

‘Listening to the Father Say Who Jesus Is’

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Text: Hebrews 1:1-14

Title: ‘Listening to the Father Say Who Jesus Is’

Series: Who is Jesus?

Who is He? Jesus. About whom we have been singing. In whose name we have been praying. Who is He?

On the Sunday mornings of this fall we have been asking that one question. Who is Jesus? We have been asking it because of the statement we print on the front of the worship folder: ‘we are a community following Jesus with a heart for the city and beyond’

After the first of the year beginning in January of 2010 I want us to ask ‘What does it mean to be a community?’ We are a community following Jesus. OK, what does a community following Jesus look like? But right now we are asking the more primary question, ‘Who is Jesus?’ We are a community following Jesus. OK Who Is He?

We began by asking John the Baptist, the prophet sent by God to introduce Jesus to the world. Who does John think Jesus is? Of all that John has to say about His cousin, we focused on the claims, ‘the Lamb of God who takes Away the sin of the world’ and ‘The One who Baptizes who baptizes in and with the Holy Spirit’.

We then talked to Jesus Himself. Who does He say He is? We heard Him claim to be ‘The Son of Man’. Not just a son of man but the Son of Man. A title that put Him in a class all by Himself. For no one, no one else in world history ever dared to take that pretentious title to Himself. I will see the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven.’

We then heard Jesus claim, ‘I Am the Bread of Life’: I am that – without which you simply cannot live; you need Me more than your next meal.

We heard Jesus claim ‘I am the light of the world; whoever follows Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life’. The light that leads to life. The light that IS life.

We heard Jesus claim to be the Stronger Man. Who invades the strong man’s house, ties him up and begins to plunder his stolen property. Jesus claims to be stronger than all the forces that seek to undo the human race.

We heard Him claim 'I am the Good Shepherd'. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. Once the Good Shepherd takes hold of a sheep He never lets go. 'No one can snatch you out of my hand; He says.' No one can snatch you out of my Father's hand, He adds.

Last Sunday we heard Jesus make the most astounding, most audacious claim any one has ever made. We heard Jesus speak during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, during the Feast that celebrates the presence of the Holy God who promises to dwell among His people. We heard Jesus use the sacred pronouns of the living God's self-revelation; we heard Jesus say 'I am He'.

Unless you believe I am He you will die in your sins. When you have lifted up the Son of Man then you will know I AM HE. Before Abraham was born 'I AM.' I am still stunned by the implication of Jesus' claim! The world has felt very different since last Sunday.

Today I invite you to listen to God say who Jesus is. More precisely, I invite you to listen to God the Father say who He thinks Jesus is.

And where do we hear God speak of Jesus? In the New Testament document called 'Hebrews'. Notice how I put it? The New Testament document. I am not using the term 'book'. The New Testament 'book'. Although the document now comes to us in book form, it was not originally a book. Nor was it originally a letter. It was sent by mail: but it was not written as a letter. There is no letter-like introduction. The document simply launches in: 'God, after He spoke.. has spoken to us...

The document is a sermon. Perhaps the most elegant sermon ever written. The author says at the end of the document, chapter 13: 22. 'But I urge you brothers and sisters bear with this word of exhortation'. The word exhortation – *parakalesis* – is one of the words used for early Christian preaching. In this document in Hebrews we have one of the most exquisitely crafted sermons ever preached! Some season, in years to come – unless the Son of Man should answer prayer and come to all His glory first! I would like to take you through the whole sermon. Bear with me this word of exhortation for I have written for you briefly, says the author. Briefly? Thirteen chapters of densely theology briefly?

I take about 70 minutes to reach through the sermon out loud. Briefly? 70 minutes is briefly?

In the sermon in 'Hebrews' we hear God say who He thinks Jesus is. Or again, more precisely, we hear God the Father say Who He thinks Jesus is. Even more precisely, we hear God the Father speak about and to Jesus.

Where? In the first chapter, in Hebrews. The whole sermon begins; 'God, after He spoke long ago to the ancestors in the prophets.. in these last days has spoken to us in His Son. Literally just 'in Son'. 'God has spoken in Son'. And in chapter 1 we hear God the Father speak about and to Son.

