

God Made Known: He is Not Silent Hebrews 1:1–3

Silence. It can be golden—after a long day of trying to interpret or to abide with the many sounds of a toddler, or a room full of them, silence can be a welcome minister. Or, escaping the 8-hour noisy hub of an office with machinery and meetings, or maybe after enduring music from your 21-year-old that fails to harmonize with your own musical tastes. Silence can help you recalibrate, rejuvenate, and think more deeply about the things going on in your particular circumstances, your mind, your affections.¹ The absence of noise can be the beginning of the presence of stability. In a busy, noisy world, we could use more of it. Yes, silence can be wonderful. Yet, silence can be haunting, too. The moments after a loud bang in the attic in the middle of the night; the electricity stops flowing into your home, or, to come full circle, when the toddler in the next room is silent for way too long—that can be rather terrifying.

Silence can also communicate meaning. No train whistle...I can safely cross the tracks, No more scurrying in the walls...good job Terminix. And the layers of meaning that accompany the quiet of an empty nest are strangely both painful and satisfying. Silence can also mean the end—the end of a task, a gathering, a relationship. To the Jew who clung to the promises made from Adam to Malachi, the four centuries of silence from God was far from golden. Surely the question crescendo-ed with each successive generation—*Will the God who promised make good on them?* Silence can be a steroid for cynicism, unbelief, and bitterness. It's into this context of silence that God definitively speaks, and in doing so He becomes what He never was, while never ceasing to be who He's always been. And if your mind short-circuits at a sentence like that, join the club. And again, if it does, know then that we're headed in the right direction.

I. The Divine Repetition

¹ *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,* God spoke. On day one He spoke light into existence, and subsequent days, years, and centuries, He continued to voice His Word beyond the formation of heavenly bodies and ocean residents. He spoke to the part of His creation who are made in His image. “*Adam, where are you?*” “*Where is Abel, your brother?*” “*Go forth from your country to the land I will show you.*” And as the centuries unfolded, God chose to speak in more indirect but no less powerful ways. One commentator wrote, “God is pictured not as a silent and distant force, impassively regulating the universe, but as a talker, as One who has been speaking, arguing, pleading, wooing, commanding, telling stories, conversing, and generally spinning words across the line between heaven and earth since the beginning of time.”² The point stands: The divine habit, full of mercy, is that God shows us the value He places on relationships between Himself and those made in His image, and He does so by His own self-disclosure, chiefly by utilizing words. And in Old Testament times, God conveyed Himself *to the fathers in the prophets, in many portions and in many ways.*

God spoke *in the prophets* to the Jewish peoples. A prophet was one who received God's message for the purpose of conveying that message to the people. Paul writes the Christian faith is built secondarily upon the “*apostles and the prophets.*”³ They told the truth in the present and foretold the truth about

¹ If you're unfamiliar with it, I commend Donald Whitney's chapter on Silence and Solitude from his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (pg. 221-248).

² Thomas Long, *Hebrews*, 7.

³ Ephesians 2:19–20, “*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.*”

the future. They were never meant to have the final word. In fact, part of the deficiency of the office of prophet was the prophet's own heart, susceptible to the very sins that plagued his hearers. You might imagine some awkward moments when the prophets sometimes spoke beyond what they understood, such as the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15, "*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.*" No more than the man in the moon did Moses completely grasp what came out of his mouth in the middle of laying out various laws and covenant stipulations to Israel. Ultimately, though the prophets served their purpose, the flicker of their office would give way to the Light born under that natal star bearing universal significance.

In many portions is a reference to God speaking at various times to his people through these prophets. He told this prophet this detail about His character and His will, and it would be relayed to His people. He revealed to a different prophet in another setting more details regarding His Person and His purposes. God's habit was not silence, but longstanding communication rooted in love for His image bearers. Is not this what we do when we love others? We speak with them. Speak freely and honestly. We choose our words carefully because we understand that words bear meaning. God speaking over the ages speaks to His great loving patience with humanity. Even the sharpest of warnings have some soft hues of mercy to them.

