

One Who is Son

Hebrews

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Bible Text: Hebrews 1:1-3; John 3:31-34
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Do take your Bibles and turn with me to the book of Hebrews. If you're using the church Bible, that's on page 1,001. Hebrews 1. I'm going to read three verses. No, we'll read two verses. We don't want to get ahead of ourselves. I think next week we'll pick up pace, by the way. Maybe not next week, the week after next, just so there is hope, light at the end of the tunnel.

Let me read again,

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.

So the summer of 2016 was marked rather the Great Debate on the Trinity or the Great Trinitarian Debate, whichever way you put it. All of social media, it seemed, lit up with the discussion of this great subject. And not before time, because what has happened in the last 150 years really within Protestantism is that the subject of the Trinity has been affected in the late 19th century by liberalism, liberalism that started to cut away and undermine the foundations on which the Christian confession of the Trinity had been based, and then somewhere in the middle of the 20th century among evangelicals, they got in on the act and the undermining of the doctrine of the Trinity became even more acute.

Now, the reason why it's important is simply this: that the Trinity is about God and God is the foundation of everything. If we're wrong about God, we're wrong about everything. And the battle of the summer of 2016 which continues, is a battle for Christianity as understood over the last 1,600 years. Everything is at stake. Everything is at stake because the Christian confession begins with God in the Trinity of his sacred persons.

When we start to consider God as he is in himself, we think of God's self-originate, self-existent, self-sufficient, self-moving, self-comprehending, self-communicating life. Life in all its beauty, all its glory, all its fullness, all its plenitude, all its happiness, all its perfection. God as he is in himself.

We do not project from where we are, creaturely realities or creaturely presuppositions or creaturely attributes back into the existence of God. The thoughts we have of God must be those which he has revealed. The words we use of God must be the words that have been communicated by him to us. The fear and the love and the praise we offer him must be that which he has commanded and which the church gladly confesses.

Worship of God must begin, first of all, by considering God as he is absolutely before we make the move to think about God as he is relatively, that is, as he is towards all of his works in creation, providence, redemption and perfection. We begin where the letter to the Hebrews begins with God and yet the great announcement of Hebrews 1:1-3 is that this God who has within himself perfect beatitude, perfect joy, plenitude of life that is incomparable and incommunicable and incomprehensible to us, that this God chooses to reveal himself to his creatures and to communicate with his creatures. That is the great announcement of this chapter. God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. God has spoken to us by his Son. And you see, we're now getting to the main point of this opening statement which is that word we see there in verse 2, at the middle of that verse, this word "Son." We're going to look this morning at the person of the Son and the revelation of the Son and the excellence of the Son.

First of all, the person of the Son. You notice in the structure of the verse that "Son" is a function of the word "God." The word "Son" is a function of the word "God." And there is a big contrast that is drawn here between the two ways in which God speaks. God spoke to our fathers, plural, in the past at many times in many ways, by the prophets, plural. But now God has spoken in these last days. He has spoken to us in these last days. This is the end towards which all that work was pointing: the many times, the many ways, the many prophets, the many fathers. God has now spoken in these last days when the fullness of time had come. God spoke to us in one who is Son.

And what we learn about the one who is Son, can I just point out there is no definite article or anything that as it stands in the Greek here, "spoken to us by Son," that is, one who is a Son. This Son, we're told, shares the nature of God, first of all. He shares the nature of God. The prophets were instruments through which he worked, but in this case God is speaking through someone that is more personal, in a way that is more personal. This one who is Son, standing alone, is one-of-a-kind. There is only one instance of divine Sonship. The Son is the terminus, the goal, the completion, the acme, the perfection of revelation. He is the last and final Word. He is the summation of the revelation of God. He is the culmination of the revelation of God.

When we read that God speaks in one who is Son, we are to think God speaks in person because the Son is internal and fundamental to what it means to be God. He shares the nature of God, as we'll see later. If the Father has life in himself, so the Son has life in himself. He is of God. He is from God. He is Son. To use the language: he is the only begotten Son. He is the Son of a Father from eternity without beginning. He is eternally of or from the Father. David, the prophet, was given to hear the voice of God from a distant point in eternity and he hears the voice of God saying, "You are my Son. Today,"

that is, in the eternal today, "I have begotten you." The early church fathers placed that "today" in past eternity. "Today I have begotten you."

So when we read the language of Sonship, we need to understand it's being used here in the normal simple way in which we in our human language talk about a Son. A son is someone who shares the nature of his father. This Son shares the nature of his Father and his Father is God, therefore, he is as God, as God is God. He shares God-ness and he shares it from God. He is of God.

Now, why is that an important thing to say? It's an important thing to say because it is precisely this that is being undermined by many elements. They were in the early church, for example. The great issue facing the early church was those whose impulse was to place Christ slightly below the Father, sometimes a long way below the Father. But subordination or making him subordinate to the Father was the great issue over which the fathers had to fight to get a grasp of what it meant to be Trinity.

