

Heir of All Things

Hebrews

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Bible Text: Hebrews 1:1-4; 1 Timothy 6:16
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Let's take our Bibles this morning and turn to the book of Hebrews on 1,001 if you're using the church Bible. Hebrews 1, reading at verse 1. Let's hear from holy Scripture, let's hear the word of God.

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Yesterday was a very warm day for November. I guess it was just the ideal day for me to put up my outside Christmas lights. My neighbor was laughing at me. I said, "It's because it's a nice warm day." She said, "You made the same excuse last year for putting them up in September." "No, no, no, it wasn't September," I said. Anyway, I was erecting these lights and as I'm putting very very, this is a very technical art and I was concentrating and was interrupted by some folks coming along the sidewalk with their dogs and I kind of started talking to these people and telling them what I was doing and why I was doing it today and it was after they had walked past, I suddenly caught myself, "I don't do that kind of thing." But I do remember growing up, being so embarrassed when my father would just talk to random strangers. Just out of the blue he would start talking to random strangers, telling them stuff the people did not want to know and I thought, "I'm becoming like my dad!" I can say that now because there's been a bit of a distance since when I was a boy but when we're children, we don't want to be like our dads or our moms, we want to be ourselves. We don't even think about it but as you get older, you begin to see these little tell-tale signs. My mom did this and my dad did that and I find myself doing this and I find myself doing that, and you're reminded of the fact that there is this great background. Our parents imprint something of themselves upon us as people, they leave their mark in our idiosyncrasies, and in other ways as well that are not quite so funny and that aren't quite the things that make you embarrassed.

Now, that kind of language, of course, is language which the Bible uses about God, isn't it? We've been looking at this as we've been looking at Hebrews. We saw that in the introduction to the book of Hebrews, the one word that controls the movement of the text is the word "God," and that in the movement of the text, it comes to a conclusion in the word "Son," and that the word "Son" in the text is a function of the word "God," for the word "Son" tells us something about God. It was something that the people of Jesus' day noted, wasn't it, that he referred to God as what? As Father. It was one of the distinctive marks that Jesus taught us to think of God as a Father, and the theological implication of that, the importance of that is this: that you don't have a father unless there's a son. My father, my father and mother were not parents until they had me. Now, weren't they lucky that they started off parenthood with me, but seriously, my father wasn't a father before he had me. I was the firstborn son and God the Father would not be the Father if there was not a Son.

Now the reality is, of course, that there was a time when my mother and father were carefree and young and enjoyed themselves and could go wherever they wanted to go and have all the vacations they wanted to have and then I came along and spoiled the rest of their lives. Now, when it comes to God the Father, there was never a time when he was not the Father of the Son and that's one of the ways in which we are taught in the Bible to think about God.

There are two things that we need to bear in mind in studying the Bible that very often, I think, we don't factor in as much as we should. One is this: that there is a divide made in the Bible between God and that which is not God. God and that which is not God. The Creator and creatures and the creation, everything over here on this side, God made it, it's here. But that there is this great chasm between God as a being and creatures as beings. I may be like my dad in some ways, talking now to random strangers apparently in the middle of the street without any cause, but I am not my father. My father was one being and I'm another being, but when we talk about the Father and the Son within the Godhead, we are talking about one being. There is a distinction but we're talking about one God and the way the Bible describes it is there is God the Father who is the source, the fountain and the origin of God-ness, there is God the Son who is of the Father, from the Father, and there is the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son to complete the Triune oneness of God. Do you understand that? Of course you don't. Neither do I. But that's the Bible's teaching about God: God is one God in the Trinity of his sacred persons. Now, keep that somewhere, file it away and we'll come back to that in a moment.

In the exordium, the opening to this book, we found that God is the speaking subject and that he is expressing himself and communicating himself. He did that to the fathers, that's the Old Testament fathers, by the prophets, and then in these last days. Now he's placing us there, you notice that. God has revealed himself to us, he has spoken to us in these last days by a Son. And with the coming of the Son, the communicating and self-expressing mission of God comes to its conclusion. It reaches its climax. The goal is reached. A full stop is made. Perfection is realized. In the Son we have the completion and perfection of

God's self-expression and self-communication to us. In the Son God has spoken fully, finally, perfectly, completely. In these last days in one who is Son.

