

Christ Community Covenant Church
God Has Spoken! Overview of the Hebrews Series
Pastor Dave Scherrer - September 8, 2013

I have always loved the written word. I learned to read early and I was rarely without a book growing up. Not always real highbrow; Hardy Boys and comic books were my main stay, but I read enough that I was infused with a delight for how words ignite the imaginations. I read Dickens (which I could finish) and Dostoyevsky (which I could not finish) in the sixth grade (Mein Kamp too and that got me in trouble with my neighbors). I can still remember a particular sentence in the Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald where he describes the fender of a yellow car that is absolutely brilliant. Do you have favorite authors who can just paint a picture for you?

Not all who write are as skilled at allegory and metaphor. Here are some metaphors submitted by some High School English teachers from various essays:

- *She had a deep, throaty, genuine laugh, like that sound a dog makes just before it throws up.*
- *Her vocabulary was as bad as, like, whatever.*
- *He was as tall as a six-foot, three-inch tree.*
- *The whole scene had an eerie, surreal quality, like when you're on vacation in another city and Jeopardy comes on at 7:00 p.m. instead of 6:00.*
- *Her hair glistened in the rain like a nose hair after a sneeze.*

So here is my thesis: We love and use language because we are made by Someone who is very good with words!

So welcome to Hebrews! This book is going to *shake* our church (at least I hope so) and will call us *deeper* into the life of Christ – especially if you read a chapter a day. William Barclay called Hebrews “*the most difficult book in the NT*.” It is at once dense and detailed in places like a term paper for law school. It’s also pastoral and caring like a letter from your mom or dad when you are away at college. It is a reminder of what we already know written in such a way that it seems like brand new information.

By way of introduction to our study let me suggest three questions:

Welcome to Hebrews!

Who wrote Hebrews? Who first read Hebrews? Why was Hebrews written?

1. **Who wrote Hebrews?** Hebrews is unique in the NT in that it’s anonymous. It is written by a Jewish Christian man (masculine pronoun in 11:32) who is known to Paul and Timothy (13:23). He is well-educated and has studied Rhetoric. The language is finest Greek in NT terms of vocabulary (169 words found only in Hebrews). He knows the OT (31 quotes, Psalms – 17). Scholars believe Hebrews is a vintage sermon that had circulated initially through churches in Rome. Some scholars suppose it is an early Greek convert named Apollos. Barnabas “the encourager” has his champions. Some imagine it was Pricilla and Aquila. The book has been celebrated for the sophistication of its style and its powerful content. Through the ages it has been a church-shaping letter, and I might even say a church-saving letter.
2. **Who first heard Hebrews?** We know more about to whom it is written. It is written to urban Christians in a pluralistic society similar to ours with many religions and philosophies. There are more references to “city” than any other NT book. Hebrews points to a culture where commitment to Jesus brought marginalization and hostility from the community along with it. The author knows some are stronger, some weaker. Some are drifting. Some are sound.
3. **Why was it written?** The presenting problem appears to be that some of the believers have begun to feel the weight of society’s shaming techniques: insults and pressure to conform to society’s values and worldview. The sermon is given to bolster their commitment to Christ. The question arises: *If God loves us so much, why is our life so hard?* It is a question we will come back to over and over for our study.

Hebrews is saying to me:

Life is a journey from weariness into rest, from alienation into the presence of God, from isolation into the city of God. [And we don't get there through short bursts and sprints but by a sustained, long-term journey of fixing our eyes on Jesus.]

Did we say the Author is good with words?! What a first paragraph!

Hebrews 1:1-4

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

God has spoken the final word . . .

Long ago and in many ways . . .

“Long ago - At many TIMES and in many WAYS God spoke . . .” We see here that God is a storyteller! This sounds like the start of a great and wonderful story that you might tell around a campfire. Think of any in the OT? (Daniel's dreams, The Call of Abram, the sacrifice of Isaac, The Son of Man showing up with the three Hebrew heroes at Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. Or the wall of Jericho falling down). Flannery O'Connor, the great American (female) storyteller said, ***“To the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures.”*** That is what the Bible is - great big pictures and lots of shouting because God speaks to be known. He wants us to know Him because He wants relationship. Let's go back to our text:

“In these last days (and as we have said with the coming of Jesus and the Holy Spirit to this hour is the end times) he has spoken to us by His Son . . .”

The expert in Greek literature would know that the word “Son” is emphatic in the sentence by a deliberate word order. God has spoken from within human history through ***His Son***- the One in unique relationship with the Father.