And in our day, we are fighting the same battle. There are theologians today who are saying the Son does not have the same glory as the Father's glory; that you cannot pray to the Son, you can only pray to the Father; that the Father has the authority and the Son's role within the Trinity is subordinate to the Father. Now we shall see in a moment that that's like thinking that there are two persons there, two people: one in charge and one who does the business of the other. We are, in fact, when we talk about God as I've been stressing these weeks, talking about one being.

In this room, we can use a theological term for a moment. In this room, there are multiple ousias, individual people. An ousia, an individual. So there is a battle of wills here. If we were going to decide we would go for lunch, there would be 600 people here deciding to go to different places because their wills that go with those ousias, each ousia has a will of its own. I've got five children, they all have wills of their own. I have a wife and she's got a will of her own, as well. Lots of ousias around my place. But God is one ousia. He is one being with one mind, one will, one power, and that's absolutely fundamental.

So when we use the word "Son, of the Son," we're using ordinary language to say simply and only, this is all that's allowed by the Bible, we are only allowed to say he is Son because he shares the nature of the Father, and to share the nature of the Father, he must be God in himself. Now, how he derives this, what begottenness means, I'm afraid we don't know. We can't get our heads around it. It's one of those things where Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the early church fathers, wrote, "The begetting of God must be honored by silence." We just don't know how it happened and if we try to imagine it, said of Athanasius, "Athanasius would die to defend the eternal begottenness of the Son," but he would also kill you if you tried to explain it.

Professor Richard Bauckham of St. Andrews in Cambridge, St. Andrews, of course, being far greater than Cambridge University, writes this, "The divine Son in Hebrews is Son of God from all eternity as well as to all eternity. Sonship is the eternal truth of his very being, not a role or a status given him by God at some point in the future." Now, in a

lot of Bible interpretation nowadays, the idea of Sonship has been cobbled to messianic rather than being directly related to the nature of God. That's a very sad thing. The Son shares the nature of God.

He shares the identity of God. The things you can say about God, you can say about the Son. Is he eternal? God is eternal, the Son is eternal. Is he God? Does he have the fullness of God? Yes, it says in Colossians 1, "All the fullness of God dwells in the Son." Does God create the heavens and rule over the earth? So does the Son, he creates the heavens and rules over the earth. Does God the Father give life and forgive sins? God the Son gives life and forgives sins. Is God the Father alone to be worshiped and glorified? God the Son is to be worshiped and glorified. Is God the Father high and exalted and lifted up? God the Son is high and exalted and lifted up. Is God the Father the Lord? The Son is the Lord. He is given the name above every name, the Lord, that at that name every knee should bow. Does the language of Lord and God and Savior apply to the Father? Yes, it does and it applies to the Lord Jesus as well. The New Testament writers are quite happy to take all of that information and apply it, all of those texts of Scripture, and see them as they apply directly to Jesus in his identity and his nature as the person of the Son.

But what about the revelation of the Son? What is the heart of what he has come to reveal? In these last days, God has spoken to us by one who is Son. What is the particular revelation here? Well, let me give you a little background. In Genesis 1, we find God speaking the universe into existence out of nothing. That's the language of Genesis 1, out of nothing, and we're going to see that that expression, out of nothing, is going to be very important in our future studies in Hebrews because there are two distinct realities we have to come to terms with: there is God and there is that which is not God. God and that which is not God. There was a time when there was only God and then out of nothing, out of nothing at creation, there is that which is not God. It is creaturely. God is Creator, it is creaturely.

So the God who is in himself self-originate, self-sufficient, makes something out of nothing and he does it, we're told in Genesis 1, by his word. By his act of speaking he formed the universe and the universe proclaims his glory. We see in the universe something of his eternal power and Godhead. And not only does he speak the universe into being but he takes time to speak to his creatures. He spoke to our fathers by the prophets. He has spoken to us in these last days by a Son. And what we're to understand is that out of his glorious, blessed fruitfulness and fullness of life and light, God has chosen to reveal himself by his word.

You know, the Bible has this picture, it says about God that he dwells in unapproachable light that no one can come near to. And yet it says in John 1, that with the coming of the Word who became flesh, light has come into the world to enlighten us, to bring light to every one of us, which is why the church confesses about Christ that he is light from light. There has been this movement towards creation from the innermost fullness and magnificence of God's inner life and plenitude. He overflows, as it were, towards us. He brings light through his word. He speaks and listening to his voice, new life the dead

receive. God has overcome that barrier and has spoken to us so that the Psalmist can say in Psalm 36, "O God, you are a fountain of life and in your light we see light."

