

God Speaks, Therefore We Are

Bible Verses Referenced: Hebrews 1:1–4, Hebrews 2:1–4, Psalm 8, John 1:1, Genesis 1:3

Love the guy with the boots. Must be from Texas. All right, let's pray. Father, thank you so much for the gift of Your Word and especially the Word made flesh, Jesus, Your Son, who the writer of Hebrews says, is the exact representation of your being. And so we ask that You would speak to us through Your Word.

It's living and active, sharper than any two-edged to the core of our being. So we pray, Lord, that You would pierce us through the gift of Your Word. May it be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son Jesus in His name we pray. Amen. Please. We're beginning our lesson, the Book of Hebrews, this series Draw Near. For the next six weeks, we'll be reading Scripture passages from Hebrews, and hopefully you'll grab one of the draw near books before you leave, if you don't have one already, where there's daily devotions about it.

And then we also are going to be having small group studies that will kick that off on Wednesday if you don't already have a small group that are gathering in homes, but that could be a good way to get organized if you would like to participate on that level. But what the Book of Hebrews fundamentally is a sermon. I've often been asked as a pastor of churches various times, "Would you do an instructed Eucharist for us?" Have you ever heard that phrase, an instructed Eucharist?

What it basically is, is going through the worship service, and there's all these parts to the worship service, and we just kind of go through them. If we've been Episcopalians our whole life, we may have it all memorized and be able to work through it by heart, but we actually don't actually sometimes stop and reflect, "Well, why did we do that? Why did we say that? Why did we pray that?

Why did we sing that at that point?" And so, an instructed Eucharist takes you through the various parts of a worship service and helps explain why that's there, what its meaning is, and what we're supposed to be doing, and what we're supposed to be getting out of it. Well, basically, what the book of Hebrews is, is an instructed Eucharist.

It is the first and earliest example of the early church preaching and teaching about what is supposed to be taking place and going on in the context of a worship service. So, it's a sermon. The writer of Hebrews says it's a brief exhortation. It's 13 chapters. My sermon today will be a lot shorter than the 13 chapters of the Book of Hebrews.

It's going to take me six weeks to get through it all. But it's nevertheless, a brief sermon, the writer says, and it's a sermon about worship to be preached in the context of worship. Essentially, it has three different parts. The first part is all about the ministry of the Word.

What we do in the context of our worship service right now, at the beginning of the worship service, the first half, and then you know we kind of have halftime when we do the peace of the Lord and we do announcements and that kind of thing, and we go into the second half of the worship service. So the first third of the book of Hebrews, chapters 1 through 4, is all about the ministry of the Word, and it starts with the supreme revelation of the Word of God and Jesus, and it concludes with that very famous passage that the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, and it pierces right to the core of our being.

Then after that, the writer, the preacher, he moves to communion. He's talking about the great high priest, Jesus, and how He leads us through a sacrifice of Himself into not an earthly throne room, but the heavenly throne room, the throne room of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, through the veil of His flesh and His sprinkled blood, what we celebrate in communion.

So that gets you to chapter 10, and then chapters 11 through 13 is all about us living as living sacrifices, basically. In light of our fellowship and our worship and communion with the Lord, and hearing His

Word, and being drawn into the Holy Place, we then are out in the world living as living sacrifices, as worshipers in this world, in the world, but not of it.

So, it's a very powerful book that can teach us a lot about what the whole of the Bible is saying and the whole point of why we've been put here on earth. You know, a very basic way to think about a worship service is, fundamentally, we have come here to bless God. That's why at the beginning of a worship service, we always say, "Blessed be God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." You ever notice that we don't say, "Hey, good morning, y'all.

We're really glad that y'all are here at St. Mark's." You ever notice that? We don't start that way, even though I would love to be able to greet everybody and welcome all the new people right from the start. But the reason why we start with Blessed be God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is because that sets the trajectory and the tone of what we are about right from the start.

When we come into this place and gather with the brothers and sisters of Christ in the Great Assembly Hall, we are stepping into the throne room of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. And the entire orientation of our being right from the beginning is vertical, not horizontal, not one to another, but straight to the Lord.

