

## Where to Hear God

**Hebrews 1:1** God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

3 who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (Heb. 1:1-4)

A few weeks ago, the American Vice-President was roundly criticised by the liberal media for saying that he hears from God. Some critics said he had a mental illness. That was until Oprah stated that she was praying about running for president, and hadn't yet heard from God.

All kinds of methods and techniques are given to hear from God. All kinds of religions and spiritualities and philosophies claim to be the way, or a way to know God, or become one with the infinite, or find harmony with the Cosmos. In so doing, they are all claiming to be the place, the way, or a place or a way where you can hear and know God.

In fact, ours is the era where God's voice may be inside your own head. You can stand up behind a podium just about anywhere and say, "God is inside every one of us" and you will see most of the audience nodding warmly. You can sell books by the millions if you tell people that they can hear God's voice if they just find a quiet place, a record their dreams, or listen to the inner voice.

But the Bible is actually very clear that God has not spoken vaguely and ambiguously to all people, as if my own thoughts are really God's thoughts. Instead, the Bible tells us that God has communicated intelligently, using human language, in particular times and places. That's how the book of Hebrews opens. God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,

God at different moments in world history, and using different methods, spoke to our human ancestors through prophets. He spoke to some men like Noah. He used dreams with Jacob and Joseph and Daniel. He spoke to Moses in the burning bush and face to face in the Tabernacle. He appeared to some as the angel of Yahweh, or sent other angels. And He spoke to prophets like Elijah, Isaiah, Jonah, Malachi.

But all this communication was partial, and fragmentary and meant to culminate in one ultimate form of Revelation: God Himself among men as a man. All of Israel's history, all of Gentile history was moving towards the coming of Christ. That's what He tells us in verse 2 has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son,

We are now in the last days, since the coming of the Son. The Son is now the place and person to hear God's voice. The Son is the final and complete form of God's revelation to man. If you want to hear God's voice, you must, even today, listen to the Son.

That's a pretty bold statement, but that's really the argument of this whole book of Hebrews. The whole book is really a defence of this idea that we can know God through the Son, Jesus Christ. Christ is unquestionably, exclusively, indisputably the exclusive means to know God. To hear from God, and to know Him as He is, you must look into the face and hear the words of Jesus Christ.

Whoever the writer of Hebrews was, he was probably writing to four groups of people.

The first was a group of Hebrew believers, possibly even priests, who had become obedient to the faith. He wanted to exhort them to keep holding to Christ as the only way to the Father.

The second was a group of Hebrews who were intellectually convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, but were not willing to make a commitment. They were happy to keep using the Temple sacrifices,

and lean on the Levitical priests, and keep to Moses' code, because they feared the persecution it would bring if they went public with their faith. He wanted to show them that theirs was no longer a valid choice, and then God was speaking now through His Son.

The third was probably Jewish unbelievers who were not yet persuaded that Jesus was the Messiah. He wrote to argue and defend the idea that Jesus of Nazareth is greater than Moses, greater than Aaron and Levi, the true Son of God and Messiah.

The fourth was Gentiles who were possibly being drawn to Judaism, and were enamoured with its Temple and Law, and Priesthood. He wrote to show that as good as those things were, there was now something better, and eternal, and permanent.

We might have all four groups listening to this. Jewish and Gentile believers who need encouragement to hold fast their confession. Jewish unbelievers who are convinced but not yet committed. Jewish or Gentile unbelievers who are not convinced. And Gentiles who are being drawn in, first by an appeal to Hebrew roots, then by an appeal to Judaistic Christianity, then finally into Judaism itself.

So what this book is going to is answer the question, Where should we look to find God? To whom should we listen? And since he answers that question in the second verse of the book, the rest of the book answers the question, Why should Christ be the way to God? Why should He be the place God has spoken? Furthermore, Which Christ/ Jesus?

When it has made that argument, it is then going to make a simple application: draw near to Him in full assurance of faith, don't draw back, and hold fast your confession of faith, don't draw back in unbelief.

The writer summarises his whole argument in this concentrated, dense and rich prologue of four verses. What he is going to do here is simply brilliant and brilliantly simple. He is going to show us that the reason Jesus is the place where you can hear and know God is because Jesus is fully God, and Jesus is fully man. The Son can tell man who **God** is, because the Son is **God**, and the Son can tell **man** who God is, because the Son is **man**. What he gives us here is a sevenfold description of Jesus. I don't think that's accidental, given the poetic and eloquent style of the whole book. These first verse are really hymnic in their description of Jesus. What he will do is show us four ways that the Son is God, and then three ways that the Son is Man.

## **I. You Can Hear God Through the Son Because He Is God**

How is He God?

### **a) The Son is the Creator**

through whom also He made the worlds;

The writer here tells us that God the Father made the worlds, that is literally, *the ages*, through the Son. The Son was not one of the creatures of creation, the Son was the agent of Creation. The Father was the Architect, and the Son was the builder. Without question, to be the builder of creation makes you transcendent and apart from the creation.

I remember memorising John 1:3 in the King James, with its slightly awkward rendering. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. (Jn. 1:3)

The idea is plain: nothing that has existence is in existence apart from Jesus Christ, the Word.

Among the cults, you will hear it said that Jesus is the first thing that God created. But not

according to Hebrews. And in Colossians, Paul is at pains to tell us that Jesus was not an angel, He is the creator of both the visible and invisible realm, the material and spiritual realm: **Col 1:16** For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. Why should you listen to the Son? Because He is God, God the Creator.

