 00] Well, theologians tell us that God is what they term a necessary being. By this we may understand that for the act of initial creation to have taken place, for this creation for all that we can see and touch and smell and feel and so on and so forth, for this creation to be sustained second by second, God was and is necessary.

John, inspired by the Holy Spirit in his Gospel, expresses this truth in the following way. Through him, through God, or more accurately, through God the Son, Jesus Christ, all things were made. Without him, without God, without the Son, without Jesus, nothing has been made that was made. We read this in John chapter 1 and verse 3.

We find that this is a truth expressed in various ways throughout the Scriptures, particularly the New Testament, obviously in reference to Jesus. And Paul puts it this way in Colossians chapter 1 and verse 17.

He, Jesus, is before all things. By contrast, you and I as human beings are what are termed contingent beings.

[1 : 34] What do we mean by that? Well, we mean that compared to God, you and I are insignificant. That our existence, my existence, your existence is actually not necessary.

We were not, and are not, moreover, needed by God. It was not as if at the dawn of creation, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons, one God, in their perfect love for one another, their perfect unity with one another, their perfect fellowship between one another, kind of had a conversation and said, there's something lacking in us as the almighty, all-powerful, blazingly holy God.

We need to create human beings. We need to create other than ourselves because we have a desperate loneliness, a desperate lack, a desperate need in us. Not at all, says Scripture.

God did not need to create us. But after the supreme love, God created other than himself, you and me, Adam and Eve, our first parents, all the generations that have lived before us, because he desired to love other than himself.

God is a necessary being. We, by contrast, are not necessary. We are contingent beings. We are completely dependent upon God for who we are.

[3 : 01] Without him this morning, there would be a kind of mess of various bones and tissues and sinews and tendons and so on and so forth. We would not be able to hold ourselves together. For me to stand, for you to sit, for us to go home and have Sunday lunch, whatever that may be, we would not be able to do any of this, take our next breath, blink our eyes, and so on and so forth, unless God was sustaining us and holding us second by second, and not only us, but the whole universe.

Again, we may helpfully quote John. In him, in Jesus, was, and the sense is, was and continues to be, life.

And that life was and continues to be the light of men. John 1, verse 4. Now, commentators debate amongst themselves whether this is light and life referring to our physical life, or also includes our spiritual life, you pay your money and you take your pick.

It's probably both. But for both our physical life and, as we shall shortly see, our spiritual life relating to God, loving God, worshipping him, serving him.

And I think worship has been well described as giving all that we are to all that God is. Giving all that we are to all that God is, where we can only do that in and through Jesus Christ.

[4 : 29] Because in him was and continues to be life, and that life was and continues to be the light of men and women and boys and girls. Now, for people like you and me, who often think ourselves, and we do to our shame, we often think ourselves from time to time to be the centre, if not of the

universe, then certainly of our universe, our sphere of influence.

We think ourselves to be important. We think of ourselves as special and essential. Well, this truth of Scripture, that God is the only necessary being, that we are contingent, that we are not actually necessary, well, this truth of Scripture is both deeply humbling and a great challenge to the values of the society in which we live.

How wonderful, therefore, that not only should God have created you and me out of love, but moreover, as we have read and as we'll open up shortly, that God should speak to us, that God has spoken to us through his word, that God continues to speak to us through his Son, that God speaks to us through his indwelling Holy Spirit, if we love him and serve him and obey him and worship him. God speaks to us through his Holy Spirit, reminding us of God's word, helping us to understand it and to apply it to our lives. How wonderful that God should love us and speak to us, that he should communicate with us that through his Son, Jesus Christ, he has even identified with us.

The greater truth, even more humbling, is that to God, you and I are not insignificant. You and I are special.

[6 : 18] You and I are important. You and I are the focus of God's particular affection and his special attention. For the Hebrew Christians, undergoing a time of desperate persecution, feeling perhaps that circumstances were spinning certainly out of their control, wondering if God indeed is still in control.

The message, the simple message alone, that God has spoken to them through the prophets and even personally through his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, well, that's a message that we may not have to use too much imagination to deduce.

That's a message of tremendous encouragement for them. For them, for us this morning, the God who spoke to the Hebrews, the God that still speaks today to us through all our experiences of life is the God who cares, the God who loved, and the God who continues to love.

I suggest we may see the basis and the expansion of this argument that the writer to the Hebrews is opening up to us, that we may see this argument, we may grasp the encouragement of it by looking at our passage under the following three headings.

Firstly, God speaks. God speaks. This is, if you like, is the that. God has spoken. God speaks.