Now, the author of Hebrews has so carefully crafted his sermon that chapter 1 cannot be separated from chapter 2. A sermon is meant to be heard. Indeed, a sermon does not become a sermon until it is spoken. I handwrite my sermons on paper – with pencil. And after writing I will often say to Sharon, ‘I finished my Sermon’. Not so. The sermon on the pages of the paper is not a sermon until it is spoken.

So Hebrews. It does not become what it is intended to be until spoken. It is meant to be heard. It is when it is heard that it accomplishes its purpose.

And Hebrews 1 and 2 are meant to be heard together. Neither chapter is finally heard without the other.

So. I am going to read .. preach? Hebrews 1 and 2 out loud together. Just listen. Do not worry about grasping everything. Just listen

\*\*\*\*\*Reading of Hebrews 1 and 2\*\*\*\*\*

Wow. And that is just the opening section of the sermon. Did you hear the constant reference to angels? The term ties the two chapters together; the chapters begin and end with angels. ‘Angels’ is an audio cue telling us that Hebrews 1 and 2 are meant to be heard together. Angels.

1: 4 having become as much better than the angels,

1:5 For to which of the angels did God ever say,

1: 6 Let all the angels worship Him

1: 7 And of the angels He says,

1: 14 Are they not all angels ministering spirits

2: 2 For if the word spoken through angels

2: 5 For He did not subject to angels the world to come

2: 7 You have made Him a little lower than the angels

2: 9 We see Jesus who was made for a little while lower than the angels,

2: 16 For surely it is not angels he helps

Why all the references to angels? And what does this have to do with God the father speaking about and to Jesus?

People of the first century lived in a universe filled with angels. So do we! It is just that they knew it. For people of the first century – Jews and Gentiles alike – angels served as the agents of communication between God and humanity. For people of the first century angels were a kind of delivery service. It was thought that angels both brought God's word to humanity and brought humanity's word to God.

Imagine the diagram. God up in heaven, humanity down on earth! It is thought that God mediated His relationship with human being through angels. Angels carried Gods messages to humans, and angels carried human messages to God.

The author of Hebrews – the preacher – wants people to realize that although that view of the world may be true, in the coming of Jesus, things have changed. Although angels may still be around and still be useful to God and humans – Hebrew 1:14 , 'Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who inherit salvation? Nevertheless things here changed.

Jesus is now the mediator between God and humanity. Jesus is the one Who brings Gods' word to humanity and who brings humanity's word to God. Jesus is the one who carries Gods message to humanity and who carries humanity's messages to God. Jesus is now the one sufficient mediator between God and humanity.

This is what being the High priest is all about. It is the dominant theme of the rest of Hebrews – Jesus the High Priest. The one final, sufficient Priest, surpassing and replacing all other orders of priests. Jesus the High Priest comes from the presence of God and brings us into the presence of God. Jesus is the only priest we need. Jesus is the only mediator we need. Thus, the author of Hebrews , right at the beginning preaches the good news. 1:4 Jesus ' has become as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited as superior to this.

Why? Why is Jesus the superior mediator? Why is Jesus more able to serve the role of mediator?

Because – and I've come to the heart of what the author of Hebrews is preaching in chapter 1 and 2 – and why the chapters need to be heard together. Jesus is the superior mediator because, unlike angles, Jesus knows both what it is like to be God and what it is like to be human. Jesus can mediate God to us because he knows God and knows what it is like to be God. Jesus can mediate us to God because He knows us and knows what it is like to be us. Jesus is the superior mediator because unlike angels, Jesus is both divine and all human.

The Latin word for priest is pontifex. What is interesting to note is that pontifex is an engineering term. In particular a pontifex builds bridges. The pontifex is a bridge builder. A priest is a bridge –builder. A mediator is a bridge builder.

Now, in order to build a bridge the builder has to know both sides of the canyon over which the bridge is to be built – right? Jesus is the great bridge-builder because He knows both sides of the canyon between God and humanity very well. He knows the divine side because He is divine. He knows the humanity-side because he is human.

