

**Sermon File # 1227**

**Scripture Text: Hebrews 1:1-4; Scripture Reading: Hebrews 1:1-14**

**Sermon Title: 2<sup>nd</sup> in Series on the Apostles' Creed: *I Believe in Jesus Christ, God's Only Son, Our Lord***

**Manuscript written by Roger Roberts and sermon preached**

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**Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.**

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## ***I Believe in Jesus Christ, God's Only Son, Our Lord***

### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles with me to Hebrews 1:1-4, as we consider the 2<sup>nd</sup> in our series from the Apostles' Creed, the earliest statement of our Christian faith. Last Sunday we considered from Genesis 1:1-2 the first line of the Creed: *I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth*. Today we look at the next phrase, *I Believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord*.

The Book of Hebrews was written around AD 64 as a sermon, addressed to perhaps a house church of newly converted of "fulfilled" Jews who were facing mounting persecution for their faith (Lane, 27f). Some were being tempted to abandon their faith in Christ rather than to suffer further losses and greater dangers to life, limb and family. These threatened and fearful new believers needed a reminder of the truth and value of their faith in Jesus Christ and that the salvation he offers is worth the price of perseverance and the cost of discipleship. This unknown writing pastor/preacher begins his sermon with an eloquent "attention-grabber" which was and still is an effective way to begin a sermon (Guthrie, 2083).

I will read the first 11 verses of **Hebrews 1**, focusing on today's text in verses **1-4**, which clearly upholds Jesus Christ as God's unique Son and our Lord.

Closing the communication gaps is one of the prevailing challenges of any culture. The fall of Adam and Eve resulted in their communication gap with God (Genesis 3:8). There seemed to be a gap, an interruption between the communication between the first parents, Adam and Eve, and their son Cain, who murdered his brother Abel (Genesis 4:1ff). We know the gap of communication between gifted, privileged Joseph and his jealous brothers (Genesis 37:1ff). Skipping down in history, there was a communication gap between Solomon's son, Rehoboam and the elders of Israel, which led to the division of the kingdom between Israel and Judah (1 Kings 12:1ff). So, throughout Scripture, down to Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), we see gaps/breaks in communication between God and his people, and between children and parents, brothers and sisters and even among church members (Philippians 4:2).

In our time of an overload of communication and information technology, we have huge gaps in communication and barriers to clear understanding. With all of our computers and Internet access and with a cell phone in almost everyone's possession in the Western World, we have probably the most serious communication gap in history. Despite our technology, we are probably the most alienated generation in history. Lack of communication is at the core of many problems between spouses and also between parents and children. We are too busy and self-absorbed to take time to really talk with and seek to understand each other. And I believe the reason we are out of touch with one another is that we are out of touch with God. Until we connect with him we will never be in good communication with each other. (If ever a group of Christians ever had reason to have communication gaps due to different heart languages and cultures, it's IBC Brussels! To me it's a testimony to the uniting power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God that we experience such unity, even though there is such linguistic and cultural diversity with 40 to 50 different nations represented here.)

In the words of one New Testament scholar, our text "begins by asserting the greatest single fact of the Christian revelation: God has spoken to man through his word in the Bible and through his Son, Jesus. In Christ God has closed the greatest communication gap of all time, that which exists between a holy God and sinful mankind" (Brown, 27). Last Sunday we affirmed our belief that God the Father created all that exists, and today we affirm that in his Son, Jesus, he communicates and commutes to us his saving grace.

To hear God speak and to allow him to close our communication gap with him will result in a dramatic change in our lives. This was the good news that the writing preacher communicated so eloquently and powerfully to these newly-converted Hebrews. And the good news that God speaks to us is a message each one of us needs to hear and believe and allow to change our way of thinking and living. I pray that all of us here today will understand the significance of the incarnation of Christ, the eternal Son becoming a human being, as God's speech act, his speaking to us perfectly, personally and powerfully. God desires to close this life-robbing communication gap between us and him.

