

## **When God Showed Up in Person**

### **Hebrews 1:1-3a**

There are many, many ways that people use to communicate with one another. None of them are necessarily bad, but different means of communication accomplish different things. Brenda and I met at a summer camp in Mississippi in 1981. After that summer, Brenda returned to Wichita to work for a year, and I returned to LSU for my final year of college. During that year, we communicated in a number of ways. We talked on the telephone quite a bit. We sent each other letters and packages. All those things were fine and good, but the best communication happened when one of us would make the long trip to the other's home and show up in person. That Christmas, for example, I flew to Wichita to see Brenda and spend a few days with her family. Love letters and phone calls are great, but there was no substitute for showing up in person.

Showing up in person was good for Brenda's parents too. They could see me, talk to me, touch me, poke me, interrogate me, etc. They'd heard lots about me, but there was no substitute for showing up in person. For a lot of reasons, when it comes to communication and getting to know someone, there's no substitute for showing up in person.

Hebrews 1:1-3 explains that after God communicated with us in many different ways over a long period of time, He showed up in person. This was the fullest, most comprehensive way that God could ever communicate with us. On this Christmas morning when our thoughts naturally turn to Jesus entering this world as a baby, I'd like for us to consider how comprehensively God has spoken to us in His Son.

The application is rather simple. Since God has spoken, we should listen. We'll first look at this passage which shows how God has spoken to us in His Son. Then we'll talk about how we can listen to Him.

### **God has spoken in His Son. (Hebrews 1:1-3a)**

1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Verse 1 stresses that God has been actively speaking to His people all along; it's not that God has been silent. God spoke "long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways." Roughly speaking, this is a description of God's revelation in the Old Testament. The "fathers" are the OT saints, especially the leaders of Israel (see 3:9, 8:9). God spoke "in the prophets"; a prophet was called as "God's mouthpiece." The prophets spoke the words that God wanted communicated.

- As a prophet, Moses spoke to the children of Israel in Egypt and in the wilderness. He told them of God's deliverance and warned them about the judgment that would follow disobedience.
- As a prophet, Nathan confronted King David about Bathsheba and Uriah.
- As a prophet, Isaiah spoke to the kings of Judah about their impending judgment.

- As a prophet, Ezekiel spoke to the people of Judah in Babylon about God's judgment and about being restored to the Land.
- As prophets, Haggai and Malachi delivered the word of the Lord to the people after they had returned from exile in Babylon. They spoke about renewed commitment to the covenant.

God sent prophets to His people for 1400 years. Nobody could accuse God of being silent. The words of the prophets were recorded and collected and read in the corporate worship of Israel. The words of the prophets were studied and taught by the scribes. "God spoke to the fathers in the prophets."

Verse 1 also mentions that God spoke "in many portions" or "bit by bit." The idea here is that God didn't speak everything all at once; rather, he spoke to His people time and again across the centuries. Furthermore, He spoke "in many ways." This is one of the things that makes the OT so fascinating: God spoke in many different ways. He spoke to Jacob through an angel. He spoke to Moses through thunder (Exodus 19:19). God spoke to Elijah in a "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:12). God spoke to the Babylonian king Belshazzar through the "writing on the wall" (Daniel 5). God spoke "in many portions and in many ways." Again, nobody could accuse God of not communicating with His people.

But verse 2 tells us that after all of that speaking, God showed up in person. God gave the fullest possible revelation of Himself when he spoke in His "Son":

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

God speaking "in these last days" stands in contrast with God speaking "long ago" (verse 1). The "last days" are the days of fulfillment when the Messiah is bringing to pass everything that was prophesied. "In these last days" God "has spoken to **us** in His Son." This doesn't mean that God was speaking only to those who were with Jesus physically while He walked this earth; the original readers of the book of Hebrews weren't with Jesus physically. But God had still spoken to them (and to us) in His Son. We hear God speaking primarily through the writings/Scriptures that explain Jesus.

When Jesus is called God's "Son," the emphasis is upon **the Son sharing the Father's deity**. The things that are said about the Son in the rest of verse 2 and in verse 3 emphasize that the Son is one with God the Father in terms of **who He is** and **what He does**. In a very real sense, in speaking to us "in His Son," God Himself showed up in person. There was nothing wrong or false in any of the other ways that God spoke previously, but they don't begin to compare to God speaking in His Son. There is no substitute for God showing up in person.

This point is driven home in the things that are said about this "Son" in verses 2 and 3. We're told at least five things about Jesus in these verses.

First, the Son has been "appointed heir of all things." In biblical times, the son inherited everything only after his father died. That obviously isn't the connotation here. Rather,

the idea is that because of his death and resurrection, the Son has been appointed as heir of all things. Hebrews 2 emphasizes that Jesus was “made lower than the angels” for a short time (i.e., during His earthly existence), but that after the resurrection God “subjected all things to Him” (2:5-8). This not only means that everything ultimately belongs to Jesus, but also that everything is under the authority of Jesus.

Second, this very Son is the one “through whom [God] made the world.” The Son is not some latecomer in the plans of God. The Son created the very universe that He is inheriting. Various Scriptures reveal that Father, the Son, and the Spirit acted in unison in creating the world. John put it this way in John 1:1-3 (See also Colossians 1:16.):

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

By revealing that this Son is the Creator, the biblical authors are stressing His authority over all things – whether in the seen or unseen world (see Job 38-39). People who encountered Jesus during His lifetime marveled at this. After rebuking the wind and the waves, the disciples wondered, “Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?” (Luke 8:25) The answer to that question: the One who has authority over creation is the Creator.