In many ways indicates the form of God speaking, how God said what He chose to say to the peoples through the prophets. And if we think for one minute that God was aiming to speak predictably with no color, giving us straight, bland truths with no spice, then we've not read the Bible very carefully. No, the writer of Hebrews is pointing to the way God revealed Himself in the Old Testament through stories, events, hymns, proverbs, poetry, parables, love songs, and through wisdom and apocalyptic genres.⁴ More than this even, consider the literary devices God employed to reveal Himself—acrostics, alliteration, hyperboles, ironies, metaphors, paradox, parallelism, rhyme, simile. This is one of the many reasons the Bible is such a compelling and glorious book, is it not?! God has labored to connect with His world in relatable and understandable ways, and many times He couches the truth of Himself, as the Preacher from Ecclesiastes sought to do, with beautiful words that arrest the hearer, or reader.

- Psalm 103:12, "*As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.*"
- Isaiah 1:18, "*Come now, let us reason together, that though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.*"
- Jeremiah 32:4, "*I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.*"

The fall of man in Genesis 3 brought about a natural dullness, and in love God made sure that at many times and in many ways to give language that would clap its hands to wake us from spiritual stupor.⁵ We can't really get a the full intent of the author of Hebrews as he wrote these 61 words in three verses, but what we do know is that the opening of this book demonstrates an elegance in style, and that the author intended to express the preeminence of the One he's describing with literary artistry.⁶ We can't see this in the English versions but in the Greek almost every word in verse one begins with the Greek letter Pi. Was he alliterating? It certainly seemed so! Some scholars even say that he's doing so with a

⁴ Thomas Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 53.

⁵ John Piper, *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, *Seeing Beauty and Saying Beautifully*, 608.

⁶ Schreiner, 53.

bit of rhetorical balance, where words are similar lengths and sound the same.⁷ So, the same divine Author who employed varying genres and literary devices over previous centuries was blowing right here.⁸ So what we find in these verses, both in style and substance, is one of the clearest, sustained claps in the whole canon of holy scripture—words that are not just at the heart of the Christian faith, but words by which all other doctrines of the faith are measured. If these words are rejected, then the one who rejects is under condemnation already, and whose only escape is to come back here and believe in the One unfolded in these verses. But if these words are wed with faith, there is no ceiling or end date of praise for the people who believe them!

It was God’s way—over and over He revealed Himself through the prophets. We have a whole testament unveiling this reality. But this divine repetition was going somewhere with ultimacy and finality.

II. The Divine Reveal

² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son . . .

The Old Testament was like looking at and standing on the wall side, the dry side of a massive dam. Picture with me, lingering beside a trickle of water in the valley below, there are sure signs of an immense reservoir on the other side. A gate or spillway is periodically opened due to flooding. There’s enough at your feet to sustain life, but more is longed for. Birds of prey constantly hover and dive on the other side, presumably hunting their daily catch. Warning signs dot the area where you are standing to keep you safe from the sudden releases of water flow, or from a breach altogether. Plumes of smoke from campers hunting or fishing rise from the banks and from the woods that touch the reservoir. It is clear that what you can’t fully see is a hub that sustains life after life. God, speaking to us *in His Son* is not just another cloud of fire or a column of smoke, impressive as that was in Exodus 13. God speaking *to us in His Son* is the calculated release of the immensity of Living Water upon His very creation! This was God with a microphone, God in the cosmic amphitheater, God drawing near so that the voice is clearest. Hebrews 1:2 and what follows: This is God removing the dam.

