



"Because God spoke..."

- Hebrews 1:4-2:4

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than

they. 5 For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"? And again: "I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son"? 6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him." 7 And of the angels He says: "Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire." 8 But to the Son [He says]: "Your throne, O God, [is] forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness [is] the scepter of Your Kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions." 10 And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail." 13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? 2:1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard [Him], 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?"

1:4-14

"What you think about when you think about God is the most important thing about you. What you think about when you think about God is the most important thing about you because it determines everything that you do." A.W. Tozer

Verses 1-3 last week introduced Jesus as the Prophet. Indeed, the last and the greatest! The one that God speaks through and through which He has communicated and still communicates His will and grace.

Jesus, having made the final sacrifice for our sins, serves also as the "priest", saying that "He had by Himself purged our sins." And in his third roll, He serves as King, having "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High."

Prophet, Priest, and King.

But do we really see Him in this way? How do we see Him? If we don't see God correctly, if we don't grasp at least some rudimentary understanding of just who our God is, what He is and what He is not, then the path of our lives will be askew. Our life road will be adversely hilly, curvy, and bumpy.

The problem is that many of us see God as essentially out of our reach and beyond our understanding, so we don't even attempt to know Him on any real level. We don't relate...we *can't* relate. Thus we struggle in our worship. We are uncomfortable in our communication. We don't know Him so we tend to run away from Him or hide from Him when things are difficult (which is most of the time) instead of running to Him.

Let us remember that this letter was written to believers who had begun in God's grace and mercy: a joy, a passion, and a commitment. Yet now these same believers were growing adversely comfortable. Even to the degree of now becoming calloused to the responsibilities and accountabilities of the faith, and they had begun to drift, to slide back into ritual and religious motion instead of the faith intimacy that they began in. How did it happen? What were the warning signs that this was occurring?

Indeed we have ourselves seen this journey in many folks. Those that we have known and loved. Those that took that path from joyous redemption to the exit door of the church. A road which began in excitement and thankfulness for both the gospel's cross as well as the community of believers, only to end in bitterness and resentfulness at their church fellowship, the brothers and sisters that had been placed in their lives, as well as even angry at God. They shifted the blame for their standing, away from themselves and their decisions, to others around them. The fact is, these are long and painful falls, a suicide in slow motion. God in His mercy gave each one multiple opportunities to "pull the rip cord" and be rescued, yet they refused to act. What happened? Why are their bodies now spiritually lying alongside the road of life?

Hebrews is telling us, *warning us*, saying, "*Jesus is better. He is better than anything else the world has to offer. Don't forget. Don't go back! You are falling into something that is merely a shadow of the real thing. You are going back to that which held you in chains. Don't settle for what is less. Go for the greatest, which it is Jesus!*" But as I mentioned last week, so many of us tend to live our lives through a series of sprints instead embracing the long marathon that is our faith life. Instead of fixing our eyes upon Jesus and therefore be able to stand immovable, we take our eyes off of the goal. This occurs for a plethora of reasons, but the end result is the same. We can no longer follow Him where He is trying to lead us because we quite simply do not see Him. He is no longer in our field of vision. We have lost sight of our lead car and suddenly we are on our own.

Notice that this passage speaks prominently about angels. The Jews, *to whom this letter was written*, were apt to hold angels in very high regard. They held high historical place in Jewish history, yet they were never God in flesh, nor could they in anyway replace Him. They never were the priest, the prophet, and the king of God's redemption of man. They were essentially just "religion." And religion for us, practically speaking anyway, works like gravity: always trying to pull us down and keep us from moving forward. It's easy. One just needs to relax and not fight it. No effort is required in this; for we naturally gravitate to it. As we grow tired of the battles that surround an intimate relationship with Christ, yes, even as the years pass, we tend to want to give ourselves a vacation. A respite from the constant war that goes on continually around us as believers. So we just stop. And religious gravity begins its sedentary work on us.

The writer of Hebrews is seeking to awaken us to what we are leaving behind. He emphasizes not the blessings and personal benefit but rather the grandeur. The majesty of Christ. Asking the questions, "What or who is greater?"... "What could possibly trump Christ, the One to whom every knee shall bow?" He is trying to pull us back from our drifting. Back from the mere motions of religious practice and to return us to the power of a connected life with Christ.