Whom he appointed the heir of all things- In the end it is Jesus Who will receive the nations as His inheritance! He supervises the course of world history toward his purposes. History is not an endless spiral of random events; it is a straight line toward the DAY. You won't read coverage of God's kingdom in the Denver Post or CNN. You won't see that most significant events do not happen inside the Washington Beltway or hallowed halls of Harvard.

Through whom he created the world- From the beginning it is Jesus Who made it all. Jesus is the smartest Man who ever lived. He defined the terms on the energy/matter equation: water-to-wine, made a fish lunch into a banquet for thousands, and knew how to transform dead tissues of the human body from sickness to health and from death to life!

Who upholds the universe by the word of his power- Now Jesus holds the universe together with His “Yes.” But when Jesus says, “Stop.” It is over.

What is being said here? I think I see a couple things in these first few verses

Reality is defined by Jesus

Jesus defines Reality. All of OT points to Jesus! Now we see that everything else passes away, But Jesus remains. Everything else must be created and Jesus is the person that can speak creation into being. Jesus stands alone as the most concrete and real entity in all the Cosmos, seen and unseen. But there is more:

God is defined by Jesus

Jesus is the **radiance of the glory of God**. This is the kind of doctrine that can give you a nose bleed, it is high and astounding and strong. This word **Radiance** is used only here, and it carries the sense of **splendor** or **intense brightness, like ten thousand suns**. As Jesus is like the shadow box kids that use to look at the sun without your eyes burning out! He reveals God's essential nature in a human form so we can relate to Him. Jesus expresses God's brilliance and holy beauty and infinite importance while letting us look at Him and live.

Jesus is the **exact imprint of his nature**. This word "**nature**" is also translated "**character**" and is used only here in NT. It describes how a child **resembles** their parents. God's nature is such that no one can be said to be "an exact representation" **except the Son**.

If this is true there are two implications;

First, if you want to know what 4Cs is all about – get to know Jesus. If you are visiting with us and you have a seeker's heart we invite you in the journey with us to know this Jesus. Go to the original sources, read the Gospels (feel free to take one of our Bibles from the back). George Buttrick, Harvard chaplain said students would come into his office to declare, **"I don't believe in God."** Buttrick would give this disarming reply: "Sit down and tell me what kind of God you don't believe in. I probably don't believe in that God either." I am convinced that you will find that Jesus is the answer to the God we always wanted to believe in.

Two, if you are a seasoned Christian, we need to remember that Hebrews is written to a pluralistic, sophisticated urban society. To believe in Jesus' uniqueness, to take at face value when Jesus said "I am the way and the only way" would have been difficult to share with others. But the writer of Hebrews is saying, "Do not back off of this. Don't lose your courage. You can't put Jesus on the shelf with all the other philosophies of the day."

Jesus said things like, **"I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning"**(Luke 10). *Yeah, I was there before the creation of the material universe and I saw the devil go bad. You should have seen it.*

"When Son of Man comes in His glory... he will separate people like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." On the Day of Judgment you will appear before me; I will decide your eternal destiny depending on what you've done with Me. Wait, What!?! Jesus is conscious of being the uncreated Creator in all he says and does. Jesus simply won't be placed on a shelf to be shared with other competing gods.

If the gospels are true, if Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being then you have got to throw everything in your life down before him and say, "Command me." Or he is a sham. Do you feel the weight of this? If Jesus is God, you realize that the only possible way to respond to him is extremely. N.T. Wright, For All God's Worth

Salvation is defined by Jesus and Communion is the living word picture. Jesus is the definition of reality! And of God! And Jesus is the definition of salvation - and Communion is the living word picture that Jesus gave us to remind us of that reality.

Author Henri Nouwen tells the story of a family he knew in Paraguay. The father, a doctor, spoke out against the military regime there and its human rights abuses. Local police took their revenge on him by arresting his teenage son and torturing him to death. Enraged townsfolk wanted to turn the boy's funeral into a huge protest march, but the doctor chose another means of protest. At the funeral, the father displayed his son's body as he had found it in the jail—naked, scarred from electric shocks and cigarette burns, and beatings. All the villagers filed past the corpse, which lay not in a coffin but on the blood-soaked mattress from the prison. It was the strongest protest imaginable, for it put injustice on grotesque display. Isn't that what God did at Calvary? ... The cross that held Jesus' body, naked and marked with scars, exposed all the violence and injustice of this world. At once, the cross

revealed what kind of world we have and what kind of God we have: a world of gross unfairness, a God of sacrificial love.

Communion