



July 9, 2023

## "Jesus: Radiance of God's Glory"

**Sermon – Rod Harding**

**Psalm 45:1-7**

**Hebrews 1:1-14**

God has spoken. That simple, yet profound, statement is fundamental to our faith as Christians ... our God is a communicating God, who has revealed himself and his character to the humans he has made, and it is only because of his love and desire to communicate with us that we are able to know him and to be restored into relationship with him.

We know that God has spoken through his creation and on-going sustaining of the universe –

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hand. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. (Psalm 19:1-2)*

We marvel and wonder at the awesomeness of his creation and, in it, we see glimpses of his glory and power, his creativity and love. As the apostle Paul once observed,

*...since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen.  
(Rom 1:20)*

We also know he has spoken through his word ... that's why we read and study the Bible ... we regard it as the 'word' of God, where he is revealed, and where we learn about him and how we can live in relationship with him.

Supremely, we know that God has spoken through Jesus, his Son, who lived and died as a man during what was a short life-time here on this planet. Jesus' life, his ministry, his stories, his relationships, his compassion and love – in short, everything about Jesus – reflects the true character of God to us. In him, we can see and identify with God in a more real and meaningful way, because we can better understand him in his humanity and his full and intimate identification with us.

That's why we so often return to look again and again at Jesus, and even in our own thinking and reading, we love to come back to the gospel

stories ... ‘Tell me the stories of Jesus I love to hear.’ On a regular basis, we deliberately re-visit some aspect of the teaching, the example, the ministry, the centrality of Jesus, which returns us to the gospels, the stirring accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, who recorded for posterity the life and teachings of Jesus. In the last few years here at KAC, we’ve been revisiting Matthew’s gospel, arriving earlier this year at chapter 22.

For the coming term (and a bit beyond), we are committing to read and reflect on the Letter to the Hebrews. More than anything else, this letter is about Jesus, reminding us of some of the very central and significant aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry. There are some ‘unknowns’ about this letter – the author is unknown, and there have been many arguments put forward over the centuries about its date and the intended readers, without any definitive answers to those questions.

For our purposes, I am assuming the letter comes from the early decades of the Christian church – written before 70AD – as that’s when the Jerusalem temple was destroyed by the Romans – but there is no mention of its destruction in the letter.

Further, I am also suggesting it is clear that the letter was intended for Jewish Christians, either a specific group or generally across the developing churches, who were struggling to hold true to the new ways introduced by the gospel and under pressure (both from zealous fellow Jews and from more widespread persecution) to fully return to the old Jewish regulations of sacrificial and liturgical worship, or at least to incorporate them into their Christian practice.

What we do know is that this letter helps us to know and understand Jesus ... and that seems to me to be a good reason for taking a good long look at it.

The letter begins, like this sermon did, with the assertion that ‘God has spoken’.

*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. (vs 1-2)*

These words will, I'd guess, be relatively familiar to many of us – especially if we've been around for more than one or two Christmases – because Hebrews 1 is a recommended and popular place to go as part of the Christmas Bible reading schedule. Who knows – we may even come back to it in December!

Immediately, Jesus is compared and contrasted with the prophets of old. Before Jesus, one of God's most significant and certainly most direct methods of communication with humans was through the prophets, who courageously stood in mostly adverse situations to declare the character and will of God within a particular context of human history. The prophets interpreted the events of their day, seeing them clearly through the eyes of God, and warning an unsuspecting public that God was going to intervene, often dramatically, in the affairs of his people. The prophets are still often regarded as those who knew the future and would be able to 'prophesy' to tell others what the future held, as if they were some kind of fortune-tellers. But nothing could be further from the truth – their role was not so much to tell the future as to understand and interpret the present reality from God's perspective, and to point this perspective out to those whose own understanding and focus had become something other than God-centred.

So they spoke – powerfully, courageously, with great faith and conviction, and often at great risk to their own welfare and comfort. And, as a result of their various ministries conducted at different times throughout the Old Testament history of the people of Israel, things changed, national and international affairs were affected, and the nation of Israel was reminded again and again to return to their God, whose unfailing love and faithfulness to his covenant promise would ensure their forgiveness and restoration. Malachi, whose prophetic words have challenged us during the term just gone, is a clear example of the true nature of God speaking through the prophets.

Having made that assertion, the author then turns immediately to introduce his main theme for the whole letter –

*...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... (v.2)*

Beginning with a ‘but’ immediately draws attention to the contrast that will follow – while it is true and it has been effective, that God has spoken by the prophets, how much more effective and revealing will be the communication which comes through the one he calls a ‘Son’ – and that, of course, is exactly the point he will go on to make. And it is not only the point of this sermon, but will continue to be the point of the whole series, as we try to listen to what God is saying in and through his Son.

These opening verses of Hebrews 1 are deliberately introductory for the letter as a whole – what we are thinking about here will be developed and given further meaning and significance as the rest of the series unfolds. So as we look today at the main points here, we’re not trying to delve too deeply – we will look more closely at these things as we move on through the letter.