But this is also God with the reply to all that had gone before, God with the answer to all that He’d promised for millennia. This was God crushing the head of the serpent, gathering His grains of sand as on a seashore, lifting up His Healer in the wilderness of the world, sustaining life from a gushing Rock, occupying the eternal throne of David, restoring all the fortunes of those who’ve sat in a similar heap of sorrow like Job. This is the installed King, begotten from the Father, who must be kissed with faith, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way; this is the voice of the Lord upon the waters, who breaks the cedars, who shakes the wilderness, who makes the deer to calve and strips the forests bare. This is Solomon’s spring of joy and the answer to all his dead ends. Here is the One who will not break the bruised reed nor extinguish the smoking wick. God the Son is the One who bore the sins of many, the One who is the centerpiece of the New Covenant that will include everyone from the least to the greatest, the One that made Job put his hand over his mouth, Ezekiel to fall on his face, and Habakkuk to quiver with lips and legs. This One was finally here. In the Son, we find the fulfillment of promises and prophecies. The shadows fall away, and the substance is born in a lowly stall. He starts the new era of *last days*. His arrival puts a full stop on further revelations. Centuries of signs had something of Him on them. He is the destination, and the writer of Hebrews is ready to explore the glory of Jesus Christ.

⁷ Schreiner refers to the author of Hebrews as a “master craftsman” on pg. 53.

⁸ David Allen, *Hebrews*, 97.

But let me say this clearly: All efforts to explain Christ's Person, including this one, are paltry at best. The need of this hour and every hour is that the Jesus which Hebrews 1 presents is the One worthy of your worshipping, adoring heart. To borrow some language from this epistle, there's no room to get your bearings in the outer court of this book. There is no adjusting to the light, if you will. There is no outer court. The author is led to begin the journey of this letter in the holy of holies, where the proper questions surface, "Who is this, One?" "Who am I in light of Him?"

a. *Christ's Person/Essence/Nature*

The author of Hebrews sets out to show that Christ is superior. He has His rivals. This book will make mention of some of them—Moses, angels, the sacrificial system, etc. We've been reminded of a few others that seek to compete with allegiance to Him from Ecclesiastes—pleasure, possessions, busyness, even the limits of wisdom—all vanity and smoke. The godless world system, chalked with information based on science, pragmatism, and expedient ethics, spiritually subsidized, and upheld by the father of lies—this system has set itself as Christ's rival. Yet all are but sandcastles in a category 5 hurricane. They have no chance of ultimate success or advance in light of the Person presented to us here. Verse 3...

³ *He is the radiance of [God's] glory and the exact representation of His nature*

Might we ask first, what is the *glory* of God? The word carries the ideas of heaviness and brilliance, something that has a great effect on those who can perceive it. Here, it's the totality of divinity shining as the unrelenting beams in a cloudless sky; the perfect harmony and infinite beauty of all of God's excellencies—here they are, in this Man who is more than a man. Simply put, Jesus Christ is the God of resplendent, divine glory, worthy to be beheld and loved and worshiped for an eternity of eternities. Moses went gray before the presence of this glory. John makes it a point to emphasize that Isaiah caught a glimpse of this glory long before Bethlehem.

You don't have to dig or think too hard to figure out that this book is written to the Jewish community. The images employed presuppose a deeper understanding of the Law and the sacrificial system. So it's important to establish the continuity of glory seen by the Jews before Jesus came, and the glory now seen in Him. The glory that passed by Moses is the glory born of Mary. All that is needed for the blooming flower is bound up in the bland seed. Old Testament glory is seed. Christ is the bloom. He is the expressive outflow of God's glory.

But the author continues to tighten the picture. Jesus is also the *exact representation of* the Father's *nature*. Perhaps you've heard the description of this phrase as meaning something akin to an engraved character made by a die or a seal commonly used to impress images on coins.⁹ As the coin duplicates the die's features down to the most intricate details, so does the Son bear such exactness to the Father. There is no space to relegate the babe in the manger to something other than God assuming the frailty of humanity's flesh. The bruise-able, disease-able, weary-ridden, blood-filled, brain-directed, death-susceptible, fleshly frame of Jesus was the plan of the Godhead before the ages began. And this same Jesus, humbled all the way down to these realities—He is God before time, God who stepped inside of time, and God who now rules over and all our times. He is God of very God and Light of very Light.¹⁰ And we make no bones about this precious, gentle, warrior-LORD. He was Lord at His birth

⁹ Allen, 120.