Let's note this morning that...

### **In Christ, God speaks to us perfectly**

Our text tells us that God has, from the beginning, spoken to his covenant people perfectly. The writing pastor/preacher reminds these converted Jews of their spiritual legacy that continues all the way to Christ, where Scripture finds its fulfillment.

#### *The progressive speech of God*

The preacher declares that our God is not silent, but has made himself known to his people from the very beginning. God spoke directly to our spiritual ancestors in the Old Covenant, throughout the millennia, all the way through the prophets before the coming of Christ. The Old Testament Scriptures are a perfect revelation of God and are fully inspired and absolutely trustworthy in what they declare. Divine revelation through Scripture is progressive, but not in the sense of being less true, worthy or mature, but rather in being progressive in moving from promise to fulfillment, in being “a story of progression up to Christ,” with “no progression beyond him” (Bruce, 2f). The Old Testament sets the stage for the coming of the Messiah, who himself declared that these Scriptures testify about him (John 5:39).

The preaching pastor writes to show these new converts the folly of reverting to their Old Covenant Judaism and forsaking the saving and superior revelation of the New Covenant. As one scholar has said, Hebrews could well be titled “The Book of Better Things,” since 15 times the writer gives examples how that in Christ God has spoken “better things” than he did in the preparatory Old Testament revelation (PE Hughes, 1858).

God has spoken to us with the progressive speech of the Old Testament but in Christ we have...

#### *The perfect speech of God*

John's Prologue declares Jesus to be the eternal Son of God made flesh, incarnated as the living Word of God, his perfect speech (John 1:1-18). As the Word of God, Jesus tells us the truth *of* God and the truth *about* God. In fact, Jesus said to Philip, who asked him to show the disciples the Father, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). As Michael Horton says, this is an “astonishing statement. Not only did Jesus claim to be the only one through whom the Father could be known (John 8:19-24), but he also claimed that seeing him was equivalent to seeing the Father” (47).

Our text tells us that the eternal Son, who took upon himself our human flesh and fully entered our human experience, is the co-Creator, as John also says (verse 2 and John 1:3 & 10). He is the eternally pre-existent Christ, God the Son, without beginning. In his taking upon himself human flesh he came to

show us God's likeness in a way we can grasp. Although he laid aside his heavenly glory and his deity was veiled to keep unbelievers from recognizing him, he made himself knowable to those who would look to him and believe (Matthew 16:16; John 20:28).

The writing preacher uses words like effulgence, translated in the NIV as "radiance" (3). Jesus is like the rays of the sun shining from the sun, who is the unseen God the Father. He also uses the words translated "exact representation," from the Greek "charakter." *Charakter* is an old word from *charassō*, *to cut, to scratch, to mark.* It came to mean "the exact reproduction of an object (Robertson, 335f). As John Calvin noted, Jesus is thought of in this text as the coin stamped to look exactly like God the Father, who is the die from which the image on the coin is cast (Calvin, 8).

By seeing Jesus we understand the character of God, that he is perfectly holy but also loving, kind and approachable. Seeing Jesus approaching and enjoying table fellowship with and forgiving notorious sinners, we are encouraged to come to God with confidence in his forgiveness and acceptance of us with all our sin. Seeing Jesus' compassion for the grieving we are stirred to think of his compassion for us in our times of grief. Seeing Jesus as his loved and listened to and no doubt played with the little children we understand God's love for little ones and his desire to bless them.

The incarnate Christ is the perfect speech of God, beyond which we need no further revelation of God. By seeing him with the eyes of faith we come to perceive what God is like and by trusting and following him we enjoy a personal relationship with God through repentance and obedience. God speaks perfectly and absolutely reliably to us, which is in contrast to the communication gaps of our culture.