Secondly, God the Son, Jesus, is superior.

[7 : 53] If God speaks as the that, that Jesus who is superior, God's Son, is the who. And thirdly, particularly here, God speaks to save.

Well, we've had the that, we've had the who. Now we have, why does God speak? Well, He speaks to save. What does God speak? He speaks the gospel, the person and the work of His one and only Son, Jesus Christ.

So in the four short verses of Hebrews chapter 1, we have the that God speaks. Through whom does God speak? Well, yes, through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in His last days, through His Son.

We have the who. We have Jesus. And we have, why does God speak? Well, He speaks to save. It's the gospel. Why is that necessary?

Well, He speaks about Jesus after He had provided purification for sins. Well, what's meant by all of that? Why was that needed? The writer to the Hebrews begins to open that up to us.

[8 : 56] He doesn't engage in extended philosophical debate. For the writer to the Hebrews, it remains unequivocal that God has indeed spoken, that we could argue prior to that, that for God to speak, God exists.

There's a lot of debate about that, led by the likes of Richard Dawkins. Well, he doesn't debate it. He just declares that God doesn't exist. For the writer to the Hebrews, there's no debate. God exists.

God has spoken. The locus of this communication is to be found in God's historic dealings with humanity, but more specifically with His special relationship in the past with the Jews, His communication to them, as we read here, to their forefathers, through the prophets, at many times and in various ways.

We're speaking, of course, primarily here about the Old Testament. That's the record where we find God's communication, His specific dealings with the Jews. We read, of course, from Scripture's opening verses that God speaks, that God firstly spoke out powerfully and effectively to create, and God said is almost the verse-by-verse continuing refrain of Genesis chapter 1.

But we not only read in Genesis that God spoke out, we also read that God spoke to. God spoke to the crowning achievement of His creation, our first parents, Adam and Eve.

[10:33] God spoke to them in blessing, He spoke to them in giving, and He spoke to them in loving, warning, command. And I suggest to you, and you can go and have a look at this this afternoon, I suggest to you that in the first couple of chapters of Genesis, we have revealed to us how God speaks to humanity, in blessing, in giving, and in loving, warning, command.

God not only spoke to Adam and Eve, He also spoke with Adam and Eve, but one chapter later, Genesis 3 at the fall. God spoke with them when they disobeyed Him.

When they just said, you know what, we're going to ignore you, God, and we're going to do our own thing, and we're going to do that which you told us not to do, namely to eat fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Remember when Adam and Eve were hiding, God, we're told, is walking in the cool of the evening, in the Garden of Eden, whatever that may mean, but God's there, He's wanting to relate to them.

And God says to Adam, He says, where are you?

Where are you? It's not as though the sovereign God had suddenly lost two members of His creation. I don't know where you are. I've lost you. Tell me where you are so I can find you, like some divine game of hide and seek.

[11:52] No. God is asking, where are you? Because He's wanting Adam and Eve to acknowledge what they have done, they have disobeyed Him, they have rebelled against Him, sinned against Him, so that they confess this, Lord, we've done that which you told us not to do.

And God says, well, when you've done that, when you, Adam and Eve, when for us today, God brings us to that point of acknowledging that we have rebelled against Him and disobeyed Him, then God can begin to do something, both with Adam and Eve and also with us.

Because confession, acknowledgement, agreement with God's just verdict on our lives, that we have not done what He has called us to do. That sometimes we can turn that on its head and say we have done things which God has told us not to do.

That we should confess that first, and then God can bring us to the point of repentance, where we turn aside from going our own way, going against God and His will and His word, and embracing who God is and what God has called us to be and asked us to think and to say and to do.

God spoke with Adam and Eve when they disobeyed Him to bring them to the point of acknowledgement and confession of their transgression of God's good, pleasing, and perfect will, to encourage them also, as we read further on in Genesis 3, to encourage them also of the one to come, the promise of the one to come.

[13:19] We may therefore agree with Martin Luther's summation of the Old Testament as the cradle in which Christ was laid. The whole testimony of God, the communication of God which is explaining, which supports why God the Son, Jesus Christ, needed to come for people like you and me.

These books, these 39 books of the Old Testament, Genesis to Malachi, herald the promise of Messiah. They elucidate the necessity of Messiah, of Jesus coming to and for a deliberately, willfully rebellious and disobedient sinful humanity.

So in a few words, the writer to the Hebrews reminds his readers that both he and moreover God has recorded the delivery of this communication from God.