In the first chapter of Hebrews, the author – the preacher – demonstrates that Jesus is superior to the angels because He is God. When the second chapter of Hebrews – which we will listen to next Sunday he demonstrates that Jesus is superior to the angels because he is a man, the Man.

Now in Hebrews 1 the author makes a brilliant move. Instead of just stating the truth of who Jesus is, the author has God state the truth of who Jesus is. Brilliant. The author quotes a number of significant texts from the Old Testament in which the being God speaks; texts with which his hearers would be familiar. And when the author of Hebrews quotes these texts he quotes them as God speaking to Jesus. Somehow the spirit of God who inspired the Old Testament texts, enables the author of Hebrews to hear in the texts God the Father speaking to His son. Brilliant, in every sense of the word.

So for the next 15 minutes or so let us simply listen to God speak about and to Jesus. Do not worry about grasping everything. Just listen.

Hebrews 1:5. To which of the angels did God ever say what He says to Jesus. ‘You are My Son; today I have become your Father’ or literally ‘today I have begotten you’. We hear the Father say part of that text to Jesus at His baptism. As Jesus came up out of the water the voice from heaven said You are my Son whom I love (Mark 1:11).

We hear the father say I again at Jesus’ Transfiguration when Jesus’ is changed and he shines with the radiant glory of God.’ This is my Son Who I have chosen; listen to Him. ‘ (Luke 9:35) And now again in the sermon to the Hebrews. The Father says what he has never said to angels or to anyone other would-be mediator. ‘You are My son; today I have begotten You.’ A theologically loaded declaration.

The author of Hebrews hears God saying this to Jesus in Psalm 2. In Psalm 2 God declares that he has set His King on His holy mountain. The rulers of the world, in seeking to throw off any accountability to god, and engaged in fertility, for says God, ‘I have installed My King on my holy mountain.’ And then the king responds, saying, ‘God said to me ‘ you are My Son; today I have begotten you’. And goes on to say that God promised the Son as His inheritance all the nations of the earth.

Many scholars argue that Psalm 2 was read whenever a new King was installed in the life of Israel. That may be so. But what is so is that if the Psalm was read over a mere human king, everyone realized that no mere human king ever fit the role. So for centuries the people of God realize that in Psalm 2 God was speaking of a king to come, of a Son to come, who would finally be God’s King in the world.

The author of Hebrews hears what the Holy spirit intends to be heard in Psalm 2; the author of Hebrews hears God the Father speaking about and to Jesus. Jesus is the king who inherits all the nations of the earth. Because Jesus is the Son; You are My Son'.

'Begotten'

'Today I have begotten you'. Many contemporary translations render it as 'today I have become your Father.' OK. But the word the author of Hebrews uses is 'begotten' – a crucial word in the New Testament particularly of Jesus. Although we do not, in modern English, use the word 'begotten' any more, we need to honor it in God's speech to Jesus.

'Begotten' versus 'made'. What we make is not us. What we make maybe an expression of us – like a painting, or song, or a quilt, or a computer. Such things say something about who we are but they are not us. Right? However, what we 'beget' is us in some way. Not just an expression of us but us. Human make automobiles and furniture. Humans beget babies. Humans beget humans.

So God. God makes all kinds of things; mountains, seas, giraffes, whales, hearts and brains and eyes and ears. But what god makes is not God. An expression of God, yes. Humans especially – 'let us make humans in our image'. But we are not God. What God makes is not God.

But what God begets is God. 'You are My Son today I have begotten You.' His Son is not made. His Son is begotten. His Son is therefore not only just like God. He is God.

'Today' 'Today I have begotten You'. The 'today' is God's eternal 'today'. Which is why the church creeds spoke of Jesus as 'the eternally begotten son. The creeds are mostly with the claim, first made by a man names Arius, that Jesus the Son has not existed forever. As Arius put it, 'there was a time when the Son was not' To which people like Antranium responded. 'Then there was a time when the Father was not a Father. But the Father has existed as the Father from eternity. And as has the Son. 'Today', 'eternally', 'forever', begotten, not made. And, therefore, eternally, like the Father, God. 'You are my eternally begotten Son.

