

HEBREWS INTRO 1:1-2 "Jesus, God of Power and the One on Whom we depend"

This morning we start a new study in the word of God. And as is my custom, before we launch into this study I would like to give some background information so as to help us understand something of the over-all intent of this letter.

Normally, we would start by addressing the author of the work, the people being addressed, the time it was written, along with the theme and purpose. Admittedly, however, we run into some problems with this letter that we might not run into with other letters in the New Testament.

We can certainly arrive at the theme and the purpose but when it comes to the author, the addressees and the time it was written we find that there are no definitive answers given in the letter itself.

Let's start with the author. Nowhere in the letter are we given a name. And so there is not much internal information we can go to and for that matter there is very little external information we can go to arrive at who was responsible for this letter.

That doesn't mean that people haven't tried to come to some conclusions. And a variety of names have made the list since the first century. The apostle Paul is on the list together with Barnabas, Luke, Aquila, Apollos the Alexandrian and Clement of Rome.

Volumes have been written on this dilemma and we could spend the entire morning pouring over the evidence, but that is not what we're going to do. Instead, I'll give the summation of two scholars who have arrived at two different conclusions regarding the person usually associated with this letter. One deciding it is Paul, the other deciding it's not.

Arthur W. Pink in his exposition of Hebrews says, "That this epistle was written by Paul is clear from 2Pet.3:15. Peter was writing to saved Jews as the opening verses of his first epistle intimates; the first verse of chapter 3 in his second epistle informs us that this letter was addressed to the same people as his former one had been. Then, in verse 15, he declares that his beloved brother Paul, "also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you." If the epistle to the Hebrews be not that writing, where is it?"

And so Pink, with others, believes that Paul was the author. F.F. Bruce in his commentary quotes John Calvin who concluded: "The manner of teaching and the style sufficiently show that Paul was not the author, and the writer himself confesses in the second chapter (2:3-4) that he was one of the disciples of the apostles, which is wholly different from the way in which Paul spoke of himself."

Bruce then adds, "What Paul and the author of Hebrews have in common is the basic apostolic teaching; but when we come to distinctive features we may say with certainty that the thought of the epistle is not Paul's, the language is not Paul's, and the technique of Old Testament quotation is not Paul's."

So, who wrote this epistle? Quoting from Bruce's commentary..."But as to who wrote the epistle, God knows the truth of the matter."

One thing is clear, the writing is inspired by the Holy Spirit and it is apostolic in nature. In fact one of the earliest followers of the apostles was Clement of Rome.

Clement, in writing to the Corinthian church in A.D. 95 actually quotes from the letter of Hebrews. And so it had already been in circulation for some time among most of the churches including the church at Corinth, which brings up the issue of when it was written.

With the internal evidence in the letter which speaks of the temple service and the animal sacrifices it is assumed that the letter is written before the destruction of the temple in A.D.70. And since the author alludes to persecution not leading to death, it's assumed that the persecutions of Nero, which started in A.D.65, had not yet started. Many then conclude that the letter was written shortly before A.D.65.

The people being addressed would seem to have a working knowledge of the O.T. which is why it's assumed that they were Hebrew Christians. This is also why the book is entitled Hebrews although this title was not part of the original letter and in fact was added the last quarter of the second century.

Others have suggested that the addressees were Gentiles who were being instructed about the O.T. covenants to help them appreciate the New covenant found in Christ. And so both Jew and Gentile could have been the recipients.

And so the writer, those being addressed and the date of the letter are up for debate, but one thing is very clear: The theme of the letter.

Pink sums it up this way: "this is the super-abounding excellence of Christianity over Judaism. The sum and substance, the center and circumference, the light and the life of Christianity, is Christ. Therefore, the method followed by the Holy Spirit in this epistle, in developing its dominant theme, is to show the immeasurable superiority of Christ over all that had gone before. One by one the various objects in which the Jews boasted are taken up, and in the presence of the superlative glory of the Son of God they pale into utter insignificance."

In short, this letter is all about the glorious and awesome Redeemer who is King of kings and Lord of lords, the risen Savior who is God and who earnestly seeks for us to come into communion with Him as He leads us and guides us in the power of His Spirit.

And so we begin our study this morning.

HEB 1:1-2 "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."

The writer of Hebrews begins by giving us an understanding of who this God is and the fellowship He wants with us. "In the past God spoke". One of the amazing things about the Creator of all things is that He is a God who is personal and who demonstrates the desire to engage in fellowship with a special part of His creation.

God certainly had the ability and the power to simply create all things including man and put them on this little planet surrounded by other heavenly bodies and let him live out his life without ever meeting his creator.

But that was never God's intention. God created us specifically to have fellowship with us. That does not mean that God needed us to fulfill some void in His existence. Being self-existent He needed no one. He is perfect in all ways and enjoyed the fellowship of Himself. For Him to need someone other than Himself would demonstrate a flaw in His perfection.