The Son represents, then, the full, final, perfect revelation of God and he does that because he is God. He is God. That's how John's Gospel begins, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was face-to-face with God and the Word was God and he was in the beginning with God." You see, there are distinctions there. He is distinguished from God yet he is God. He is with God but he is God.

Later on in that chapter, it says this, John 1, "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten God," who is Son, that phrase comes in in some translations in order to capture the Greek behind it, "the only begotten God," who is Son, "who is at the Father's side, he has made him known to us." That's why Jesus can say in John 3 as he interprets this relationship with his Father, he says to the crowd, "He that comes from above," that's himself, "is above all. He who comes from heaven," that's himself, "is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard. For he whom God sends," that's himself, "utters the words of God, for," and he gives the reason, "he has the Spirit of God without measure," that is, without end. He has the Spirit of God in all his God-hood, in all his fullness without measure.

Isaiah 11 talks about the coming servant of the Lord, the Messiah, and he says the Holy Spirit of God will be upon him in immeasurable fullness, in absolute perfection. "And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD." The revelation that comes from Christ is a dependable revelation because as God he brings with him all of the depth of the knowledge of God. As it says in Colossians, "God's mystery which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge." In other words, everything that God knows, Christ knows as God. All the wisdom that God has, Christ has as God. He is able to give us revelation that we can trust. He is able to tell us things we can believe because he has all of the knowledge of God in himself. In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

And so he comes into the world, you see, with this comprehensive knowledge of the whole mind and will of God and as God himself can only comprehend himself. So Christ must be God to comprehend God. That's true of the Holy Spirit as well.

So all the mysteries of the divine will were known to the Son as he takes on our humanity. It's a wonderful picture, actually, as he takes on our humanity. His human nature, of course, in the mother's womb knows nothing. You know, in the Middle Ages there was a period in the Middle Ages, different periods in the Middle Ages but there was one period where religious art would draw the Son, paint the Son, in the womb of his mother Mary looking like a grown man to kind of communicate something of his eternal knowledge and so on. It was intended to communicate that idea. But of course he wasn't. He was a baby. When he was born, he was just a little baby. He learned at the same stages we are. Perhaps as time went on it accelerated. We know that by the time he was 12, we're told in Luke 2 that the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. He

was drawing from the knowledge that he has as the eternal Son of God even in his humanity. By the age of 12, he's able to say to the doctors of theology in Jerusalem as he's debating with them as a 12 year old boy, arguing theology with them. He is able even at that point to know that he is the Son of the Father so that when his parents come to get him and take him home after they've lost him for three days, he tells them, "I was about my Father's business." And it confused them. He has already passed his Ph.D. in Trinitarian theology by that stage.

He grew. Then it goes on to say in summary of that, that Jesus increased in wisdom and stature. His human nature took time to absorb the knowledge of the divine will. It took time for him to grow in his knowledge of God in his human nature but at no time did his divine nature as Son not have absolute access to all the riches of the knowledge of God.

And, you know, he learned something in being human, he learned how slow we are to learn. When you see him with his disciples in the Upper Room on the night he was betrayed and he's saying to them, "You know, I have so much that I want to share with you." Let me read exactly his words. He says to them, "I've still many things to say to you but you can't bear them now, but when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will speak not on his own authority but whatever he hears he will speak. He will declare to you the things to come. He will glorify me." Now listen to this, "He will take what is mine and declare it to you." And he clarifies what is mine. He says to them, "All the Father has is mine. That's why I said he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All the Father has is mine and the Spirit will take what is mine and declare it to you."

He stands, therefore, apart from the prophets in this, that whereas they received revelation from God, here is God revealing himself. In the language of John Owen, "Whereas the Son having all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and truth hid and laid up in him, did at all times, in all places, with equal infallibility and authority, give forth the mind and will of God." When Jesus speaks, God is speaking. The prophets were servants but Jesus is the Son in his own house and he comes to speak to his people.

The Word of God. Not only the Word of God but in the Bible the Word of God is very closely linked to the wisdom of God. In Proverbs 3, the Lord by wisdom founded the earth. In other words, wisdom was involved in the creation of the world. And in Proverbs 8, the fathers hear the voice of the Son speaking about the creation of the world. In that passage in Proverbs 8, wisdom is speaking, "The Lord possessed me. Ages ago, before the beginning of the earth when he established the heavens, I was there. I was beside him like a master workman. And I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world, delighting in the children of men." Here is the voice of wisdom personalized.

Here is the pre-existent Son delighting in creation, acting with the Father in creation so that if you look at the Bible and you take the three persons of the Trinity, you find that the Father is God only wise, the Son is the wisdom of God, and the Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom. You cannot say anything of one that you cannot say of the other except this: one

is the Father and one is the Son and one is the Spirit. In Christ, all the wealth of wisdom and knowledge is concentrated and communicated. He is the self-expression of God, the final revelation of God. The prophets, they said, "Thus saith the Lord." Jesus says, "I say to you." Again and again, "Truly, truly, I say to you."