Hebrews 1: 5 again. To which of the angels did God ever say what He says about Jesus. 'I will be His Father and He will be my Son' The author of Hebrews hears the father saying this is 2 Samuel 7. In that text God is speaking to the Israelite King David, God's favourite king. David has expressed his desire to build a beautiful temple for Yahweh as David calls God. But Yahweh says, 'No, you will not build it; but your Son Solomon will. God says, 'He will build a house for Me. I will be a Father to him ad he will be a Son to Me' 2 Samuel 7:14.

Now, there is a sense n which Solomon lived in a father-son relationship with Yahweh. But as we read the Solomon story we realize that he did not even come close to what God intended in His promise. So, again, the people of God realize that God was speaking beyond David and Solomon and beyond all other mere human kings. The words to David

about Solomon were clearly spoken about someone to come. And the author of Hebrews hears what the Holy Spirit intends to be heard in 2 Samuel 7; the author of Hebrews hears God the Father speaking about His only-begotten Son. 'I will be a father to Him as He will be my Son.

And this is the key to understanding Jesus and His ministry. He lives His whole earthly life conscious that he is that unique Son of the Father. Again and again He speaks of being 'the son'; 100 times in the Gospel of John. From the beginning of His earthly life to the end we hear Jesus say 'Father'. The beginning, to his mother and adopted father. 'Did you not know I had to be about My Father's business' (Luke 2:49). The end, on the cross, 'Father, into thy hands I command my Spirit' (Luke 24:46)

Again and again we hear Him saying things like 'I only say what I hear the Father say', 'I only do what I see my father do'. As David Gooding of Ireland puts it 'No prophet, priest, poet or king ever spoke of God as his personal Father in the way and to the extent that Jesus did (An Unshakable Kingdom; The Letter to the Hebrews Today, 56)

That is because no one else can. Jesus is the unique, only begotten Son of the father.

The wonder of the Gospel is that we who are made and adopted by the Father into that unique relationship. But this is another Sermon.

Hebrews 1:6

When God brings His first born - Hebrew's way of saying 'the principal heir' - when God brings His Son who is heir of all things into the world He says, 'Listen'. He says 'Let all God's angels worship Him' Amazing! God, who alone is worthy of our worship says about Jesus 'Let all the angels worship Him'!

The author of Hebrews is quoting Psalm 97. In that Psalm the psalmist is celebrating the sovereign reign of Yahweh. 'Yahweh reigns; let the earth rejoice'. Then, 'Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images, who boast in idols.'(97:7a) And then the psalmist says, 'Worship Him, all you gods' or 'all you angels'. Worship Yahweh not images of idols.

But the author of Hebrews hears something more. The author hears what the Holy Spirit intends to be heard. The author hears not only a human being exhorting other human beings to worship Yahweh. The author hears Yahweh exhorting the gods, the angels to worship His Son!

This is truly amazing!

For one of the foundational themes of the whole Bible is that only God is to be worshiped. 'You shall have no other gods before Me' is the first of the ten commandments (Exodus 20:3). 'You shall worship the Lord Your God and serve Him only.' Jesus says to the devil in the wilderness (Matthew 4:10). When an angel gives the

apostle John a vision of the new heaven and the new earth, John falls at the angels feet to worship him. The angel is horrified and exclaim ' do not do that, I am a fellow servant of Jesus. Worship God (revelation 22: 8-9). And now we hear God. God the Father say that Jesus His Son 'worship Him let all the gods , all the angels, worship Him'! The father wants the angels and us to give His Son what the father deserves. Worship Him. Worship my Son!

The Father has more to say about and to Jesus.

Hebrews 1:8. To which of the angels did God ever say what He says to Jesus. Ready?

'Your throne , O God' 'O God'. The Father says o Jesus ' O God'. ' Your throne , O God'. Oh my goodness! That is why the Father exhorts us to worship Jesus. Your throne, O God' . The Father addresses Jesus as 'God'. 'o God' It takes my breath away!