This only adds to the amazing reality that He created us, not for His needs, but for our blessing and His glory. He created us to share in His eternity which necessarily means that fellowship is involved. And as with any fellowship there must communication.

Of course with Adam and Eve God spoke to them and enjoyed their fellowship as they walked with Him and partook of all of the earth's bounty which was created for their pleasure and their needs.

But what happened was that the first man and woman came into fellowship with another of God's creation. And that fellowship turned into death as Satan spoke to the woman and she concluded that the fellowship she had with her God was not sufficient and that for life to be fully realized she must eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

She entered into a fellowship with Satan which would be fatal, not only for her and Adam but for all mankind. And because of this fellowship with Satan and her subsequent disobedience to God the fellowship they enjoyed with their Creator was broken.

The curse of sin entered into the creation of God and it affected everything. The fellowship was broken. God no longer spoke to them in a way they previously enjoyed.

Imagine how that affected them, knowing that instead of walking with God as they did in the Garden of Eden, they would now only communicate with God from afar. No longer was their communication and fellowship in His very presence, but now, by faith that He was there, even though they could now not see Him as before.

But in God's grace He didn't abandon them. Even after they sinned He spoke to them and promised that this broken relationship would be restored and that this would happen through One who would be sent into the world and be born of a woman to redeem mankind as He destroyed the power of death and sin.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that this grace of God manifested itself in a way where, though the relationship was broken, God didn't cease to communicate to us and enter into fellowship with mankind through His promise we had to receive by faith.

How did God continue to communicate with mankind after the fall? He did it through chosen agents who heard from God and who

then communicated that to the people. The first agents of this communication would have been Adam and Eve themselves.

After their children were born you can depend on them telling their children that this place of residence was not their original home. They conveyed how they disobeyed and yet how God in His mercy told them that He would restore the fellowship.

Of course over the years the people in this world forgot what was spoken to Adam and Eve, or simply excused it as having no relevance in their lives, not unlike how people think today.

And the message of "restored fellowship with God" fell on deaf ears and mankind reveled in the curse of sin which effected their very hearts.

GEN 6:5-8 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth - men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air - for I am grieved that I have made them. But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

Evidently, Noah was a man who had heard this message of hope and trusted in God that He would come through for mankind. And in the midst of Noah's faith in God, God came to Noah and spoke to him.

Gen. 6:13-14 So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress..." (or gopher wood as some translations have it).

And God gave Noah the instructions as to how to build this ark. Of course we know the world was destroyed and 8 people in all survived. But the curse of sin had not gone away and after Noah and his sons and their wives re-populated the earth sin continued to affect mankind and once again God spoke.

This time God spoke to a man who lived in Ur of the Chaldees. And God told this man to leave Ur and to follow God as He led him to the land of Canaan. This man's name was Abram who later came to be called by God as Abraham.

Through Abraham the promise was given in GEN 12:2-3 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

God was still speaking and He would continue to speak to men with the express purpose of calling men to trust that He would restore this broken relationship because of sin. And for almost 2,000 years God did not keep silent about His love for mankind. This is what the writer of Hebrews meant when he said in verse one of our text:

HEB 1:1 "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,..."

Our Lord would use a variety of means to speak and convey His truth. Quoting Pink from his commentary: "Thus we may see ... the Sovereignty of God. He did not act uniformly or confine Himself to any one method of speaking to the fathers. He spoke by way of promise and prediction, by types and symbols, by commandments and precepts, by warnings and exhortations."

But the thread of truth continued to be conveyed because the God who created man still desired the fellowship with man He originally had in the Garden. This communication; this "speaking" of God written down by His prophets is what we know as the O.T. scriptures.

Interestingly enough, from about 433 B.C. which is when the last book of the O.T. was written, the book of Malachi, there are no more spoken words of God given to men until we come to the fulfillment of what the O.T. prophets spoke of in the Messiah.

For over 400 hundred years God was apparently silent. Some have suggested that it was unfair for God not to speak to mankind and encourage them during this time. And yet God was never silent during this time. Mankind had the written word of God declaring what God wanted men to know about Himself.

This world has never been without the witness of God as He has spoken. In His mercy and compassion He has always declared Himself. Though the writer of Hebrews specifically speaks of God speaking through His prophets, God has even spoken through His creation.

This is why Paul said in ROM 1:20 "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

This is what is known in Theological terms as general revelation where God has shown Himself in His own creation.

You and I would think it absurd if we found a beautiful painting in the woods and concluded that it evolved over eons and fell from a tree as a leaf.

No, our first reaction would be that an intelligent and talented person arranged colors in great detail on canvas. There would be no question. And yet the "greatest minds" of mankind insist that they have found not a beautiful creation made by a creator but rather a chance happening of mistakes over millions and billions of years mindlessly coming together to form this world and the creatures in it.

Paul spoke of this as well in ROM 1:22,25 "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools... They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator - who is forever praised. Amen."

God has spoken in times past so that we may know Him. But it is one thing to speak through agents you choose to do your bidding. It's entirely something else when you speak in person.