And that word "Son" denotes both relation, a relation of origin, the Son comes from the Father, and distinction, the Son is not the Father. One of the ways this is shown, not the only way by any manner of means, by the way, but one of the ways in which this stands out in the New Testament is in the use in John's Gospel of the word "monogenes." It's a shortened form of monogeneo which is translated into Latin as unigenitos, meaning only begotten or only generated or only birthed Son. And we find it coming up in other places in the New Testament. When Jesus says that he came from the Father, he's talking not just about coming into the world, but coming from the Father eternally. He is of the Father, from the Father, as part of his existence.

The Son is of the Father eternally. He does not have a beginning. There was a time when I began, conceived in my mother's womb and then born in Glasgow, but there was never a time when the Son became. He was always birthed, begotten, from the Father. He always came from the Father. He is eternally God. There was never a time when God the Son was an inferior or a junior. He came fully God. In him all the fullness of the Godhead is pleased to dwell. He is eternally, John says, face-to-face with God. That's why we confess, as we'll start doing next Sunday for Advent, the Advent period when we're reciting the Nicene Creed, we'll be reciting that he is begotten and not made.

So here's the thing: creatures beget creatures. You get married and you have children, they will be creatures like you. God begets God. So when we read of the Son we're thinking of God. Now, this is now teased out for us. That's all this stuff I've covered in the last few weeks. Let's get down to the text for this morning because now it's going to be expounded and enlarged upon and we want to look at the Son, then, who is now the focus of attention from verse 2 forward into the text, and we learn some things about him. We learn some qualities about the Son. Let's look at them.

First of all, the Son is the heir of all things. The Son is the heir of all things. To be the heir in a royal context is to have the rule over everything. Two things, two ideas that are involved in being the heir: one is dominion and the other is possession. We'll look at those shortly, dominion and possession. The heir has the rule over all and all is subject to him and this is an eternal appointment. He appointed the heir of all things. You go to Psalm 2 and there in Psalm 2 you overhear a conversation deep in eternity past where the Father says to his Son, "Today I have begotten you," and then he says to the Son concerning what comes in the future, "Ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance." He is the heir of all things. One theologian puts it like this, "The Son's appointment is not an event in time between God and a creature, rather it's the enactment of what it means for the Son to be the eternal Son of God, God of God."

Now, this is not something new in the Bible. If you go back, for example, to the book of Proverbs in chapter 8, you don't have to look it up, you can look it up later on, chapter 8, verse 22, the writer of the Proverbs is speaking about the wisdom of God. In the New Testament we're told that Jesus is the wisdom of God. Now listen to the language that

wisdom speaks. The early church fathers read this and they heard the voice of the Son of God speaking, "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth." So he's not the same as a created being. "When there were no depths," when there was nothing, "I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he assigned the sea its limits, I was beside him, like a master workman." Now, you read all that and what you discover as you read it is that the wisdom of God that is identified and personalized in the Bible and is identified in the New Testament as being the Son of God is possessed before everything else. He is brought forth before everything else, is set up before everything else, and he is with God at creation, and he is active with God at creation, and he is involved in the work of creation. All of that comes from Proverbs 8.

In a couple of weeks, not very long now, it will be Christmas, hence the lights going up yesterday, so that we can seamlessly transition on Thursday night from Thanksgiving to Christmas. But in Micah 5, one of those great Christmas passages, here's what we read, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah," that's just identifying which Bethlehem, there were two Bethlehems. It's the city of David, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, so this one who's coming with come forth," that is, will have his beginning in Bethlehem, humanly speaking, okay? "Whose coming forth," oh, he's already come forth, "whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient times." He has come forth from the very being of God. He is the Son of God. He has the nature of God. He has the God-ness of God. And it's this one who has already come forth from God who will come forth from a woman's womb in Bethlehem Ephrathah.

In other words, all this language is pointing us, isn't it, to what is known as the eternal generation or the eternal begetting of the Son of God and we are told that he is heir of all things. That phrase "all things," is to be understood absolutely. In John 3:35 we're told this, "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand." In John 13, Jesus knowing the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going back to God. This eternal giving of all things implies dominion. In Colossians 1, "For by him all things were created in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities. All things were created through him and for him." He has dominion. The monarchy belongs to the Son as well as to the Father.

And possession. In Luke 10:22 Jesus says to the people of his day, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son." He is distinguishing himself from creatures and is excluding himself, sanctifying himself, putting himself into the category of God.