Sometime during the 80's, I think it was, a remarkable communication error occurred in the life of a traveling American businessman. On his way home to California from Germany, he made a plane connection at LAX, the air terminal in Los Angeles. Time Magazine reported that the weary traveler awaited his plane for the final leg of his journey to his home in Oakland, California. He heard a gate announcement for boarding the plane to what he thought was for Oakland, CA. He was too weary to take note that the airplane he had boarded was unusually large for his relatively brief trip to Oakland. After the plane had taken off and the flight attendants began serving, he noted they all seemed to have a distinct and unfamiliar accent. Upon inquiring of one of them, he discovered that instead of being on his way home to Oakland, California he was en route to Auckland, New Zealand.

Studying a language that is new to me, I have a new appreciation for the importance of communication. I also realize how imprecise human language can be, how very inadequate it is to express ourselves clearly. Using a second language is a humbling experience that reduces us often to child-like speech, with a very limited vocabulary. I admire so many of you, for whom English is a second language, for your diligence in learning English and your willingness to worship, fellowship and communicate with us in a tongue that is not your heart

language. It's a challenge often for me to make myself understood in Dutch. And sometimes, because of my pride, I don't want to admit that I haven't clearly understood someone speaking to me in Dutch! But I'm glad God speaks clearly to us and makes certain we understand him.

In his incarnation of Christ, the preacher tells us...

### **In Christ, God speaks to us personally**

The writing preacher/pastor reminds this little house church of believers facing mounting persecution that they can stand strong because God has a word to give them personally. God has spoken to them, he says, by his Son (2). And we also need to be reminded that God speaks to us personally, as though we were the only individuals in need of his grace; and in his speech he is...

#### *Seeking us individually*

One of the remarkable things about Jesus is the way he had time for individuals. Although he preached to the multitudes, he invested himself in one-on-one ministry, with hands on caring, healing and encouragement. Jesus will not let us be lost in the crowd, but rather, as he did with the woman who touched his garment and had hoped for anonymity, he calls us to face him squarely (Luke 8:43-48). When the healed woman realized that "she could not go unnoticed," she came trembling and fell at Jesus' feet (47). God's speech to us will not let us go unnoticed.

We all receive anonymous calls, letters and e-mail that we call "junk mail," dismissing it quickly and consigning to the waste bin, realizing how impersonal all this mail is that's addressed "to resident." But our text says that God has spoken to us, that is, to you and to me, as though we were the only ones on earth.

And God in the Incarnate Christ is...

#### *Searching us out completely*

When Adam and Even had fallen in their sin, God sought them out in the garden, calling them by name (Genesis 3:9). The meta-narrative of salvation history is one of God's seeking sinners, calling us by name, even when we, like young Samuel, have not yet learned his name (1 Samuel 3:7). As Jesus said, "the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10).

This letter or rather sermon to the Hebrews is a reminder that Christ is the perfect Great High Priest who is the approachable, loving and tender one who sympathizes with us in our weakness. He chose us as individuals, Paul reminds us, "before the creation of the world" to receive the blessings of new life and an everlasting relationship with him as our adoptive heavenly Father (Ephesians 1:4f).

### *Showing the way faithfully*

God's speech to us is absolutely reliable and he will not lead us astray when we seek to listen to him in Scriptures, which primarily and savingly point to Christ. Scriptures tell us who Christ is, what he has done for us and how he will forgive us and give us eternal life when we follow him in a life of discipleship. And, as Henry Blackaby teaches us, God continues to guide us into all truth, which he makes known to us through the Holy Spirit, who speaks to us through Scripture, prayer, circumstances and godly people in the church (Blackaby, below). Knowing and doing the will of God is not always simple and direct, but the truth is, God is not elusive with us. He doesn't hide from us anything we need to know if we sincerely seek to know and do his will. He isn't waiting for us to discover some mystical secret or decipher a secret code like some reluctant tyrant. He wants us to know his will much more than we do.