HEB 1:2 "but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."

The very God who spoke with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and enjoyed their personal fellowship, before their fall, is the very God who came into this world to personally speak to us in a way the prophets of old could never do.

But this speaking which the writer of Hebrews addresses is not simply God coming into the world to carry on the work of the prophets. Rather, this speaking is a final fulfilling revelation to men to come to the God who created them and who is now in this earth to accomplish the promise made to Adam and Eve and the prophets of old.

This speaking is where Christ comes down from heaven and discloses all that the Father would have us know of Himself and His will as it relates to our salvation, our restoration to the Father.

This was not just another person relaying information about God. This person was God in the flesh. Now in the second verse it reads "in these last days". This is not meant to be limited to the time of Christ's earthly ministry though it certainly began there. The idea here in our text is to make a contrast between the Old covenant and the new.

Dr. Donald Guthrie in his commentary on Hebrews makes this observation: "these last days" refers to the Christian era, which involves a new era compared with the old. When God spoke to men by a Son, it was meant to mark an end of all imperfect methods. The curtain had finally fallen on the previous age and the final age had now dawned."

This is what Peter meant in 1PE 1:20 "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."

Paul puts it this way in GAL 4:4-5 "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

We lost those rights in the Garden when Adam represented us and failed as he rebelled against God. Jesus came to redeem us and restore us to sonship with the Father. We are His children in Christ. This is what Adam and Eve looked forward to by faith. You and I have received it by faith as well as we put our trust in this Messiah who came into this world some 2,000 years ago.

He has spoken on behalf of the Father in the sense that He came on to the scene to declare that what was spoken of in the past through the prophets He was now fulfilling. This is what Jesus said in the gospel of John.

JOH 15:15 "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

This is what the Jews were supposed to be looking for. They were to be looking for the One who would be sent from God to declare

to them the way of salvation and personally lead them out of the bondage of sin, not unlike how Moses led the people out from under the bondage of Egypt.

And others besides the Jews knew this as well. The Samaritan woman who met Jesus by the well understood this. You might remember the conversation.

JOH 4:22-26 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us. Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he.

HEB 1:2 in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son..."

Now, we need to be careful not to fall into the trap of thinking that simply what Jesus said during His earthly ministry is what the Father only intended to convey. Andrew Murray from his commentary entitled "The Holiest of all" points this out when he says, "The description of the glory of Christ's person is followed by that of the work of this Son in whom God speaks to us. God's words are His deeds. It is in what Christ is and works that God speaks to us. In His divinity and incarnation we see what God has given us..... All Christ's work is God's word to us."

This is what John meant when referring to Jesus Christ who came into this world from the Father in JOH 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The Father spoke to us through His living word, His Son, by the very way in which He actually came into this world and accomplished the will of the Father which was to die for the penalty of our sins and bring us back to Himself.

We've all heard the expression, "actions speak louder than words." Jesus spoke through His actions as He humbled Himself to take on flesh and dwell among us.

Some have erroneously taught that Jesus first came into existence when He was born into this world as they take the expression that the Father begat the Son as in

"He sent His only begotten Son into the world." (Joh3:16)

The truth is that Jesus is eternal, because Jesus is God who is eternal. HEB 1:2 "but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."

The Son of God was appointed by the Father from all of eternity to be the heir of all things. Remember what Peter said?

1PE 1:20 "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."

This would be accomplished in time as He came into the world to fulfill all the Father had. But there was never a time in eternity when the Son was not heir. And there was never a time in eternity when Jesus wasn't God.

The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus is very God as he describes that the Father and the Son were there at creation and in fact it was the Son who "made the universe."

This doesn't mean there were two Gods or even three as the Holy Spirit was there as well hovering over the waters as we read in Genesis, but rather all three persons of the Godhead making up only one God, played a role in Creation.

In fact we're told in GEN 1:1 " In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

It's implied that the Father is the One creating. And yet here we're told that Jesus created. John points this out in JOH 1:3 "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

The apostle Paul writes about Jesus in COL 1:16-17 "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."

Paul even connects Jesus with the Father as they create together. 1CO 8:6 "yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

This is the Christ we serve. This is the Christ sent from the Father. This Christ is God and the writer of Hebrews sets the tone of this letter by encouraging his readers to take heart in the fact that the Creator who brought them to Himself is now with them and will be with them forever.

He is not a Savior who is powerless. He is not a Savior who is unaware of our problems. He is not a Savior who is unconcerned with our lives. He has come into this world and has spoken to our hearts so that we may follow Him and trust Him and love and serve Him all our days, knowing that His intention is to ultimately bring us into the kind of face to face fellowship man once had in the Garden and infinitely more.

But that fellowship starts today as we trust Christ alone for our salvation, being indwelt with His Spirit. And that fellowship is what gives us hope as we rely on Him by faith today, looking to the future.

Let me end with 1CO 1:5-9 "For in him you have been enriched in every way - in all your speaking and in all your knowledge - because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful. Amen!