He is the heir of all things and it's because as the heir of all things he comes into the world and takes our humanity, that we trusting in him, becoming connected to him by

faith, we become as believers co-heirs with Christ of all things so that men and women, believers, are heirs together of life in Christ Jesus.

He is the heir of all things. Now, how appropriate is it that he should be the heir is answered by the next phrase. The Son is the Creator of all things. Here is the answer, "through whom he created the world." The world is a particular category of the "all things." All things cover all things in God and all things that are not God. Created reality, in other words, and he's thinking about created reality, the universe with our planet in it. The world, the universe, that's what he has in mind here.

Now, this use of "all things" here is monotheistic language. Throughout the Old Testament, throughout the Scriptures of Israel, this phrase, "all things," is absolute and is a God thing. Isaiah 44, "Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: 'I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth.'" Isaiah 66, "All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD." In other words, in this phrase, in this clause, we are moving to a new reality, a reality that is not God. That is, there's God and there is this new reality, this external work of God in making a universe and in that universe making creatures, angels, people. And he is distinguishing God and what is not God and in what is not God, he includes all creation, all creatures, angels, humans, and he says they are the work of the Son's hands. John 1:3, remember, "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."

As Creator, the Son is God doing God's will and God's work and that means that he cannot be compared to any creature or creature reality because the Son, by nature, is intrinsic to God's own eternal identity. Do you know these words from 1 Corinthians 8:6 that underline the inseparable operations and work of the Father and the Son, "for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." We exist through this one who is the Son. We would have no existence apart from this one who is the Son.

Now, isn't it amazing, let's pause for a moment, here's a little sidebar. Isn't it amazing that these words are being written perhaps about 15 years after the death of Jesus to the churches after the shameful death by crucifixion, the execution of someone who is treated like a common criminal, and these people have come to this conclusion by reading the text of the Scripture, that is, the Old Testament Scripture, and by virtue of the sheer massive impact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection was no small thing. It changed their minds. It impacted their thinking. It transformed the way they thought of God.

Then we move on to the third thing. So he's the heir of all things, he's the Creator of all things, he is very God of very God. So notice what's happened: in the flow of this passage we've come from God, we've come from a period when there is only God, God's been interacting with the world by way of revelation, we've just heard about the creation of the world by God, and now in case we've forgotten, now he steps back again and he reminds

us carefully of who the one is about whom now he's speaking, the Son, in his relationship to God the Father. He uses two metaphors and these two metaphors state the Son's eternal relation to God in terms of his identify and power.

Let's look at the two metaphors together. First of all, he says the Son is the radiance of the glory of God. He's describing something of the being of the Son. What is God's glory? God's glory is what God is in himself. His unapproachable splendor. His perfect majesty. His supreme beauty. And what the Bible says about this glory of God, this is generated, as it were, from God himself. It's using language that we can grasp.

Now this glory of God becomes visible and in the Bible glory is associated a lot with light. God is glorious. He dwells in unapproachable light. God is brilliant light. And what this text is saying is that God, who is light, projects light. God is glorious and his glory is radiant. God is light and that light shines and what the author is saying is God in himself is light but the shining of the light is the Son, the Son of God. And what he's arguing here is this: the Father is the source of light, the Son we're told is light in himself, but you cannot separate the light from the shining, from the outshining. You can't do it. You can't say, "Well, I'm going to switch off the light and still have the outshining. I'll switch off the torch but I'll still have the beam." You can't do that. You go and experiment tonight. It won't work because lights shine. The illustration is teaching us this: though you can distinguish between the light and the shining, they are one. That's what it's saying.

The light and the shining are one, the beauty and the splendor is one, the glory and the effulgence of the glory is one. You notice that he's not saying that the Son reflects the glory of God. He's not saying the Son is illuminated by the glory of God like a spotlight. No, no. He is the shining forth of the glory of God. It's an illustration to help us get our heads around who Christ is and who the Son is. Basil, one of the church fathers, puts it like this, "The radiance is always considered with the glory that is its source, the image with its prototype, and always the Son with the Father. One demands the other. Both are inseparably joined in name and nature." Origen, one of the early fathers, puts it like this, "This is an everlasting begetting as brightness is begotten by the light."

So what can we say about this image? Well, light and radiance of the light are identical but they're not simply identical, they can be distinguished. But if you think about the radiance, the outshining, it invariably makes you think of its source, the light. And then if you want to investigate the light, the source, you cannot do that without following the outshining of the light and seeing its radiance. So what that's telling you is this: you cannot think of the Father without the Son. You can't think of the Son without the Father. Jesus is the radiance of God's glory.

