

Our Radiant Lord

(Heb. 1:1-3) 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;

The book of **Hebrews** is unquestionably one of the deepest, most profound letters in the New Testament.

... Much like the great epistle of **Romans and Ephesians**, this book is primarily occupied with doctrine.

[It is important to note that while **Romans and Galatians** are detailing the **benefits and results of the work** of Christ ... Ephesians and Hebrews **explain the power and influence of the person** of Christ.]

- In **Romans**, Paul teaches about overcoming the bondage of sin and the flesh.
- In **Ephesians** Paul teaches of the victory, unity, and blessings of being IN Christ—or the fullness we realize in Christ.
- **But the writer of Hebrews** wants the believer to understand and experience nearness with God ... and when I say nearness, I mean both spiritually and literally.

[Caveat—The author of Hebrews is unknown.

.. Most evangelical scholars believe that Paul is the author based upon the writer's usage of certain concepts and phrases found only in Paul's writings.

... However, there are some evangelical scholars who believe the author of Hebrews to be Luke, who also wrote the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, because of certain words and expressions in Hebrews that are only found in Luke and Acts.

... Personally, I don't think the answer is either-or ...

... In fact, I believe the answer of the question “who wrote Hebrews” is found in the book of Acts.

Based on Acts we know that most of Luke’s ministry was spent working with the Apostle Paul...

... There is no question that Luke wrote Acts so the next time you read it take notice of how many times Luke uses the pronoun “WE.”

So, why are there concepts and phrases found only in the writings of the Apostle Paul as well as words and expressions found only in Luke’s writings in the book of Hebrews?

... Here is why. What we see in Hebrews are the teachings of Paul being verbalized in Luke’s voice because ...

... probably because Paul wrote this epistle to the Hebrews in the Hebrew language and then Luke translated it into Greek for public reading throughout the Roman empire.

In other words, the book of Hebrews is Pauline authorship with Lukan vocabulary.]

Now, like **James and First Peter** the book of Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians who were:

- a) Members of a specific Church or community of faith. We know this because Paul writes in 13:7 “**Remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you ...**”
- b) Most likely this church was the church in Jerusalem because Paul writes in 13:24 “**Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.**”

Regardless of where this church is, it is obvious that Paul is writing to Jewish people who were raised in the Jewish synagogue and who, before coming to Christ, were involved in the Old Testament temple worship.

So, why is Paul writing to this church?

Paul writes that these followers of Christ had started out well but then (for whatever reason) they hit the pause button ... they stopped growing ...

... even worse some of them were turning away from the teachings of Christ and going back to Old Testament temple worship.

Paul tells them they have become “dull of hearing.” He writes ...

... by this time, you should've become teachers feeding on the meat of the word, but you have reverted backwards ... you need someone to re-teach you ... you need milk not solid food.

... after their salvation they had not made progress or sought to enrich and deepen their relationship with God.

Paul says, “this is a problem, this has to change...”

Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (Heb. 6:1)

This is the grand theme undergirding the whole book of Hebrews.

Paul says “We need to press on to maturity” ...

In this book, Paul is going to show us that this “spiritual maturing” comes from **looking at and meditating upon** the glory of Christ.

There are other books in the New Testament where we see Jesus doing “priestly” things, but Hebrews is the **ONLY** book that makes it absolutely clear that Jesus Christ is our one and only High Priest.

Now here is why this is so important NOW.

What you and I are seeing in the streets of our nation right now, is not the triumph to justice ...

This is not the “civil-rights” movement of the 60’s and 70’s ...

I’m not going to take time away from the Word of God this morning to have an extended discussion on sociology or equality ... But I just want to point out two things ...

First, God is not the author of confusion ...

Second, vengeance belongs to God and not anyone else ...

Third, when the comfort and rights of humanity become greater than the glory of Christ then society can abort the baby, defend the criminal, and malign the lawgiver and never see the contradiction between the three.

PAUSE-

In 1976, Francis Schaeffer published a book entitled: *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*.

In this book Schaeffer traces Western history from Ancient Rome until the time of his writing the book which was 1976.

The first line of chapter 1 in the book says: *“There is a flow to history and culture.”*

... Yes, there is such a flow, and as Christians we had better know which way the culture is flowing.

In that work Schaeffer shows how philosophy, science, and religion has developed over 2000 years and he illustrates the distinction between two different kinds of societies.

- First: a society which believes in an infinite personal God who has spoken and revealed himself and given absolute truth by which humanity should live and judge
- ... versus a second society which does not believe in God and instead believes that as human beings there is no god or higher moral law to which we are accountable

Schaeffer says of the first society ... its belief in God will lead to what he calls **“freedom without chaos.”**

In contrast Schaeffer says the second kind of society ... because in it all values are relative and there is no way to truly distinguish between right and wrong, (he says this) will lead to what he calls **“fragmentation of thought”** which will result in a society plagued with despair, alienation, and chaos.