Back to Hebrews 1. . . The third thing we are told is:

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. . .

The third thing we are told is that “He is the radiance of His glory.” Just as the sunshine is the radiance of the sun, Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory. When people looked at Jesus, they saw the glory of God. John 1:14 communicates this same truth:

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The glory of God was certainly evident in the other ways that God spoke in previous ages. But God’s glory shone the brightest when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Fourth, the Son is “the exact representation of His nature.” This phrase can also be translated as “the very imprint of his being” (ESV). An imprint was what you had if you pressed a stamp or signet ring into a wax seal. Let’s say that you had a stamp in the shape of a lion. If you pressed that ring into a blob of soft wax, it would leave “the exact representation” of that lion. It wouldn’t (and couldn’t!) be anything else. Although the Father and Son are distinct persons, the Son is the exact representation of His nature.

Jesus made this point over and over during His ministry. In John 14:9, for example, He told His disciples, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” This is something that

we really need to believe if we want to grow closer to the Father. God the Father is as inviting and humble and compassionate and strong as the Jesus we see in the gospels.

The fifth and final thing we see is that Jesus, as the Son, “upholds all things by the word of His power.” The One who created all things also sustains all things. He didn’t create and then turn the world loose to see what would happen. Rather, by His mighty word, He brings all things to their appointed end. In Colossians 1:17 Paul wrote that “in Him all things hold together.” As we see throughout Scripture, the “word of the Lord” is powerful; the Son sustains the world through His “mighty word.” This is yet another powerful reason to listen to what God is saying in His Son.

The rest of verse 3 introduces the topic of Jesus’ ministry as High Priest, a topic that will run throughout the book of Hebrews. But what we’ve seen so far confirms that the incarnation (the second person of the Trinity becoming a man) was God’s fullest, most comprehensive revelation of Himself to us. God was so intent on communicating to us that He “showed up in person.”

I know that this isn’t a new idea, but I think it’s vital for each of us to ask, “Do I really believe that God is intent on speaking **to me** in His Son?” It’s one thing to agree, “Yes, God wants to speak to people. . .” But it’s quite another to believe, “Because God has taken such great pains to speak ‘in His Son,’ **God wants to speak to me!**” For a dozen different reasons you may have a hard time believing that God is committed to speaking to you through His Son, but it’s the case.

When you think about it, this is the whole reason that we have the Scriptures which reveal everything we know about Jesus. Eugene Peterson makes this point:

God’s gracious purpose in giving us his word in written form is not to turn us into Bible students, but to provide a means by which we can hear him speak and be turned into *Christians* - awed worshipers, sacrificing sufferers, devout followers.  
Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, p. 24

When we come to the Scriptures, we should be convinced that God is speaking. He wants to show us everything that He has provided for us in Christ.

**Our Response should be to “listen” to Him.** This is an obvious point: if God has spoken, we should listen. This is implicit in the book of Hebrews, but it’s very explicit in other places. For example Luke 9 records the “Transfiguration” – the time when Peter, James, and John were on the mountain with Jesus. When they looked at Jesus, “the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming” (v. 29). Peter somehow came up with the idea of building three tabernacles - one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. But God interrupted Peter in this way:

35 Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!"

Again, this is a very basic point. But whatever else we do, since Jesus is God's Son, we should listen to Him! Since God has spoken in His Son, we should listen to Him. The rest of the book of Hebrews, in effect, spells out how we should listen to (or pay attention to) Jesus. Perhaps the biggest message God is saying to us in Hebrews is that ***you don't have to pay for your own sin***. The entire sacrificial system in the old covenant pointed to Jesus. Jesus offered Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins. No more sacrifices need to be made.

You may have heard this a thousand times, but the point this morning is that you need to hear God saying ***to you***, "You don't have to pay for your sin. You simply need to accept Jesus' payment for your sin." That's true when you first come to Christ. That's true when you've known Him for 20 years. You never have to pay for your sin. When you sin, you don't have to "earn" God's favor again; you don't have to "pay off" your debt (like you would pay off a credit card after the holidays); you simply need to continue trusting that Jesus' sacrifice paid even for the sin you committed last week or yesterday or this morning before you came to church.

One of the other huge things that Hebrews tells us God is saying to us through Jesus is that ***God will give you as much grace as you need*** to live your life in a way that pleases Him. You haven't been left alone to figure things out on your own; you don't have to live in your own strength and your own wisdom. Hebrews 4 puts it this way:

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin.

Because Jesus became one of us, He can fully sympathize with our weaknesses. He doesn't have to "imagine" what we're facing. He knows. God is telling us, "You aren't alone in your weakness and in your temptations." It's not very helpful knowing that "God understands people." I need to hear God saying, "I understand ***you*** and ***your circumstances***." Here's the application:

16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

God has spoken in His Son, and one of the things He is saying is, "Draw near to Me through Jesus and you will receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Where do you need mercy this morning? How do you need grace? In other words, what gift do you want God to give you? There is a sense in which Christmas ***is*** all about gifts; it's about the gift/grace that God gives us in Jesus. God is saying to us today, "I have spoken in My Son; listen to Him!" Since God is eager to speak, I need to be eager to listen, eager to learn.