¹⁰ The Nicene Creed

and will stand as Lord in the new heavens and new earth.¹¹ Both these images at the beginning of verse 3 pulsate with deity.

The remaining descriptions of Jesus now fall sensibly in line. If He is the God-man, then we can now understand what remains, with the cumulative effect meant to show why God's revelation through His Son is the highest, fullest, and most complete he could possibly give.¹²

b. *Christ's Position*

² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things...

Promised in Psalm 2 to inherit the nations by divine appointment, this Jesus is the Messiah who came to fulfill that Psalm of David. Psalm 2:8, "*Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.*" I don't have to convince you that *nations* and *ends of the earth* are huge ideas, but apparently, according to verse 2 of our text, nothing is excluded. The whole universe of creatures, material and spiritual, animate and inanimate, rational and irrational, all are His property, to be governed according to His pleasure.¹³ At the moment, we see this truth as if looking through slightly shaded glass. Yet, we can be presently encouraged inside of a groaning creation as we think on that Day when our faith will turn to sight. Much of it reeling in rebellion. But our Father, who loves us, appointed our King and Savior, who loves us, to own and wisely operate ***all things***. Christ gets it all and directs it all, including our very destinies. This is personal!

The word ***heir*** signifies one who has a right to what another owns by virtue of relationship. When Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17, "*all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine,*" He was specifically referring to the lives of His people. And though the ***all things*** list is sweeping and worthy of reflection and worship, you, and those sitting next to you in here—we are under the possession of a great and merciful Christ! The Father sent His Son to take us for His own, with no intentions of giving us back over to our own deceitful hearts, nor back into the hands of the prince of darkness.

c. *Christ's Power*

² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son...through whom also He made the world.

And ^{3b}...[He] ***upholds all things by the word of His power.***

Yes, Christ was born, but He was certainly not created. Christ is eternal, and clearly stated that He is so in the same prayer from John 17 mentioned earlier. "*And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*" Jesus existed before creation and was the agent of creation, truths that bend the mind and bow the heart of faith.

But not every heart bows here. In the 4th century, the church was entrenched in a battle for orthodoxy as Arianism attempted to spread its wings. In this teaching, Christ was created, not begotten from the Father. In fact, one of the famous lines that made it into the music scene of the day was, "There was a time when [Christ] was not." Depending on the emperor, Arianism gained a foothold for several decades but eventually lost ground to the truths of this text. A bishop named Athanasius championed the eternality and divinity of Christ. He stood and didn't shift with the winds of his day. And church, we have a charge to hold the line as well. Christ is the eternal God through whom the world was fashioned with His majestic glory.

¹¹ *Silent Night*, written by Josephus Mohr, 1816.

¹² Allen, 109.

¹³ John Brown, *Hebrews*, 25.

And He is active in and over His creation, for He ***upholds all things by the word of His power***. There's that phrase again—***all things***. You know, in many ways children can teach us about the kingdom of God. But we might also observe some ways in them that point in a different direction. On December 26th your living room might look like it is holding ***all things***. If you have children or grandchildren, most of the boxes and paper were devoted to their gifts. And I'm rather confident that those gifts you gave were given with responsibilities attached—take care of them, share them, clean them up after you're done using them, etc. In essence, steward them, or govern them well. About February, they may have been stewarded well (maybe not), but some of those items will have faded into the land of the uninterested and irrelevant.