First, the author points to Jesus and his position in relation to the creation. He is the one through whom God ‘*made the universe.*’ (v.2) John’s gospel identifies Jesus as the creative ‘Word’ who ushers in the created order, the One through whom all things were made. We remember the Genesis 1 account of creation, where we read, over and over again, ‘*God said, ‘Let there be ... ’*’ and there was! Jesus is that ‘Word’ – the spoken, creative, all-powerful Word of God, who created all the universe out of nothing, climaxing (as Genesis makes very clear) with the creation of humankind – ‘*male and female he created them.*’ (Genesis 1:27)

The writer continues to speak of Jesus when he says he is also ‘*sustaining all things by his powerful word.*’ (v.3). Jesus’ relationship to the created order does not stop with the act of creation – he continues to be intimately involved with the day-to-day workings of all that he has made, being personally involved in achieving the on-going maintenance of everything that is. I like to imagine Jesus personally calling up every new blade of grass, or taking the trouble to individually shape every new wave which breaks on the beach – such is his role in the ongoing life of our planet and the universe. And, if he were to remove his involvement, I have no doubt that the whole thing would implode – our lives continue only because Jesus sustains us.

Even further, he is also described as having been *'appointed heir of all things.'* (v.2) It is said of Jesus that he is *'the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End'* (Rev 21:6). Jesus did not only START it all, he is also the One in whom all things will end. Paul says, *'all things were created by him and FOR him.'* (Col 1:16) As the heir, Jesus stands supreme and we know that everything belongs to him, everything will return to him and, because of that, we find our ultimate and best security only in him.

Secondly, we turn to Jesus and his relationship to God. Again, in these introductory verses, the writer is very quick to point out the importance of knowing Jesus as being the closest and best description or understanding of God that we can ever achieve while we remain within the limitations of this earthly life.

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being' (v.3)*

Radiance and representation.

The concept of 'radiance' carries with it the understanding of something real and alive within the object that is radiating. It is more than 'reflecting' – that is only passing on the light or power which has emanated from another source (like comparing the sun with the moon). To be able to 'radiate' means to have one's own source of energy and to be able to send that energy out into whatever surrounds it. So Jesus is not just the reflection of God's glory – he IS God's glory and, as such, he radiates that glory beyond himself to everything and everyone.

But he is also reflective – because that's at least one way to understand 'exact representation'. Jesus is like God in every way – everything the Father is, Jesus is – there is no difference to be perceived between them. Jesus told his disciples, *"Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father"* (John 14:9), with the implied addition, 'we are one and the same'.

The combined effect of these two descriptive words gives us an insight into the true nature of Jesus – he is unique, he is superior to all, he is the *'head over everything'* (Eph 1:22) – the majestic and glorious Son of God!

Then thirdly, the writer also addresses Jesus' relationship to humanity – to us!

*After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.* ' (v.3)

We don't have time today to fully examine this third and vital aspect of Jesus' ministry and work, but be assured that this theme will be addressed further in this letter, so we will return to it! Here, at this introductory stage, it is sufficient to note that it is this same Jesus, who is the creator, sustainer and heir of all creation, and who is the exact image of God, radiating his glory and majesty into the world and into our lives, who is also the One who through whom our sinfulness can be purified.

This is a very simple statement, yet so very deep and impacting in its meaning and implication. Refusal to acknowledge God is the defining characteristic of this world. Broken relationship with him answers for all of the things that are wrong with our lives and our experience – pain and suffering, depression and disease, broken relationships with each other, and death itself. We are trapped by these things – as long as we live on this planet, we continue to be plagued by all sorts of problems and pain – and at its deepest root, it is all because we naturally, carelessly and often ignorantly turn our backs on the God who made us and loves us!

Today we are reminded that God has spoken to us through Jesus, who has provided the means of purification for our rebellion and for the restoring of our relationship with God, and who now sits at God's right hand. It is done, the work is complete, there is a full and eternal answer to our greatest dilemma – and it is found in Jesus!

My prayer is that, as we continue to study this letter, we will better understand and capture the radiance of God's glory in Jesus – seeing him more clearly, loving him more dearly, following him more nearly – and we will be all the more prepared to allow him his rightful place in our lives.

**Hebrews 1:1-14**

*1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,<sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.*

*<sup>5</sup> For to which of the angels did God ever say,*

*“You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father”?*

*Or again,*

*“I will be his Father,  
and he will be my Son”?*

*<sup>6</sup> And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,*

*“Let all God's angels worship him.”*

*<sup>7</sup> In speaking of the angels he says,*

*“He makes his angels spirits,  
and his servants flames of fire.”*

*<sup>8</sup> But about the Son he says,*

*“Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;  
a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.*

*<sup>9</sup> You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;  
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions  
by anointing you with the oil of joy.”*

*<sup>10</sup> He also says,*

*“In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands.*

*<sup>11</sup> They will perish, but you remain;  
they will all wear out like a garment.*

<sup>12</sup> *You will roll them up like a robe;  
like a garment they will be changed.*

*But you remain the same,  
and your years will never end.”*

<sup>13</sup> *To which of the angels did God ever say,*

*“Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies  
a footstool for your feet”?*

<sup>14</sup> *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*

### **Psalm 45:1-7**

<sup>1</sup> *My heart is stirred by a noble theme  
as I recite my verses for the king;  
my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.*

<sup>2</sup> *You are the most excellent of men  
and your lips have been anointed with grace,  
since God has blessed you forever.*

<sup>3</sup> *Gird your sword on your side, you mighty one;  
clothe yourself with splendour and majesty.*

<sup>4</sup> *In your majesty ride forth victoriously  
in the cause of truth, humility and justice;  
let your right hand achieve awesome deeds.*

<sup>5</sup> *Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king’s enemies;  
let the nations fall beneath your feet.*

<sup>6</sup> *Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;  
a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.*

<sup>7</sup> *You love righteousness and hate wickedness;  
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions  
by anointing you with the oil of joy.*

© Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by International Bible Society

**All rights reserved worldwide**