God has spoken, and you can't gainsay it. God has spoken, and you can't gainsay it. We are to realize that the one through whom God speaks is superior.

The writer to the Hebrews moves on from God has spoken to our forefathers, through the prophets, and many times and in various ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us through his Son, by his Son.

[14:42] The writer to the Hebrews moves, as it were, from recorded delivery, God has spoken, and you can't again say it, as we were seeking to explain to the children, to special delivery. In the past, God spoke to our forefathers.

In these last days, God has spoken to us by his Son. That this is so is surely the greatest testimony to the supreme importance of the message that God desires to speak to us, that God has spoken to us, that he has made known to us, that he has revealed to us.

Any other means of communication from God to us was simply not adequate, even as we have read if that communication was delivered through the angels.

The very act of God the Father giving the Son, of the Son coming, the very act of Jesus coming to the world he created as one of us, as a human being in incarnation, is a message in and of itself. Notice that the text says he, God, has spoken to us by his Son, not just now through his Son, but by his Son.

[15 : 55] The very act of the blazingly triune God, blazingly holy God, speaking to you and me by his Son, by Jesus, is something that should cause us to sit up and to take notice.

This is serious stuff. God is speaking to us personally. He's speaking to us by the giving of his Son. Notwithstanding, all that Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, said and taught whilst here on earth in flesh, and to this we must give our time and attention to, of course, the act of the Father's delivering up of the Son, which refers, as Paul draws this truth together in Romans 8, 32, for God who delivered up his Son, will he not freely along with him also give us all things, all things necessary for life, for spiritual life, for serving him and worshipping him, and so on and so forth.

As Paul brings that together, it refers to both incarnation and crucifixion. We are to wake up and to realize that there is supreme value, there is utter seriousness, there is a great and awesome weight of message that God would have us, as his created children, to hear, in order that we may become his saved children, in order that we may be assured that we're his saved children, in order that we may go on serving him and honoring him as his saved children.

This is a serious message that we are to give our time and attention to, and not to treat it lightly, to squeeze it into our busy schedule as an afterthought.

Now, God would have us left in no doubt as to just who the Son is and evermore will be. The Son, Jesus, is no less than God himself, and once again, in our time and day, this is a truth that is being challenged on all sides.

[17 : 59] The Son, Jesus, is no less than God himself, as the writer to the Hebrews puts it in our passage in verse 3. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

The sense of the Greek here is of the impression of a stamp left on a coin. Like me, you may remember some time going to various tourist attractions.

You take your wee one-pence coin, you put it in a machine, you pull the lever and out the bottom in the wee tray comes an impression of a Roman coin or, you know, a Pictish coin or something like that.

It's the same idea that the Son has got the very stamp of who God is upon him because he is fully God himself.

It is from this verse and from many others besides that we may begin to enter into the mystery, but no less truth of the Godhead, of Trinity, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[19 : 04] As the early church fathers sought to express this truth, the three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are of one substance, God. One God, three persons.

We struggle to understand it, yes, but Scripture testifies to it and therefore we believe it.

Theoretically, we may begin to imagine in our minds God being able to delegate the responsibility of speaking to his created children to another.

Who will go for me is the question that was asked when Isaiah had his vision in Isaiah 6. Who will go for me? And Isaiah says, I'll go. I'll preach to my rebellious, sinful people of whom I am a part. I recognize myself to be one of unclean lips. But for this gospel message, for this important, serious message, there was no one else who could come. No one else could communicate this other than God the Son, Jesus, God himself.

This was God himself who both spoke. This is God himself, even this morning, who speaks. This was and is the great creator God.

[20 : 17] Now, with our Western mindset, we miss something of the import that the writer to the Hebrews wishes us to grasp in verses 2 and 3 of Hebrews chapter 1, as to just who or what the nature of the Son is.

For the Jews, for the Jews, well, they understood that there were some acts that only God could perform because he was and is God.

Here, our attention in our passage is drawn first to the act of creation and secondly, to the ongoing work of the divine sustaining of that creation.

creation. No other being could create or sustain. As the theologians would have it, in God, there is no difference between function, that is what one does, and ontology, that is who one is or being.

There is no difference between what one does and who one is for God. If there is a being who creates and sustains, then the Jews understood that you read about that and you are only reading about the one true God because no other being can create or sustain.

[21 : 35] But Jesus is not only the creator and sustainer. We read also here in our passage that he is the heir of all things. I suggest Paul as he glorifies and praises God and that wonderful few verses at the end of Romans 11.