And so we begin to bless the Lord, and that is our intent and our aim in coming into worship is to bless the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the Triune God. And as a consequence of that and a result of that, we are blessed. So we don't come here primarily to be blessed, but to bless. And as a result of that, giving of ourselves away, we actually receive the blessing of God.

And this is how the service ends with blessed be God, or may the Lord bless you and keep you and cause his face to shine up near, whatever we say. What do we say at the end? "May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you now and always." That's when we do. So we bless to be blessed. So, chapters 1 and 2 of the book of Hebrews, all about the Word of God.

And the basic premise of the book and the way that it starts is very similar to John's Gospel, actually, that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Hebrews begins very similarly. Let's go back to our Scriptures for today and just get that before us. Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets.

But in the last days, He has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed as heir of all things, through whom He also created the worlds. The Scriptures assume something very important that our culture and our world rejects and is very skeptical of. The Scriptures assume that we actually can know what God thinks about us.

What the world says and our culture reinforces more often than not is that we can't know the mind of God. That even if there is a God and we kind of have to remain agnostic about that, there's no way for us to get to anything that high or out there or that spiritual. And so maybe there's a God. If you want to believe there's a God, that's fine for you. If that's your truth, you can have that truth.

What's true for me may be something different. But we can't really know that God or what he thinks about things or us or whatever. The reason why the culture operates that way and thinks that way is because human beings start from a man-centric perspective. One of the great philosophers was a man named Descartes that was the founder of the Modern Enlightenment Period.

And one of the things that Descartes did is he started by doubting all of the revelation of God in the Scriptures and through Jesus Christ. And he said, well, these could all just be a Fig Newton of my imagination. And so I'm going to just try to doubt every single thing and see if there's anything that will make sense to me. Do you remember what he said?

It's a very famous phrase, "I think, therefore I am." And what Descartes did for the Western civilization in the Western world is something that was really bad, actually. He switched the basis of truth to self and what I think gives me definition for my being.

And in doing that move of doubting the transcendent and doubting the revelation of God, he forever doomed or not forever, but he doomed Western civilization to pursue a very self-centered and almost, I dare say, narcissistic way of looking at life. And what the writers of the Scriptures are saying, what Hebrews is saying so profoundly, is that God has always been speaking to us.

That the reason why we are is not because we think, but because God speaks. God speaks, therefore I am. And we can know what He says, and we've always been able to hear the voice of God down through the history of humanity, through various prophets and sages, and so on, angelic messengers like Moses or Elijah or John the Baptist.

But in these last days, God has most profoundly and most definitively spoken to us through His Son, who He has made heir of all things. And the Son of God is the exact representation of the divine being. So if you want to know God, you need to know Jesus is what the writer of Hebrews is saying.

Because nowhere else will you be able to understand the mind of God and the will of God for this world without understanding Him. Wow. So there's a response that the preacher then says, "We have to respond to that." Because if that's true, if God has been speaking to us through angels and so on, and now in these last days He's spoken definitively and most profoundly and supremely through His Son, then we better pay attention to that.

"Lest we drift away," is the way he puts it. "Therefore, we must pay greater attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away. For if the message declared to us through angels proved valid, and every transgression and disobedience received its just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great as salvation?"

The preacher of Hebrews is giving us essentially three different antidotes or remedies or recognitions of how we can accept and believe and receive the Word of God. The key thing is to pay attention to it.

You may have noticed when we had two Scripture readers up here, and they began by saying a reading from the book of Job, and the other one said, "A reading from the book of Hebrews." But did you notice how they ended? What did they say? "The Word of the Lord." And you said, "Thanks be to God." Now, that's the reading of the-- That's the word spoken through prophets, what we heard.

Then I came down here in the middle. Remember this? The candles and the gospel book, and we raised it up. It's a little more prominent. Did you see that? A little more ceremony associated with all of that. And then I said something even stronger than the Word of the Lord. I said, "The holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." And what did you say? "Glory to you, Lord Christ." Now notice what you didn't say.