If you didn't get that, he gives you another illustration, the exact imprint of his being, of his nature, of his substance, of his essence, the exact imprint. It's as though the Son is a repetition of the Father, a representation of the Father. The Son and the Father share the same imprint of being.

Now, you're looking lost and so you should be. This is all above our pay grade, and even those who are experts on theology proper as we call it, that is, the study of the Trinity, those people invariably are regularly worshipping. You see, we need to say that there are things about God we don't understand. That was our first point; it's right at the very beginning about six weeks ago when we began. God is incomprehensible to us and we can say what the Bible says about God, which is what we're doing this morning, these are things the Bible has said that we can say, but that doesn't mean because we say them that we understand them.

How could that be? Here's the reason: we are creatures. We live in creaturely reality. We don't think like God. "My ways are not your ways. Your ways are not my ways," says the Lord. His knowledge is too wonderful for us. It's too deep for us. There are points in which we come to contemplate, just to come together to worship to contemplate God. You see, very often we've got a kind of functional attitude to the Christian life. We come just looking for kind of some points to take away as to how I can live a good Christian life during the week. Do you know that becomes very wearing, very tiring, very fast. We need at times just to sit back, as it were, and try and contemplate what we know about the God who has reached out to us and spoken to us and acted for us. The exact imprint of his nature. John Owen puts it like this, "The Son corresponds to God as infinitely glorious, eternally subsisting with the Father in his own person."

But let's move on. He upholds the universe by the word of his power. What does that mean, to uphold? It means to bear something. If I lift something up, I'm bearing it, carrying it. The Son bears, carries, sustains, preserves, maintains, all of created reality. Created reality cannot survive on its own. It is contingent. God is not contingent on anything or anyone. Created reality is contingent on the Son of God keeping it going. Every detail. Every detail of your blood supply and the synapses in your brain, every detail of who you are is being sustained every moment by the active power of the Son of God. That's what this text is telling us. We call it providence. To sustain the universe is cosmic in its scale. All of creaturely reality comes under its purview. This universe exists by his act of creation but it continues by his act of sustaining. It is the Son prevents the universe simply dissolving, disappearing, in a moment becoming extinct. He is presently continuously supporting, carrying the universe.

You see, that's a very big idea. Well, let me break it down. Do you know what the implications are for you and me? Well, they're this: that the God who bears the universe also carries his church. He bears up his people. He sustains us. He will preserve us and will bring us to the perfection that he's preparing for us. He will not let us go. He who is superintending the work of supernovas and quarks and microbes and synapses is able to sustain you in your Christian devotion no matter how tough it becomes tomorrow morning, no matter what lies before us in the history and flow of humanity. It's that belief, you see, that underlies the great promises of the Psalms. Psalm 27, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

He upholds all things by the word of his power. His powerful word is the enactment of his will. His word is not a puff of wind, not a little sound. His word is an event. It is an accomplishment. He speaks and things are. He speaks and things remain. Do you remember the story of Jesus in the boat in the Sea of Galilee? Galilee is surrounded by mountains and they have these random storms that will just come out of nowhere, there will be no cloud in the sky and suddenly a storm will come. And there was a very bad storm and the men who were in the boat with Jesus on that occasion were hardened fishermen, they were used to sailing on that sea but they were terrified. This was a storm like no other storm. Do you remember what Jesus did in the midst of the storm? He got up and he spoke. He said to the winds, "Shut up." That's literally what it says. "Be quiet." Be quiet is the kind of nice, middle-class way, but in the Greek it's far stronger than that, "Be muzzled." And the wind stopped. And to the waves he said, "Be calm."

Now, you do this experiment, you go home, you get a bowl, put some water in it and, as we would say in Scotland, just jiggle it around a little bit. Jiggle it around. It's a great word, that, jiggle. Just do this and the water will start going like this, then you put it down and see how long it takes for it to stop moving. And when Jesus said to the sea, "Be calm," it didn't take a few hours for it to calm down again. It was instantly calm and when the sailors, the disciples, saw the sea be calm, they knew, "This is God."