In verse 36 of Romans 11, Paul sums up what we find here in Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 2. Paul writes, for from him that is creation, that is our origin, and through him that is our continued being, and to him that is God's divine inheritance, that is our destiny if we have trusted Christ and loved Christ, have confessed and repented of our sins.

that from him and through him and to him are all things. Whilst, as we may read concerning the incarnation, one chapter later in Hebrews, Hebrews chapter 2 verse 9, it's the first time that the Son is specifically, clearly identified as Jesus.

We read in Hebrews 2, 9, we see Jesus who is made a little lower than the angels. Hebrews 2, the writer to the Hebrews here leaves us in no doubt as to just who the Son is, that he is no less than fully God.

That the Son existed from before all time, that the Son, Jesus, is co-eternal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, that the Son from eternity past has shared the unfathomable holiness and gloriousness of who God is, with God, as God, that at the incarnation whilst fully human and at one and the same time remaining fully God, that Jesus' Son voluntarily laid his glory by.

[23 : 22] Following the resurrection and ascension, Jesus has now returned to the realm of glory. The latter half of Hebrews 2, verse 9, puts it this way, where he is crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death.

Why? As the author, as the founder of our salvation. This, the writer to the Hebrews would have us understand, God would have us understand, is the one who has spoken, is the one who now speaks, Jesus, God the Son.

This is the one who speaks at such great cost and at such great expense. The subtext is, give him your focus, give him your attention, do not neglect, do not ignore, do not drift off, concentrate.

This is important stuff. In the second half of verse 3, we see just why only the Son, Jesus Christ, God himself, could communicate to us such important a message.

We understand that here, the sense is, as we said earlier, our third point, that God speaks to save. Just as the babe in the manger, you may recall, was to be given the name Jesus.

[24 : 33] Why? Because he will save his people from their sins, Matthew 1, verse 21. So we are to also grasp, somewhat ironically, as did the indignant Jews, that the miracle that Jesus performed, the healing of the paralyzed man who had been brought to Jesus by his four friends, the hole in the roof where Jesus was speaking, was dug, the paralyzed man was let down on his mat.

Jesus is about to heal the paralyzed man. He begins to say to the paralyzed man, Son, your sins are forgiven. The Jews, whether it's Sadducees, Pharisees, teachers of the law, we're not quite sure, but the Jews, they're in their minds, and Jesus knows this.

The Jews in their minds are indignant, and they're saying, but who can forgive sins but God alone?

And Jesus then says, but that you may know that the Son of Man, a phrase that Jesus uses of himself, but that you may know that the Son of Man has authority here on earth to forgive sins.

He turns to the paralyzed man and says, Son, get up, take up your mat and walk. And we know that the paralyzed man got up, rolled up his bed mat and walked. Testimony to the power of the Lord God Almighty, of Jesus himself to both heal physically and to perform that greater miracle of spiritual healing, of forgiving sins so that we might love him and serve him forevermore.

We are to understand as the Jews did, that just as in creation, so in the ongoing second-by-second work of sustaining that creation, so here in salvation, we find something that only God could do and can do.

[26 : 17] as we have sung in Psalm 49, and let me add verse 15, we stopped at verse 9, let me add verses 10 and 15 to Psalm 49.

Listen to these words. No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him. The ransom for a life is costly.

No payment is ever enough that he should live on forever and not see decay. You're trusting in someone else to save you, the psalmist says, don't do that, no one else can do that.

No man can redeem the life of another. You're trusting in parents or grandparents because they've been in the free church for generations because they love the Lord. You're not quite sure, but you're trusting in their salvation.

Don't do it, says the psalmist, they can't redeem you. No man can redeem the life of another. But then we read in verse 15 of Psalm 49, but God will redeem my life from the grave, he will surely take me to himself.

[27 : 15] God will do it. The fulfillment of this, of course, is in God the Son, Jesus Christ, going to Calvary's cross, dying my death, your death, for my sin and your sin.

As the hymn writer expresses it, there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He, Jesus, only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.

Only God himself, the one grieved, the one offended by our sinful nature and our sins, which we all commit, have committed, do commit, and probably will commit.

Only God himself, the one we have offended, without exception or excuse, the infinitely holy, the blameless, the perfect, the pure one that we ultimately sin against when we sin in thought and word and deed, who only he, only God, can forgive us our sin, my sin, and your sin.

Only God can provide purification for them. And it's not just sins. It's our sinful nature. If you like to think of it this way, our sinful nature is the factory that produces the sins.

[28 : 29] Jesus has died for our sinful nature. Jesus died for sinners, not just for sins. God has done that uniquely, supremely, through his one and only Son.