The writer, seeking to draw our focus to the authority and the superiority of Christ, points out that in fact all of nature bows before Christ. Even the angelic beings bow at His feet! Philippians 2:10 rings forth saying “every knee will eventually bow before Christ!” Either in this life or at the eternal judgment. But all us, man or angel, will eventually bow before Him.

This exaltation reaches its incredible crescendo in verse 8, when God calls Jesus GOD. There should be no doubt as to what... *as to who* ...we are dealing with here. Such a statement would be shocking to the average Jew both then and now. That position would be even blasphemous. Truth be told, whenever a community takes such an emphatic and absolute position such as this, the world goes crazy on them. They are, *of course*, a “cult,” a bunch of “religious zealots,” just “fanatics.” The world just can’t stand it when truth is presented in any absolute and unmoving form. Man always feels, *wants* really, room for discussion. Opportunity to find and present an exception to the rule. The reason why that truth is not always the truth. Especially in their case, in their special situation. We want to believe we are different. We are special. Our position is excluded.

And yet herein, Hebrews “throws down.” It makes statements that it claims as absolute unbending fact, infallible certainty. This is one reason why this book makes a lot of folks nervous. It’s a bright light which declares where the truth lies. Verse 9 declares where this “God in flesh” stands. Where and what is His position as to our behavior and lifestyle, without exception, without exclusion. “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness.” **Hated?** That’s right. *Hated*. It’s not a concept or position that is often presented in this day. Once again, in our day where “Jesus meek and mild” is stated as the sovereign characteristic of Christ! Where grace means tolerance, and tolerance means acceptance and agreement!

The important thing in all of this is the trump card is played. GOD declares Jesus as the final word, the sovereign position, the end of the discussion in all things. It is the supreme “personal reference.” In verse 10, God is declaring Jesus as not just God in terms of Creator and deity, but God in terms of LORD. And this is where the squealing brakes are heard, as the world slams their foot to the floor. We like the idea of Creator. We even love the premise of Savior. We embrace the grace and mercy! But we flinch at LORD. In fact, many of us **convulse!** After all, Jesus made some pretty radical statements in terms of his position as Lord and our response to such!

He said in Luke 14:26, *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."*

He said John 6:53, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you."*

And in Matthew 6:24, *"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."*

And Luke 6:46 ...*"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"*

Our immediate response is something along the lines of, *"He's not seriously saying that, is He? Surely He doesn't mean it like it sounds."* And so goes again the high-water mark of Christ, that which Timothy Keller calls the “Nosebleed Theology.” So high above everything else that people stay away from it. That which is written off as mere hyperbole and then forgotten in the subsequent translation. However, let us take note that all of these declared difficult passages have in them an innate aspect of presenting Christ not just as a teacher, *the heavenly cop that exists to enforce a set of rules, edicts, and behaviors*, but a God who seeks a relationship with His Creation. All of these passages above, and so many more found throughout the New Testament that are just like them, have a common element, and that is a form of intimacy. A union. A personal connection. “Come to

me, abide in me, eat my flesh and drink my blood, follow me, confess me, learn from me, bring them to me, etc.”

He indeed *brings* us His word, but we are called to grasp the concept that He *IS* the Word. Thus unless we are intimately and firmly connected to Christ, we can never live out this thing called the Christian life. It will never be found by merely doing the things we read in this book. We must have a connection with the person of the Word that supersedes all other connections in this world. The voice of Christ must move from an external audio to an internal obsession. A Word that comes forth from within your very being.

As we already pointed out, the receivers of this letter had “slid.” They began to only hear that voice coming at them from outside their world, outside their being, instead of inside them. Instead of the voice from the pulpit, from the pages of a book, from the other voices in their community. The voice was no longer from within them in intimate unity with this final voice, this ultimate bond with Christ. We all must cross this bridge at some point in our faith development. The point in which Jesus moves beyond the walls of religious institution, exceeding the credo of moral ascent, to become our internal guiding voice of not just do’s and don’ts, but one of intimate possession.

NT Wright once said the following:

“How can you live with the terrifying thought that the hurricane has become human, that fire has become flesh, that life itself came to life and walked in our midst? Christianity either means that, or it means nothing. It is either the most devastating disclosure of the deepest reality in the world, or it’s a sham, a nonsense, a bit of deceitful play-acting. Most of us, unable to cope with saying either of these things, condemn ourselves to live in the shallow world in between. We may not be content there, but we don’t know how to escape.”