What we are seeing right now is the consequence of the loss of belief in society that God has spoken and revealed Himself ...

[pause] I want to make this as clear as I can this is not a loss where the world has robbed the church ...

... this loss is the result of the church “giving it away.”

Just like the Jewish Christians to whom Paul is writing the American church has become “dull of hearing.”

... I’m not saying there is a famine of the word of God ... there is a famine of the HEARING of the word.

How many dramas have been played out in churches all across America ...?

- Fights over who was elected deacon and who wasn’t ...
- How this dollar was spent or that church van was used ...
- We did sing this song or didn’t sing that song ...
- We quit preaching about sin because we were afraid this or that wealthy family would leave
- We’ve allowed unbiblical power structures to rise up in churches ...
- Churches competing with each other over membership

... by this time, we should’ve become teachers feeding on the meat of the word we’ve reverted backwards ... we need to be retaught ...

... we love the milk but despise the meat!

Paul says, here is the remedy for the spiritual apathy and immaturity that is plaguing the church.

... As you continually think and meditate on **Jesus Christ as YOUR High priest** and all that this means for you ... you will spiritually mature.

1. Spiritual Maturity is Possible

Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, (Heb. 6:1)

Our God is not a capricious God ... He does not command what we cannot obey and if the Word of God commands us to mature (or as the King James writes it ‘go on to perfection’) the it is possible.

This word sometimes translated maturity and other times perfection occurs 11 times in Hebrews but it NEVER means sinlessness.

... in every case it refers to a mature Christian life in contrast to staying an immature Christian.

But what I a mature Christian? Is this someone who is really good at keeping the 10 commandments?

No. Paul writes in 7:19 that **the Law has made nothing perfect.**

(I'll spend more time on this when I get in chapter 7) But not only can the Old Testament law no make you mature ... spiritual maturity was impossible under the Old Covenant.

Now, because Jesus is our High Priest there is a closeness ... a spiritual intimacy ... a maturity available for any follower of Christ that wants it.

And in case you don't believe me listen to this ...

¹⁴ For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. ¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, ¹⁶ "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," He then says, ¹⁷ "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." (Heb. 10:14-17)

As we go into the book of Hebrews it is my hope that you will not only come to believe such a life is possible ... but you will have it!!

2. God means to be seen, known, and heard

(Heb. 1:1,2) 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...

The word "Son" is the central word ... Paul's usage of the possessive pronoun "HIS" is the demonstrate WHAT Jesus is over who Jesus is.

Paul wants us to fully realize that Jesus is not the "instrument" or "mouthpiece" of God ...

Jesus is God perfectly revealed as **creator, sustainer, provider and ultimate satisfaction!**

...In times past God spoke through the prophets to the fathers, but no more!

... God is not some non-descript metaphor for a higher power—God is a person.

... God isn't just an idea to be imagined.

Unlike in the Old Testament God has done something new, different, glorious—instead of speaking through another mere moral...

God has revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ and He means to be seen, heard and known!

- “O God if you would only speak! –He has!

3. What is it that we see, hear, and know?

The Apostle Paul gives us 7 things that we see hear and know

... whom He appointed heir of all things,

through whom also He made the world. (Creator)

³ *And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature,* (Jesus reveals the Father)

and upholds all things by the word of His power. (He sustains what He has created)

When He had made purification of sins, (This is new. The theme of Hebrews is spiritual purity and spiritual maturity. Jesus isn't just Savior, He is also high priest and as such we He doesn't just forgive, He purifies.)

He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Christ isn't only Savior and high priest ... He is king and ruler.)

⁴ *having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.* (*Heb. 1:2-4*) (Christ is supreme)

Hear me today:

Jesus is prophet, savior, priest, and king ... and therefore Jesus is all we need in order to have the fullest, richest, deepest spiritual life imaginable.

Before the discovery of America, Spanish coins bore the imprint of the Pillars of Hercules and had on it the motto, *Ne plus ultra*, which translate is “**Nothing else beyond**”

However, after Columbus’ discovery of America the motto was changed to read *Plus ultra*, which translated “**More beyond.**”

You see, now the explorers had seen the new world and in seeing realized there was much more beyond what they had previously believed and known.

This is what I hope will happen as we go through the rich truths of Hebrews ...

... that you will begin to realize there is more in Christ than you had previously believed and known.

Whereever you may be in your Christian life right now you will realize **there is still more beyond.**