He has done that. He has provided purification for our sinful nature, for our sins, thus assuaging or turning aside God's just and holy wrath.

God's settled indignation against sin and sins. Only God has the ultimate right to do this as the one sinned against. The root of the word our Bibles translate as purification, relating to Jesus, points to an act of total self-giving for the sake of the other.

Total self-giving for the sake of the other. Who's the other here? It's you. It's me. Jesus totally gave himself so that my sin, so that your sin, so that my sinful nature, so that your sinful nature might be forgiven, that God's wrath turned away from me, from you, that we might live with him who made us by himself, for himself, to be with himself forevermore.

So if this morning we find ourselves in any doubt as to the absolute sinfulness of sin, as to the supreme affront that sin is to the eternally holy God, then you and I only have to ponder the price that was necessary to be paid for me, for you, to be cleansed, to be forgiven, to be set free, to be reconciled to God.

[30 : 11] If, like me, sometimes there may be folk here who suffer from a low self-esteem, I don't think I'm worth very much, I don't think I'm any good at anything, I'm not sure really who I am, am I special?

than Scripture would say, yes you are because you're worth Jesus. Because you're worth God delivering up, God the Father delivering up his Son, the Son who came, you're worth that, you're worth the Son of God going to Calvary's cross.

You are worth Jesus. Is there any more encouraging, any more assuring, any more wonderfully setting free truth of the Scriptures? Only God himself, only Jesus, could do this.

Jesus willingly, out of inexpressible love, did this, has done this. He went to Calvary's cross to pay the penalty for my sin and for your sin. There's a little chorus that goes like this, that I think sums up this truth and how we should respond to this wonderful and supreme truth.

Hallelujah, my Father, for giving us your Son. sending him into the world to be given up for men, knowing we would bruise him and smite him from the earth.

[31 : 23] Hallelujah, my Father, in his death is my birth. Hallelujah, my Father, in his life is my life. Given the truth of all of this, the nature of the one who has so spoken to save, Jesus God himself, is it any wonder that the writer to the Hebrews should offer us some warnings?

Chapter 2, we must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard. God has spoken. So that we do not drift away.

How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? And then one of the last verses in the book of Hebrews, Hebrews 12, 25, see to it, says the writer to the Hebrews, almost pleading with us, see to it that you do not refuse him who speaks.

It is possible as the writer to the Hebrews opens up for us in chapter 4 and chapter 5, for us as human beings to harden our hearts, to stop our ears to what God has spoken and God speaks to

us.

To know that even as we sit here this morning that God is speaking to us, challenging us, but to say to ourselves, I'm not prepared to do anything about that. I know what I need to do but I know that the cost is too much and you know what, I'm not prepared to do that.

[32 : 46] Jesus as saviour, quite happy with that, like the idea of going to heaven. Jesus as lord, Jesus as boss, as master of all of my life, every single part, not quite so sure about that.

Not quite so sure about that. Writer to the Hebrews, scripture, God himself says, see to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. Don't harden your heart. Don't harden your heart.

God has spoken. He has spoken by no less than his one and only son. God has spoken to save. It's a recorded delivery. It's a special delivery, a supremely special delivery.

Make sure that you're in the place, not geographically so much as spiritually, that you are in the place to receive this message, to receive not a message but to receive him, to receive God himself, to receive Jesus with gratitude.

As Paul puts it, for now is the time of God's favour. Now, today, is the day of salvation. In my job as a postie, if people are not in, when I'm seeking to deliver parcels, and you've probably got one of these at one point in your life, a wee shut notice, sorry you're not in, we've got something for you, come down to the delivery office and you can get it.

[34 : 02] Post office will keep that parcel for 18 days and then it's returned to sender. Don't let God hand you, as it were, a shut notice today because he hasn't found you in the place where you can receive what he is saying to you, communicating to you.

Now, today, is the time of God's favour. We don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. You may recall the words of God to Israel of old in Ezekiel chapter 18, and I think it sums up God's heart for sinful, rebellious humanity, whether that be Israel of old, whether that be God's covenant community today, whether that be men and women and boys and girls like the two gentlemen we saw going into the kingdom hall on the way to the church this morning.

God would say this, repent, turn away from all your offences, then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offences you have committed and get a new heart and a new spirit.

Why will you die, O house of Israel? I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the sovereign Lord. Repent and live.

God has spoken. He has spoken to his son, through his son. God has spoken to save. Let's respond. Let's listen. Let's live for him.

[35 : 24] God has to speak to him.