In the Western Christian world during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, particularly among evangelicals there waged a great "battle for the Bible," which was a divisive debate over various theories of the inspiration of Scripture. The correct and orthodox definition and acceptance of words like inerrant and infallible were critical in determining which side of the battle one was on. Although I adhere to a conservative and I believe an orthodox view of the inspiration of Scripture, I think these words became merely theoretical and divisive and unhelpful in understanding Scriptures and what to think of the Bible. I believe it's better to think of Scriptures as absolutely trustworthy and faithful, and when prayerfully and carefully studied and followed, will not lead anyone astray. The more important issue is, not what is our theory, but what is our practice of hearing and obeying God's voice?

I identify with Pastor John Piper, who confesses that at times he cries out for God to speak to him clearly, yet, as Piper notes, God has spoken. And our part is to listen to his voice, his faithful word to us.

"Let's begin with a question. Do you want to hear God speak? Have you ever said in a moment of desperation, 'O God, if you would only speak! If I could only hear your voice. If you would only talk to me and not be so silent!' I have said those words. And I have found the Lord patient with me and tender in his rebukes. One of the rebukes I have heard is found in Hebrews 1:1–2. What these two verses teach very loudly and plainly is that God is *not* silent. God is not withdrawn and uncommunicative" (Piper, 1).

Christ the Word is the Great Physician who knows all about us and who always perfectly diagnoses our needs. Those of us who have faced a somewhat risky medical procedure know the comfort of getting a second opinion from another doctor. But with Jesus we have "the last word," and we don't need to look elsewhere. Like Simon Peter, we simply confess, "Lord, to whom (else) shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68. See Tozer, 24).

In the Incarnate Christ, God speaks to us perfectly, personally and also...

## **In Christ, God speaks to us powerfully**

Our text tells us that in the Incarnate Word, Christ, God has spoken and continues to speak powerfully. In the incarnate Christ God speaks to us...

### *As the Almighty Creator*

The writing preacher is quick to remind the people in this house church, fearful of the approaching storm of persecution, that God has spoken and continues to speak as the almighty Co-Creator. He notes that it was through Christ the Son that God created the universe and that the risen Lord Jesus Christ holds all things together, "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (2f). This echoes the Apostle John's words (John 1:3, 10) and also those of the Apostle Paul, who says that

"He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:15ff).

When I think of the immeasurable vastness of the universe, with its innumerable galaxies that span billions of light years and continue to expand with mind-boggling speed and intensity, I simply confess with David,

"When I consider your heavens,  
     the work of your fingers,  
 the moon and the stars,  
     which you have set in place,  
 what is man that you are mindful of him,  
     the son of man that you care for him?" (Psalm 8:3f).

Christ the eternal Son, born in weakness and abject humility as the son of Mary, is now in the glory he had with the Father before the creation of the universe. He created simply by his word, by commanding life and the universe into existence. And it is only his authoritative word that holds everything in place. Without Christ's sustaining life, the atoms and molecules in our bodies and in all of matter would simply spin off into chaotic self-destruction. Christ holds the atoms and molecules in place of the blasphemous, God-defying atheist as well as for the child of faith who trusts in him. This is the general grace and goodness of God (Matthew 5:45).

God speaks to us in Christ, the Almighty King and Ruler over all creation. The Greeks had their mythical god Atlas, who held the world on his back, and carried the world as "dead weight." But the Lord Jesus holds us in his powerful hands and doesn't just sustain us, but also moves us along according to his determined and inexorable will. As one has said, Christ carries his children on his appointed course (Bruce, 6). This first chapter also tells us that the Lord Jesus has his angels who serve as ministering spirits to serve us (14). We are amply cared for!

God speaks to us through his Son, who is the almighty Co-Creator and he speaks also...