He speaks and his word sustains the universe and it was this Son who made purification for sins and suddenly we find ourselves where we are today. Suddenly it's come from eternity and it's come from God and now it's down here to the nuts and bolts and grime reality of life under the sun. Sins. Here's the state of the world today, it's polluted, it's unclean, it's defiled, it's defeated. The world is in rebellion against its Maker. For him to make purification for sins, as we shall see in chapter 2, involves him becoming a creature, taking on creaturelyness, taking on our humanity, becoming one of us, putting our skin on, shrinking himself into the womb of Mary, becoming a little baby thing dependent on Mary feeding him, changing his diaper. And he comes to our rescue. He comes to our place of shame. He comes to carry our guilt. He comes to secure our cleansing. Why does he do that? Well, he does that because that's what we needed or how were we to know God? We need purifying. We need washing. We need cleansing. Because we're not fit for the presence of God. We're not fit to go into God's heaven. We're not fit for the new heavens and the new earth. We're not fit to have a relationship with a God who is perfectly pure until we've been purified by the work of Jesus.

And it was this Son who is by very nature God, who takes things on himself, my nature, your nature, who humbles himself and becomes the servant, a slave who is despised and rejected, who carries the weight of our sin on his own shoulders to Calvary and there suffers ignominiously the shame of the cross and the pain of the cross in order that you and I might be purified and made right with God. And having done that, we're told the Son sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. You're saying, "Liam, you're really racing through Hebrews this morning. My goodness, we're going to get to verse 4 if we don't watch ourselves."

He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. Of course, that was his right. He was the heir of all things. He had always been the Son. He had always shared the monarchy of the Father. This was his by right. The Psalmist heard by the Holy Spirit them saying to the Son is, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever." The throne was always his. As the hymnwriter puts it, "The highest place that heaven affords is his by sovereign right, the King of kings and Lord of lords and heaven's eternal light." Always his right. But now after the spectacular humiliation, after the obedience to death, after taking our flesh, in our humanity he earns the right not to have what was his alone now, but to take now our humanity and in our humanity now to sit at the right hand of God, of the majesty on high.

And lastly, verse 4: he has inherited a more excellent name. Verse 4 is a transitional verse. We're not going to spend any time on it this morning except to pick out this last thing. We're taking back to the beginning again, the beginning was with the heir of all things, now we're back to what he has inherited as the heir of all things. He has inherited by virtue of his generation from the Father, his being eternally of the Father, he has the name that is described here as excellent, literally incomparable. A name that bursts all bounds. A name that blows all minds. A name that we don't know.

That we don't know. People have guessed, of course. They thought perhaps it was the unpronounceable name, the name of the Lord that we find in our Old Testaments capitalized by capital letters L-O-R-D. We often refer to that name as Yahweh. We don't use it. It's offensive to our Jewish friends for us to use that unpronounceable, unmentionable name. It was transliterated badly into English by the word "Jehovah," but Jehovah is okay as far as I'm concerned because it doesn't offend so much but it just singles out that that name "LORD" is God's personal name.

But that's not the name that's mentioned here and I'll tell you why: because all over the New Testament Jesus is called LORD. All over the New Testament there are Old Testament verses applied to Jesus that refer to the LORD and they refer to the Lord Jesus. The word "Kyrios" which is the Greek word for Lord is used in the Greek Old Testament to translate Adonai and Yahweh and all of these names and in the New Testament they are applied to Jesus. It's not the name LORD. It's not the name Son. We've already got it there. It's not the name "Word," we've already got that elsewhere. It's not the name "Christ." This is the unknowable name.

In Revelation we have the vision of the reigning and returning Word of God, the Son, and we're told there that he has a name inscribed which no one knows except himself. In Philippians 2, he is given the name above all names, we're just not told what it is because there is a name that is unknown to us. In other words, at the end of this introduction to the Son of God, we're reminded at the very end that he is still the ineffable God. There are things we don't know. What we do know is wonderful. What we do know is accommodated to our status as creatures but there is much mystery that leaves us wondering and worshiping this glorious Son who, for us and for our salvation, deigned to enter our creaturely reality as a creature, as the man, Christ Jesus, to bring us to God.

That's the good news of the Gospel. That's the good news of the Gospel. Does the teaching about God bend your mind? Well, so it should. If you could fit God into a couple of nice paragraphs, then he would not be God. We bow before the mystery and the majesty and I commend to you Jesus Christ, the man, Christ Jesus, in whom God demonstrates his love for creatures like you and like me.

Father, God, thank you for your Son. Thank you for sending him. And thank you that in sending him you demonstrated your love towards us. I pray that you would help us today to bow before you, to wonder at your majesty, and to be grateful ever for your salvation. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.