Read it to us, Charlie. What you said is, "Jesus, you are speaking to us." Now, that particular gospel passage is always hard to hear, especially those who've had marital problems and struggles. Like, that's very much part of my family's story, is with my parents. And so that one's a tough one.

But what we said at the end of it, even after we heard that tough word from the Lord, is the gospel of the Lord, and then you said, "Praise to you, Lord Christ." And what the writer of the book of Hebrews is saying is, is that Jesus Christ walks among the lampstand of His church, and that when the Word of God is being preached in the context of the assembled people of God, Jesus Christ Himself is speaking to our hearts and our minds.

And we have been acknowledging that in our liturgy, that it is Jesus' voice, the risen Lord Christ that we're hearing whenever the gospel is read, and what should we do, but pay attention to it. In the old days, I'm talking about like the early church days, and this is still a part of the ancient liturgies of the Orthodox Church, which is one of the oldest continuous worshipping bodies in the world, is the Orthodox Churches.

But when the gospel is read, one of the priests, they'd say, "The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," and the bishop would yell out, "Attune!" In other words, pay attention because you are about to hear the voice of the king. This is not the time to be thinking about your grocery list, or checking your email, or thinking about how the gators did last night.

And this is the problem with human beings, is that we have all kinds of distractions that pull us away from worship in general. But even in the context of the worship of the living God, when we come into the throne room of the king and our mind is going a million different directions, and our stomachs are going, "Well, what are we going to have for lunch?" And this sermon seems like it's going on a long time.

And so what the writer is doing for us, he's saying, number one, if you can look at the past testimony of the veracity of the Word of God, and you know the impact that it had in the history of redemption, because if the people that did and didn't listen to the Word of God and the story of the Bible experienced its blessings or its curses for not responding to it, well, then how much more when we have the supreme revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, will it impact us if we don't accept and pay attention to and receive the great salvation of Jesus?

I mean, we have something so much stronger and so much better than what the guys in the Old Testament had. And if they experienced consequences for not following the Word of God that they had, how much more will it impact our lives if we don't give ourselves wholly to our attention to respond and be faithful to the Word of God in our day? Wow.

And he goes on to say, not only has this been verified by the track record of God's Word down through history, but it's also been testified by the mighty acts of Jesus when He first appeared and the testimony of the disciples as they presented it to us. More than that, there's a much more important reason why you should pay attention to the Word of God and receive it.

Not just because God is great and awesome and His Word is powerful and true in reality and there's consequences. But you should believe it because He loves you. And that the reason why He gave us His Word is because He cares for us. The writer of Hebrews would say, "It wasn't angels that the Lord subjected the coming world, but it's a man.

Who are humans that are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? You made them a little lower than the angels, but you crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet. And what Hebrews is interpreting this Psalm, which is Psalm 8, he's applying it to the life of Jesus, who made Himself low by taking on not only humanity, but bearing suffering and going through even the suffering of death so that by the grace of God, He might taste death for everybody.

And it's so it's through Him that God is speaking to us. When I was in preaching school, one of the little slogans that I often heard was, "People don't care how much you know until they what? Know how much you care." You heard that one? People don't care how much you know until you know how much you care. And then what they would say is, you earn the right to be a prophet in a person's life by showing up at the sick bed and being in the hospital and your pastoral care.

And what they were trying to get across to us, young seminarians, is all this theology and truth is wonderful, but people are more than just brains. They actually have hearts. And what people need in order to get the message through and across to them is actually empathy and love and caring.

And this is what the preacher is saying about Jesus is there is no one who cares more about you and who loves you more and has done everything to go to the depths of your pain and even to the point of the depths of suffering unto death so that He might not only convey to you that He gets you and what you're going through and He cares about you.

But He has done everything conceivably possible from a divine and human perspective to get through to you and let you know that not only is what He's saying truth, but it's the loving truth that it is coming from a God who cares about you and would do anything to save you and bring you and draw you into His presence.

This is what we're coming into in a worship service is to the God where He is speaking to us not only through the truth of His Word, but addressing our deepest concerns, hopes, dreams, pains, sufferings, our very hearts as the one who has empathized and sympathized with us in His weakness.