

Greater Messenger, Greater Message

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:1-4

Turn to Hebrews 1 please. Hebrews ends like a letter, but it does not begin like a letter. Hebrews begins in high gear, which suits me fine since I never really learned how to properly introduce a sermon anyway. So let's begin.

*Heb 1:1-4 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels, as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.*

God's Two Speeches, Divided by Messenger (1:1-2a)

The writer to the Hebrews breaks all God's messages to his people into two, based on two different messengers. The two messengers are the prophets in the past, and the Son in these last days. The two messengers are all the prophets, and the Son.

By "the prophets" Hebrews mean the whole OT. Moses was a prophet, and the Psalms are often prophetic. So for Hebrews, "the prophets" are all God said before Christ.

And notice that the last days began with Christ's first coming. The NT writers all understood themselves to live in these last days.

The Logic of the Greater Speech

The writer of Hebrews uses this kind of logic: the greater the messenger, the greater the message. The prophets brought God's words, and the Son brought God's words. No difference there. But the messages are not equally important, because the messengers were not equally important. The Son was far greater than the prophets, so his message from God will be much more important.

That logic takes us right through Hebrews 1. We'll just go through 1:1-4, and then we'll move to Hebrews 2.

The Seven Majesties of Christ (1:2b-4)

In 1:2-4, Hebrews gives us seven majesties of the Son, so that we will pay close attention to the salvation message the Son brought us. Majesties? Greatnesses? Excellencies? I am not sure what to call these. We'll work with "majesties."

We will go quickly through these seven short lines about Christ. This is a dense and almost unbelievable section about the Son. And he's talking about the Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, and he's explaining why a message from this person is a most important message.

The first, second, and fourth majesties are all about the Son and Creation, so I will take them up together, and then the third. (1) God appointed the Son to inherit everything at the End. (2) Through the Son God made everything at the Beginning. (4) The Son holds up everything (carries it along, keeps it all going, sustains it) by his powerful word.

The Son plays some crucial role in Creation at the start, God creates through the Son. And at the End, it will all be given to him. That's already decided: it will be his inheritance.

And between the Beginning and the End, the Son carries it along, he keeps it all going. The universe does not run itself, though that's sometimes the picture we are given. Things keep going in all the predictable ways because God the Son holds it and carries it. These are the first, second, and fourth majesties of the Son.

The third is that the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the imprint of his being. In different words, the Son is the brightness of God's glory, and the stamp of God's nature.

Try to separate the sun in the sky from the warmth and light that come out from the sun. On the one hand, a big ball of fire; on the other hand, light and warmth radiate from that ball of fire. It's hard to imagine one without the other, the sun in the sky apart from light and warmth. Jesus, the Son of God, is the light and the glory that come out from God.

And the Son is the imprint of God's being, the stamp of God's very nature. God stamped his very nature on the Son. We must never think that we can imagine a more accurate picture of God Almighty in his essence, than the picture we get from Jesus of the Gospels.

We have trouble with this, and I suspect myself of not believing it. When I imagine what God the Father is like, and what Jesus the Son is like, they are not exactly the same. Big mistake on my part. "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father," said Jesus, and he meant it just like that.

Fifth, the Son made cleansing for sins. Wow. There's an accomplishment nearly equal to creation itself: he made cleansing for sins, he made a way to purify us from our sins. This is big in Hebrews, Hebrews will explain this part carefully later on.

Sixth, he sat down at God's right hand. This comes right out of Psalm 110, sit at my right hand. So the Son is now on the throne beside God's throne. The sense is that he's resting after work. He made cleansing for sins, and having done that, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

And his seventh majesty is that he inherited a much better name than the angels. In the rest of Hebrews 1, we learn about the better name: God calls Jesus “my Son” in 1:5, God calls him “God” in 1:8, and in 1:10 he calls him “Yahweh,” because the “Lord” there in our Bibles is “Yahweh” in Psalm 102, the Scripture that Hebrews quotes there. God never called the angels “my Son” or “God” or “Yahweh.”

Why do Angels Matter?

Why does the writer to the Hebrews spend so much time showing that the Son is greater than the angels? Doesn't everyone know that? Who cares? Why are we talking about angels at all?

The answer is a particular Jewish tradition. This tradition said that when God told Moses what to put in the law, God used angels as his messengers. Our Bibles don't say that, they just say that God spoke to Moses. Our Bibles do not mention angels in that story. But the Jews had come to believe that God used angels as his messengers to give the law to Moses.

Stephen assumed this was true. He mentions this twice in his sermon in Acts 7 (vv38, 53), and everyone listening to him agreed. Paul assumed this was true, in Galatians 3:19. And the writer to the Hebrews also assumed this was true, that God used angels to give the law to Moses.