Is he a lifestyle or a life? If He is all that and more, then we must be compelled, if we have any integrity at all, to throw all of our life, possessions, dreams, and passions at His feet and ask, “What do you want of me, Lord?”

NT Wright goes on to say, *“We cannot worship the suffering God today and ignore him tomorrow. We cannot eat and drink the body and blood of the passionate and compassionate God today, and then refuse to live passionately and compassionately tomorrow. If we say or sing, as we so often do, ‘Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit’, we thereby commit ourselves, in love, to the work of making his love known to the world that still stands so sorely in need of it. This is not the god the world wants. This is the God the world needs. The New Testament’s vision of Christian behavior has to do, not with struggling to keep a bunch of ancient and apparently arbitrary rules, nor with ‘going with the flow’ or ‘doing what comes naturally’, but with the learning of the language, in the present, which will equip us to speak it fluently in God’s new world.”*

But how do we do this? How is such a relationship practiced in the real world, in practical application? How can we really experience this transforming glory in our lives? Having begun the race, how do we actually get to that finish line in one piece? Note the first four verses of Chapter 2.

2:1-4

This term *“more earnest heed”* is even greater than what we read here on its face value. In fact, the word “heed” actually means “obsession.” You see, once we have heard and received that gospel message, the journey does not end there, but only begins. At that juncture we have just begun to experience the transformation that Christ seeks to put you through in order to be all that you were created to be. Because we must in fact, become furiously obsessed with that message, passionately embrace that gospel reformation.

This is exactly what the world does not want you to do. They don't really mind if you become "born again", if you morally and religiously adopt a social adherence. It's good for you, and it's good for society. It's a "nice" thing to be a part of. But secular society, *and sadly even a large percentage of the Protestant religious society*, rejects the radical submersion of their lives into Christ, and they reject you doing so too. They will hang labels on you like cultish, fundamentalist, and extremist. They will fight against you like the hounds of hell.

Some will eventually rebel against the faith upon a closer scrutiny of their lives by Christ and community. But the vast majority will not so much as *rebel* as *drift*. Because it is in our DNA. It is our natural tendency in our fallen human state. You will never drift into God, you will only drift away.

We must take the message received and literally obsess on His grace, obsess on the gospel. This is what Paul meant when he wrote in Philippians 2:12, "*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;*"

The "word spoken through angels" refers to the Old Testament law. The writer is saying that when the law was broken, there was a just and sure punishment. If that was and is a truth and a sure reality, how is it that we think that we can go even further and actually neglect and ignore the literal arrival of God into our midst? Not another prophecy by another prophet. But the *actual God who made the prophets!* The very living embodiment of God and grace coming to dwell inside of us. To take up residency within us. How do we think we will escape that slight? How will we avoid the consequences of such a passive approach? One not toward mere directions and instructions, but the *actual presence before us of the Word...of God?*

It used to be that when you wanted to seal a letter, you would soften wax with heat, drip it onto the letter seal, and then an insignia would be pressed down into the softened wax. The wax would form around the insignia, taking unto itself the permanent shape and emblem of that insignia. But remember, the wax had to be *soft*. If it was not, one of two things would happen. One, the wax would only at best take upon itself a surface impression of the seal, but it wouldn't actually be shaped. Or, the seal would actually break the wax. And that's what happens when we are not prepared to receive that infilling of Christ. We will simply wear the surface impression, the moral life, the nice religious and social implications of Christianity and nothing more...never actually being shaped and permanently imprinted with the mark, the character and person of Christ. Or, two, it breaks us. And that's what has happened to so many of those who once shared these pews with us and walked amongst us. It broke them. Not because of any fault of the insignia, but because we were not soft and open to receiving this permanent impression of God.

Something has to melt you. It has to melt your heart to receive such an imprint. And that can never be mere rules, or guidelines, or instruction. It has to be, *it can only be*, the gospel. What Jesus did on that cross! It must be the fire in your life that makes the wax soft, the soil tilled and loosened, so we might receive the very imprint of Christ, the seed for the full maturity of the saints.