

Hebrews 1:1-14
Tim Anderson 21/10/18

Today we begin a new sermon series in the book of Hebrews.
Hebrews is a solid New Testament letter.
It's 13 chapters long.
Nearly as long as Romans or 1 Corinthians
but far less well known.
That's not because it lacks really important stuff to say.
There is a wealth of treasures in Hebrews.
I think it's not well known because it's hard work.
But as my teachers at school used to try to convince me,
hard work is good for you.
So we are going to plough into it.

"In the past God spoke ..."
Our God is a speaking God.
The whole Bible is the story of a God who speaks.
God spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden.
God spoke to Noah and told him to build a boat.
God spoke to Abraham told him to travel to another land.
God spoke to Abraham
and promised him that he would be the Father of many nations.
God spoke to Abraham and told him to sacrifice his son Isaac.
God spoke to Jacob and told him that his name would be Israel.
God spoke to Moses
and told him he would take his people out of slavery
and into the Promised Land.
God spoke to Moses and gave him the ten commandments.
God spoke to Joshua and told him to cross the Jordan river
and take possession of the land.
God spoke to Samuel and promised judgement on the house of Israel.

God spoke to Nathan the prophet
and gave him a message for King David.
And from that time,
God didn't speak directly to his kings.
Rather he spoke to prophets who gave God's messages to the kings.
And so there were the great prophets Elijah and Elisha.
God spoke through them many times.
And then there were the writing prophets,
God used them to speak to the whole nation.
There were Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel,
and a dozen minor prophets.
God spoke through all of them.
Our God is a speaking God.
"In the past God spoke ..."
Words are God's chosen method of communication.
Images of God were strictly forbidden to his people.
They were to know God through his words.

We are called people of the book for a reason.
God has revealed himself through words.
If you want to know God,
you encounter him through his word.
"In the past, God has spoken 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."
The writer to the Hebrews is telling us
that the character of God's revelation had changed.
In the past - it was through prophets.
Now - it is through his Son.
History is broken into two eras.
There is the time when God spoke through prophets.

That's the Old Testament times.
And there is 'these last days'
when God is speaking through his Son.
You could be mistaken
and think the writer to the Hebrews thought
that he was living close to the end of the world.
But it's not that.
The point is that God has done lots of things in history.
Created the world.
Flooded the world.
Called a people his own.
Gave them the promised land.
Gave them kings to rule over them.
Booted them out of the promised land.
Brought them back to the promised land.
God has done lots of stuff in history.
But his one final action was to send his Son.
That is his last word on the matter.
There will be no more special actions till he sends his Son back again
to draw all things to a close.
These are the last days.
They may seem like they are dragging on for a while.
But they will draw to a close without warning.
Just when people think things are going to keep on going
the way they always have,
suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye,
Jesus will return
and the last days will be over.
And it's in these last days,
that God has spoken to us by his Son.

This has some consequences for us today.

Many people in every generation
want to claim that their particular generation was 'the last days'
in some way that previous generations after the coming of Jesus were not.
When I was a kid,
we were at the height of the cold war.
Nuclear Armageddon was just around the corner.
It was the last days.
Then when I was at Uni,
it was the rise of the united nations.
There was one world government,
the mark of the anti-Christ.
It was the last days.
Now we have the rise of President Trump.
He's a totally unstable man with access to the nuclear codes.
It must be the last days.
1000 years ago,
they were saying that it had been 1000 years since the resurrection,
the 1000 year reign of Christ must be over
his return must be imminent.
It was the last days.
Why can't people just believe Jesus
when he says no one knows the day nor the hour?
The reason is that we are proud.
We like to think we live in the most important bit of history.
And there's a great danger that goes with this.
When people think they live in the most important bit of history,
they often think that God might be speaking to them now.
Not speaking in the sense of giving them a gentle nudge by the Holy Spirit
to live according to his word,
but speaking in the sense of giving them new authoritative revelation.
Telling them some new message you can't find in the Bible.
Telling them something that everyone else in the church must heed

or they risk ignoring the voice of God.

That's dangerous.

And look it's happening right now in Melbourne.

Bethel Church is running Awakening Australia at Etihad stadium in November.

They fall victim to exactly this temptation.

In the last of these days,

God has spoken to us by his Son.

If you want to hear God's final word,
you have to listen to Jesus.

Jesus' words recorded in the Bible,

Jesus' actions recorded in the Bible,

they are God's final authoritative word.

Now here's a question.

Jesus is God's final word.

Does that mean all of the words that came before are obsolete now?

Are the words of the prophets past their use by date?

No. Not in the slightest.

The whole book of Hebrews is about showing

how the revelation of the Old Testament points to Jesus.

Listen to these words from Hebrews 4:12.

"The word of God is alive and active.

Sharper than any double edged sword,

it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit,

joints and marrow;

it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

When the writer to the Hebrews wrote that,

he was talking about the OT Scriptures.