### **b) The Son is the Manifestation of God's Glory**

3 who being the brightness of *His* glory

Here the writer tells us that the Son is the brightness of God's glory. What this word means is the light that is seen and emitted: radiance, effulgence, even reflection. You can have a light source, such as the Sun, or a light bulb, but then you have the actual light beams that leave the light source and enter our eyes. This Scripture tells us that Jesus is like the actual light of a light source that is seen. God the Father is the source, but God the Son is the means by which God the Father is seen. Now we are using visual words, such as *light* and *seen*, but these words are not meant to be taken in the literal sense of retinas and photons and visuals. They are meant in the sense of knowing. The Son is the ultimate way of knowing the Father.

You remember the conversation between Philip and Jesus.

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. 7 "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." 8 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? (Jn. 14:6-10)

Jesus did not mean that He is identical to the Father. He meant what this verse in Hebrews is showing us. He is the light from the light source. He is the brightness of the glory. He is the incarnation and manifestation of what no man can see and live. **Joh 1:18** No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

**2Co 4:6** For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

This is highly relevant to the deity of Christ. Do you remember how God speaks about His glory? **Isaiah 42:8** I *am* the LORD, that *is* My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images. (Isa. 42:8)

If God will not give His glory to another, and the Son is the brightness of His glory, then who is the Son? The Son is fully God.

Why should you listen to the Son? Why is the Son where God has spoken? Because He is the manifestation of God's glory.

But the writer takes it one step further.

### **c) The Son is the Exact Expression of God's Being**

and the express image of His person

Now here the Greek word for express image is very interesting. It's the word *charakter*, from where our English word *character* derives. It meant the exact imprint that you would get when a metal seal or image on a coin, was pressed into wax. The image in the wax was the exact imprint,

the precise representation, the identical image of the image on the seal. Today our closest analogue would be when your thumb is pressed into ink, and an image is made on paper that is the exact expression of your unique fingerprint.

So, the Son is not a lesser being, a great and high creation, but still far subordinate to God Himself. No, the Son is the imprint of God's seal, the fingerprint of God's hand, the character of God's hypostases, His very nature. Whatever the Father is, the Son is the same, essentially God a second time over, without becoming a second God.

The Son is not 99% God. The Son is not a divine creature derived from God. The Son is not the highest of all beings less than God. The Son is the exact representation of God's being. The Son is 100% God, as the Father is, as the Spirit is.

The terminology that Paul uses for this is the word Image. **Col 1:15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. In that verse, it's the Greek word *eikon*, from which our English icon derives. An icon represents the person prayed to. Scripture says, there is only one Icon: Jesus, who is fully God, and fully represents all that God is.

It is no small thing to get this wrong. The writer of Hebrews is at pains to identify the Son as fully and completely God: the Creator, the expression of God's glory, the complete representation of God. The writer has a fourth way of showing us that the Son is fully God.

#### **d) The Son is the Sustainer**

and upholding all things by the word of His power

Not only is the Son the Maker of all things, but the Son sustains all the things He has made. Literally, he is bearing up all things through the spoken word of his power. Creation is not a clock that the Creator wound up and now runs on its own. Creation is like a massively complicated circuit that needs a continual power source to keep going. Creation is like a body which needs blood pumped through it. And the Son is the one giving all things continual existence.

Paul also teaches this where he writes **Col 1:17** And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. In Him, all things hold together.

Jonathan Edwards was one theologian who took verses like these to mean that there was a form of continuous creation, whereby God created initially, and ceased, but in a secondary sense, goes on speaking the world into existence. He said, let there be light, and in a second way, He continues to say, Let there be light.

I love to watch unbelievers exploring the mysteries of creation. Because their unbelief makes them like someone suffering from macular degeneration. Someone with macular degeneration has a large central grey spot in his vision. So it is with unbelievers. There is this large central grey spot in their understanding: there is no God. With that sitting there, they desperately try to see what's going on in the universe using their peripheral vision. And they get a lot right, but things don't add up. For example, as astronomers and cosmologists make their observations, they calculate that there is not enough matter in the universe to explain why galaxies look the way they do. Things should have spun apart. So they speculate there is something called dark matter, and dark energy, matter and energy that makes up 80% of the mass-energy of the universe, but it can't be seen or detected or measured. Maybe there is such a thing. Maybe it's the presence of soul and spirit within the universe. Or maybe it is the Son directly holding the universe together by the Word of His power. All three, and any other explanation still fall under this account: the Son is the Sustainer of the universe. Did you ever think that if you drilled down inside the atom, and went smaller than the

proton and neutron, smaller than leptons, bosons and quarks, the basic component of what we call matter is actually words. Words. The spoken, and continually spoken words of the Son.

Why should you listen to the Son to hear God? Because He is God: the Creator, the Glory of God, the Image of God, the Sustainer.

In the fourth century, one of Rome's emperors was named Theodosius. Unfortunately, he was very tolerant of the heresy of Arianism, which denied the deity of Christ. When his son Arcadius was about sixteen, he made him a co-ruler of the empire. For the special occasion, many nobles and dignitaries were assembled. One of those invited was a bishop named Amphilocus, who did not share the emperor's openness about denying Christ's divinity.

Amphilocus addressed the emperor with great reverence, and then ignored his son Arcadius.

Theodosius was outraged. "What! Do you pay no notice to my son? I have made him prince, with equal dignity to myself, and you treat him so lightly? Amphilocus replied, "Do you see, O Emperor, how you do not tolerate a slight paid to your son? In the same way, God the Father does not tolerate dishonour paid to His Son, turning with loathing from those who blaspheme against Him, and being angered at that accursed Arian heresy? What must the eternal God think of you who has allowed his coequal and coeternal Son degraded in His proper divinity in every part of your empire?"

But if all the writer did was tell us that the Son is fully God, we might wonder why He is a voice that we humans can hear. We might marvel that within the Godhead there is a plurality of persons, but it might take us no closer to those persons within God's being.