Christ inherits all that He makes and His interest in all that He's made will never fade, and He proves it daily by sustaining His creation by the ***word of His power***. This seems to infer that if Christ ceased sustaining all things, then the universe would collapse on itself or cease to exist altogether. Now this sounds odd and over-the-top because we naturally measure reality by our senses, which is part of our sinful makeup. But the center of reality in the universe is not us or anything that can be placed inside of a test tube, or seen with the eyes, or felt by the hands. But, "the foundational reality in the universe is Christ and his Word."¹⁴ And that Word keeps gravity intact, the sun from fizzling out, the oceans from breaking their appointed boundaries, and my heart from stopping. Turn to the existential left and the existential right, and you'll not find power of this magnitude described or expressed anywhere. This is our LORD Jesus. The children's song is right and rich with the profundity, "I am weak but He is strong."

d. Christ's Provision

Verse 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...

The author of Hebrews is hitting all the major chords of Christology, and no less in this statement about Christ's aim and work for us. The authoritative, final Word from God, the heir of all things, creator of all things, sustainer of all things, and now the Redeemer of all of His people...He has dealt with our greatest problem! That which keeps us from seeing Him in the Old Testament, that which blinds us to His fascinating radiance, that which makes us deaf to His calls for mercy—our deadly sin needed a corresponding response, and by the sacrifice of Himself Christ put away sin with a death of His own. He made ***purification*** for it. Unsurprisingly, since we're in Hebrews, this is a word originating from the Levitical system. Sin has defiled us wholesale, and it must be purged, or atoned for. This Christ did with our sin, not in part but the whole, nailed to His cross, we bear it no more. A blameless Christ was offered to present to the Father a blameless church.¹⁵

Does Christ bear the punishment due your sins, or are you still carrying a weight, a weight that will eventually destroy you? Again, if you're an unbeliever here today, you may be asking yourself a few things—what's this guy talking about? Or, how could I ever believe this? Or maybe you're honest enough to realize that evil and sin are real, though you've not settled on how it should be addressed. Take stock, right here—notice what God is saying in these verses—the glory of Christ is forever linked to the shame of His cross. And this is because of His great love for this vile man. For me, for you,

¹⁴ John Piper sermon, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/he-sat-down-at-the-right-hand-of-majesty>

¹⁵ 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13, "Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, [12] and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, [13] so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

Christ, God the Son, was born to die, that “man, no more die.”¹⁶ God has made this Savior known. Do you know Him by faith?

e. Christ's Preeminence

When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...

No doubt the subject of our text has been the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Yet, the one main verb in this text is ***sat down***. In other words, this was the end goal of the Incarnation. Yes, Christ is the answer to Old Testament promises and prophecy. Yes, Christ existed before the mountain you climbed on your last vacation and before the galaxies you squinted to see at night from that same mountain. Yes, Christ created it all, owns it all, and governs it all as the appointed heir. And yes, there is even a connection to the cosmic element inside of the redeeming work of Jesus, Colossians 1:20, “[*Christ reconciled*] to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” But it all found resolve as the Father accepted Christ’s finished work and raised Him from the dead, crowning Him as the preeminent LORD and King of the universe.

Conclusion

Yes, He’s that big, that important, that central, that imposing, that kind, that dominant, that incredible, and that merciful, and in keeping with the previous few minutes, I’m understating everything at every point.

Sin muddles what we hear. Even as I preach this, my heart is not low enough, praise not high enough, love not deep enough. But in the Person of God the Son, God the Father speaks. “*This is My Son, the Chosen One; listen to Him*” were the startling words that fell from the sky on the day when Jesus was transfigured with Peter, John, and James. But words like this were both for the church and the world...

Church, we listen to and are led by God’s final Word—the Risen, radiant, and ruling Redeemer. He is our choicest meat in the feast of the Bible. The branches would wither without the Vine. The sheep would die without the Shepherd. The building would crumble without the Cornerstone. The body would not move without the Head. The bride would grieve without the Groom. God has spoken in His Son, our Sovereign, our Savior—worship Him in the beauty of all He is this day, brothers and sisters.

If the Jesus of Hebrews 1, the greatest Being of all, is not reigning in your heart by faith, why not?

God has spoken wholly and finally in the sending of His Son.

He has not been silent.

Will you be?

¹⁶ *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing!* By Charles Wesley, 1739.