The progression from the OT to the NT

is not from the less true to the more true,

it's not from the less worthy to the more worthy.
It's the transition from promise to fulfilment.
In the past, God made his people promises.
Now he has given you what he promised.
He has sent Jesus.

And it's Jesus to whom we now turn.
In a few short sentences,
the writer to the Hebrews tells us more than we can grasp about Jesus.
7 amazing truths about Jesus.

1. God has appointed him heir of all things.
To be the heir means that you are the one who inherits.
Everything belongs to Jesus.
What is everything?
Everything is all creation.
Everything is God's people whom he has saved from out of the world.
The world belongs to Jesus.
We belong to Jesus.

2. God made the universe through Jesus.
There's a reason why Jesus inherits.
He is the agent of creation.
Makes sense.
If you helped make it,
that it might be considered yours.
This is important because it completely undercuts the folk
who say that Jesus was just a good teacher.
No mere good teacher is with God the Father creating the universe.
A good teacher can be admired and learned from.
But the creator of the universe must be worshiped.
Those who admire Jesus or learn from his teaching but don't worship him

will not be saved.

3. Jesus is the radiance of God's glory.

You are a reflection of God's glory.

You are made in the image of God.

And you reflect some of God's glory
because of how wonderfully God has made you.

You're pretty good.

But you are nothing like Jesus.

Jesus is the radiance of God's glory.

What is the difference?

It's like the difference between the Sun and the Moon.

If the sun stopped shining,
the moon would immediately go completely black.

The moon has no light of its own.

But the Sun doesn't depending on reflecting light from something else.

It shines with a radiance of its own.

It's energy is equivalent to 100 billion nuclear bombs every second.

Jesus is the radiance of God's glory.

And he outshines the sun by far.

He shines with the light of the Trinity.

4. Jesus is the exact representation of God's being.

Jesus doesn't just show us a little bit of what God is like.

Jesus shows us everything that God is like.

It's not like God has got a private side that he hasn't revealed to us,
and a public side which we can see in Jesus.

God has shown us every aspect of his character.

All his goodness,

all his qualities,

they are all revealed to us in Christ.

We have plenty of private stuff that we don't let hang out in company.

No doubt things go through your mind,
that you would be very embarrassed if we played them on the big screen.
I know I would be.

Even those who know you best
don't know everything about you, do they?
But God has completely revealed himself to us in Jesus.
What you see is what you get.
The full character of God is made clear and open to us in Jesus.

5. Jesus sustains all things by his powerful word.

In the 18th century, there was a perversion of Christianity called Deism.
It was embraced by people you've likely heard of.

The English philosopher John Locke,
The American founding fathers
Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton.

It was a theory that went like this.

God made the world.

He's the creator.

He wound the world up,
like you might have wound up a clock in the 18th century.

But then he let it go and now he doesn't interfere.

If you're a deist, then there are no miracles.

That would be God interfering.

If you're a deist, then God is a distant being.

You can't have a personal relationship with him.

He might hear your prayers,

but he certainly isn't going to do anything

that might break the laws of nature

to answer your prayers.

Deism is completely blown apart by Jesus the sustainer.

What stops the universe from flying apart?

What keeps you alive?

Why do you wake up in the morning?
Why do you get better when you are sick?
Why does adversity make you stronger?
Why can you sometime resist the temptation the devil puts in front of you?
Why does sadness fade?
Jesus is sustaining all things by his powerful word.

6. Jesus provided the purification for sins.
We most often talk about the forgiveness of sins.
Jesus taking the punishment for sins.
Here the writer speaks of purification for sins.
Sin makes you dirty.
If you've sinned,
you need to be cleaned.
Maybe that's a helpful metaphor for us today.
Cleansing is a big business in 21C Australia.
Go across the road after the service
and check out how many cleaning products are on sale at Coles.
Clean your oven, your windows, your bench tops, your shower,
your car, your hair, your skin,
you can buy special stuff to go in your petrol tank
to clean your fuel injectors,
You can buy special gadgets
that filter the perfectly good water that comes out of your taps,
head across High Street to the chemist
and you can cleanse the toxins from your liver
with any number of ridiculous products.
Fair dinkum we live in an OCD cleaning society.
But you know what is really toxic?
Sin is really toxic.
Sin poisons everything.
And Jesus provided the purification for sin.

Pity we aren't a bit more OCD about that purification.

7. Jesus sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

Jesus is ruling.

Notice that he has already sat down.

His ruling doesn't wait until he returns.

Jesus rules right now.

When you look at the world,

and you are tempted to believe that everything is out of control,
remember this,

"Jesus is ruling, right now."

He is directing everything towards its rightful end.

Here's an application of that from my life this week.

I moved a motion about Gafcon at Synod this week.

If I didn't know Jesus was ruling,

I might have thought,

"What if this motion loses?"

I might damage God's plans."

But because I know Jesus is ruling,

I'm free to say,

"I can speak the truth in love.

Jesus will look after the consequences.

He is ruling."

Let's spend a few moments in prayer.

Let's praise our great God for speaking to us by his Son.