Let's remember what Hebrews is doing here. Hebrews divides all God's speech into two speeches, first everything God said in the past, and now, what God said through his Son. And the logic works like this: the more important the messenger, the more important the message.

The Jews revered the books of Moses, because God used angels as his messengers to Moses. Hebrews says, “that's true, God used angels as his messengers to Moses. But God spoke to us by his Son Jesus, and his Son is a far greater messenger than the angels.”

The message of Jesus is as much greater than Moses' law as the Son is greater than the angels. And that is why Hebrews shows how much greater the Son is than the angels, so there will be no confusion about which is the greater message.

All of Hebrews 1 is a buildup to the opening of Hebrews 2. So now let's read Hebrews 2:1-4.

*We must pay careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels to Moses was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to this message by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.*

## The Warning: Pay Attention, Don't Drift Away

The whole book of Hebrews is a warning. It is written to Jews who had heard about Christ, and had believed in Christ, now they were Christian Jews. And since then there has been some kind of persecution, some kind of pressure on them that did not happen before they believed in Christ.

It seems the readers are thinking about leaving Christ and just being good Jews again. They are thinking, "that's how Jews came to God all those hundreds of years, and it would make our lives easier, so let's just go back to the old ways, and worship God as devout Jews and no more." And the writer of Hebrews is saying, "that is a very bad move. Don't leave Christ."

"We must pay careful attention to what we heard, so we don't drift away. We will not escape if we ignore the message from this great messenger." That's the core of the warning.

"If the message of Moses, which came through angels, had to be obeyed, and if disobedience to that message received a just punishment, what will happen if we ignore the greater message that comes through the Son? How will we escape God?"

## The Message Announces Great Salvation

I love this part. What is message God gave through his Son? The Son is the greater messenger, but what's his message? A great salvation. The Son announced an incredible salvation. That's how Hebrews summarizes the message of Jesus. What did the Lord's announce, in one word? "Salvation!" In two words, "Great Salvation!"

## What does it Mean to Pay Attention?

The writer says, "we got the great message from the Great Messenger, so we must not drift away, or ignore it, we must pay attention." In Hebrews, how do we actually do that? Three things.

One, go to God, approach God, go confidently to the grace throne of God, draw near to God, flee to God, enter through the new and living way to God. Hebrews never waits for God to come to us. No, but we can always go to God, and when we do, we will receive sympathy, mercy, and help. Go to God (Heb 4:16; 10:19-22).

Two, keep meeting together, in order to encourage each other, and urge each other on to love and to live in God's ways. The closer we are to the End, the more important this is (Heb 10:24-25).

Three, keep loving one another, take care of each other, help one another, keep serving each other (Heb 6:9-12; 13:1-3).

In Hebrews, this is paying attention and not drifting away: we draw near to God for mercy and help, we keep meeting together to encourage each other, we keep helping each other and serving each other. Much of this happens among us, and that is just right.

## Has God Spoken to You?

How did God’s message get to the believers who got this letter? First the Lord announced his salvation, but the people who got Hebrews did not hear Jesus directly. Those who heard Jesus came to the Hebrews, and repeated the Lord’s message of salvation.

And while these followers of the Lord were preaching the gospel to the Hebrews, God added his mark of approval to their message by giving them the ability to perform signs and miracles and wonders. That was God’s way of saying, “Listen to what these people tell you about Jesus. This is my Message, they are speaking for me, and you need to take this gospel as from me.”

And then, the preachers left and the miracles stopped, and after a while life got difficult. There were troubles. And now these Hebrew Christians are looking at each other, and wondering if they really heard from God, and if this is all worth it.

And the preacher who writes Hebrews to them says, “What? You heard the most important message God ever gave, which came from the most important messenger he could send, and now you will drift away, and ignore this? You think you will escape God’s righteous judgment?” And he does not tell them how to get a fresh word from the Lord, he tells them they need endurance.

If you have heard the basic story of Jesus, that he was born, and that he died for our sins, and he rose from the dead. And then he ascended, and he will come back for us his people. If you have heard that story, and the Spirit opened your heart to receive it as God’s offer of salvation to you – if that has happened to you, then you have heard the Voice of God.

You have heard by far the most important thing God has to say to this world. If you heard God so that the gospel made sense to you and you responded, then God has spoken to you directly, and he will never again say anything as important to you.

That’s what we are, that’s what a church is. We are a bunch of people who heard the greatest message God has ever spoken, announced first by the great messenger God has ever sent. And now we are doing our best to build our lives around this together. We will not ignore what God has said, and we will not drift away. We will pay the closest possible attention! Amen.

**PRAYER:** O God, we have heard your greater message, and we have met that Great Messenger. Thank you for speaking to us, that the message came even to us. We don’t want to drift away, and we don’t want to ignore it. We want it to steer our lives. We ask you that the great Shepherd of the sheep will keep us on track. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:** May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.