The author of Hebrews is quoting psalm 45. Psalm 45 is a love song, celebrating the love between God's ideal king and his lover. Right in the middle of the story – verse 6 – the psalmist exclaims 'Your throne, O God is forever and ever.' The psalmist is realizing that the ideal king will somehow sit on the throne of the universe. He is not addressing the King as God. He would never do that. But unknown to him the psalmist is speaking beyond what he knows. And the author of Hebrews hears that., he hears what the Holy Spirit intends to be heard. He hears God addressing His beloved Son – your throne, O God'. Isn't this amazing? This is why the author of Hebrews can say in the opening lies of his sermon – verse 3 – Jesus the Son is 'the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of God's nature' (1:3). The word 'radiance' means shines forth. It is at he property of light to shine forth light radiates light. It is the property of God to shine forth ; God radiates God. And the radiation is Jesus of the light. 'O God'. The word 'exact representation' refers to an image stamped on a coin. When you look at the image you see the character of the one I the image. When you look at Jesus you see what God is; you see the character of God. God looks at Jesus and says 'O God'.

There is more!

Hebrews 1:10. To which of the angles did God ever say what God says to Jesus. Ready?

In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundation of the world.' 'In the beginning, O Lord, You' ' O Lord, You'. O Lord'. The Father addresses Jesus as Lord.

The author of Hebrews is quoting Psalm 102. Psalm 102 is a prayer for help in the face of decay and death. The psalmist cries out, 'do not hide Your face from me in the day of distress' (102:2). And in the middle of His prayer he cries out, 'But you, O Lord, abide forever' and then verse 25, 'In the beginning You laid the foundation of the earth.' ' O lord, You' is the cry of psalm 102. O Lord you'. 'You remain forever'. You remain the same'. 'O Lord'.



The Hebrews for Lord is Yahweh, the sacred name of the God of Israel. 'O Yahweh'. The Psalmist calls out using this name. And the author of Hebrews hears in the psalmist cry the Father calling out to His Son'. 'O Yahweh'. Yahweh calls out 'o Yahweh' Yahweh calls Jesus Yahweh! You, O Yahweh!

Jehovah is the way the term was often rendered in the last centuries. O Jehovah! Mercy me. Jehovah calls Jesus Jehovah! 'O Lord, o Jehovah, 'O Yahweh'. You. You laid the foundation of the earth; the heavens are the work of your heart.

Which is why the author of Hebrews can say in the opening lines of his sermon – verse 3 – Jesus the Son is the One through whom God made the universe and Jesus the Son upholds all things by His powerful word. Jesus made the world; Jesus upholds the world; Jesus made you; Jesus upholds you; Jesus made me; Jesus upholds me.

And always will. For as the Father say, You, Lord , remain forever, everything else will change but you remain the same. Which is why the author of Hebrews can say in 13:8 the famous line 'Jesus that is the same yesterday, today and forever'. The author can say that because the Father says it ; 'O Lord You remain the same forever'.

Hebrews 1:13

To which of the angels did God ever say what He says to Jesus ' Sit at My right hand until I make you enemies a footstool for your feet'. The author of Hebrews is quoting Psalm 110. Psalm 110 is the text of the Old Testament the New Testament quotes the most. Why? Because it speaks of Jesus as He is right now. Seated at the right hand of the Father. The 'right hand' is the symbol of authority; to sit at the 'right hand' is to be invested with the authority of the throne today. The Father invests His Son with the Father's authority.

'Sit' Jesus the Son has finished his crucial work for the Father , for us.

So the author of Hebrews ties chapter 1 and 2 of His sermon together by that great affirmation. 1:3 ' After he has provided purification for sins, he sat down as the majesty of heaven. 2:17 'He made atonement for the sins of the people. 'Sit at my right hand', says God the Father to Jesus. 'You have finished the work, sit my Son. Sit O God, sit O Yahweh, sit O Jesus. And one day all that opposes You and Your Kingdom will lay at Your feet.

And as the author of Hebrews can say in the middle of his sermon, Hebrews 8:1, 'the main point in what has been said is this ' We have said a high priest has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens. The one sufficient mediator between God and humanity has finished His crucial work and has taken His seat. The mediator of the new covenant. The mediator of a new agreement between God and humanity

Sit, my son. My only-begotten Son who I have loved for all eternity, sit. O God, sit. I anoint You with the oil of ???. O Lord O Jesus , sit.