*As the crucified Savior*

The writer speaks about Christ's being seated in his position as glorified Lord of the Universe after having completed his mission of providing purification for sins (3). Our Lord Jesus Christ, who speaks his saving grace to us and who sustains and carries us along through life, is none other than the crucified Savior. He is not the Christ of overwhelming power, but the gentle Savior who has suffered in our place. The glory of our God is not in his crushing, tyrannizing power forcing his subjects into servitude, but is rather to be seen in his suffering love (Barclay, 5).

The way we most clearly see the glory of the Father is to see him in the face of Christ, as the one who suffered and died for us sinners. Christ crucified speaks to us most powerfully and eloquently about our sins that nailed him to the cross and his grace and forgiving, unconditional love that kept him on the cross. Like Elijah, we hear God's voice, not in the wind, earthquake and fire (1 Kings 19:11-13), but in the gentle whisper of his love, when Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Jesus is the risen Lord, with sovereign power over all our circumstances, but also he is forever the crucified, sympathetic Great High Priest who gently cares for us and invites to trust in him (Hebrews 4:14ff). He joins alongside of us in our suffering and speaks his words of comfort and sympathetic love, enabling us to share in his sufferings and endure faithfully as fellow pilgrims who are looking for an eternal city (Hebrews 11:10). These words to the threatened house church were of immense encouragement to them. As one pastor says, this letter to the Hebrews was for them a "manual on how to handle stress" (RK Hughes, 23). The entire Word of God enables us to deal with stress, teaching and reminding us that the Crucified now risen, Almighty Savior and Friend walks beside us.

**Conclusion:**

God's speech act through his Son has closed the communication gap for us forever. He has made the way through to us, to get through to us that we have been on the wrong flight, on the way to Auckland when we wanted to be in Oakland. He tells us in Jesus what he is like—loving, kind and forgiving, wanting us to know and enjoy him forever.

His word has the power to give us a new life, a new way of thinking and living. Whatever stands in the way of enabling us to hear, follow obey and believe he is willing and able to overcome. His word gives us all of the wisdom and knowledge that we need and all of the courage and will that we need to persevere through life's trials.

Today, as we affirm our belief in Christ as God's only Son and our Lord, we need to let him close the communication gap as we listen for his gentle whisper from the Word, conveyed by the Spirit. I ask you to search your heart to see if you have come into a personal, life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. As Paul says, you cannot sincerely confess that Jesus is your Lord except by the Holy Spirit, who lives within only those who have called upon him in repentance and faith (1 Corinthians 12:3; Romans 8:9).

During my tenure of service as a trustee on a missionary sending agency, one of my friends, who served in Eastern and Southern Africa, shared about the impact of the *Jesus* film across Sub-Sahara Africa. The *Jesus* film tells the story of Jesus as presented in the Gospel of Luke and has been dubbed in now more than a thousand world languages. This tool has been hugely successful in communicating the message of Christ with those who are illiterate or who don't have access to the Scriptures in their own language.

John Faulkner related that soon after the showing of the *Jesus* film had begun, with Jesus' calling his disciples to follow him, an African lady was so excited she could no longer contain herself, and stood up and began dancing, saying joyfully, "He speaks my language! He speaks my language!"

Whatever your language, whatever the deepest need of your heart, I want you to know that Jesus indeed speaks your language and he desires to close forever the communication gap between you and God. And knows exactly what you need to hear and to understand, about his saving grace and your desperate need of him. He knows your language!

Today I hope you can say with conviction, "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, *my* Lord!"

### **Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:**

1. What do you think are the causes of communication gaps between family members, friends, neighbors and work colleagues?
2. What is the primary cause of a communication gap between humans and God?
3. Why do you think Christ is called the Word of God (as in John 1:1-18)?
4. In what ways can you hear God speaking personally to you?
5. The audience who heard the message of Hebrews consisted of new converts from Judaism facing mounting persecution. What was the word, the communication from God that they needed to hear?
6. What is the part of God's communication that you most need to hear?

7. Reflect on ways that you can hear God's communication to you and receive his words of encouragement, guidance or assurance.

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