Well, the third thing we see in this reference to the Son is the excellence of the Son because this word, as we said earlier, denotes having the very nature of God and the people of his own day, the Jews of his own day, understood this very clearly. In John 5:18, they complained. You see, he was calling God his own Father, thus making himself equal with God. They understood what was going on. Listen to Jesus' reply. He doesn't dissuade them, he doesn't deny it, he doesn't avoid the subject. In fact, he pursues the subject. He virtually says to them that he's exactly, you are exactly right. Son of God means God. "Truly, truly, I say to you," he says. Let me read this to you, "the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing," they are perfectly coordinated in all their actions, "for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater things, so that you will marvel. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. Though the Father is the judge, he doesn't judge, he gives all that judgment to the Son." To what end? This is the end, "that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father." Not the Father getting more honor than the Son, that they honor the Son as they honor the Father. "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him."

Now get this: whether it's doing what God does, seeing what God sees, grasping the depths that only God can grasp, giving life as God gives life, judging that God should do, receiving the same honor as God receives in every particular, Jesus says. He is making himself equal with God.

And should you get the wrong notion, he goes on to sum it all up, the end of John 5, "just as the Father has life in Himself," self-originate life, self-sufficient life, "so the Son also to have life in Himself," granted to him by the Father, by his eternal generation. Then in chapter 6 of John, he says, "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except," the Son, "the One who is from God; He has seen the Father." The Son is the one from God. And in chapter 14 of John's Gospel, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father. I am in the Father and the Father is in Me."

Now what does all of that mean? It means this: Jesus once met a Samaritan woman by the well and in talking to this Samaritan woman he taught her some high theology, he taught her this, he said, "God is spirit." God does not have body parts or passions as our confession says. God is spirit. We can't see spirit. We're creatures. We go by what we see and hear. We live in a creaturely level. So what does God have to do? What does he do? In Christ the mission of the Son is to take on our humanity so that in his humanity, creaturely humanity, perfected by the Holy Spirit, now glorified as it is, you and I may see the unseeable. When we see him as he is, we will see the Father in him. We will see the Father in him.

All of this, then, summarizes, then, the excellence of Christ. "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father." This final word of his comprehends the whole revelation, then, that was given through the prophets that culminates in the Son. Now, some of what I've said to you this morning is over your head. Don't worry about that. I'm assuming it's over your head. Maybe it's not. Maybe you understand it all very clearly and you can explain it to me as you leave. But don't worry about it if you don't understand it. Do you understand that Jesus learned from taking our humanity, how slow we are to learn? That's why he was tender with his disciples. That's why he said to them, "You know, I want to tell you this but I know right now you're focused on this sense of bereftness because I'm leaving you and all you see ahead is dark clouds and terrible things. Emotionally you can't cope with this right now. It's okay. Right now you're distracted. Right now you can't get your head around this. That's alright. Take what you can, leave what you must." And I would say that to you this morning.

These things, and we've been discussing these Sunday mornings as we've begun to look at the book of Hebrews, are in fact, some of it is beyond our comprehension anyway. There are moments when we have to be silent. You know, the world's greatest minds that occupy themselves with studying the Trinity are the most humble theologians of all. They regularly tell us in their writing, they tell us, "We get this so far and we have to stop here. We can't go any further than this. We stop, we ponder, we worship, we adore, we put a hand over our mouths and we are silent. We will not speculate beyond this point lest we commit idolatry or blasphemy." The world's most arrogant theologians are the ones who think they can reinvent the Trinity and explain it all, and once God is explicable, he's no longer God.

That's the reality so don't be afraid to say, "I don't understand it." Worship the mystery because let me tell you as we conclude, when we look at Jesus, when we look at the Son, we are seeing what we could not see with our naked eye or grasp with our understanding. We are seeing in the Son God's authority on display. God is the source. God in his fullness is the source of all power and authority, but in his humanity, our Lord Jesus displays what it is to have all authority. He says this, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." That's comprehensive, in heaven and on earth. The Son of Man on earth has authority to give eternal life to those who have been given to him. We see God's authority on display.

We see God's love on display. The Bible says God is love. You could not say that of the kind of monotheistic god of Islam, for example, kind of unitary god. Love always needs an object and the Christian God, the Trinity, there is always an object. The Father has always loved the Son. The Son has always loved the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit from all eternity. God is love and out of the fullness of that love, out of the plenitude of that love, out of the overflowing wonderful nature of that love, God has chosen to share it with us. With us. That's a remarkable thing. The remarkable thing is that though there is only one instance of divine Sonship, by the grace of God you and I can be adopted sons of God and share in the life of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. We see God's love on

display. John Owen again says, "It was out of infinite love, mercy and compassion that God would at all reveal his mind and will to sinners."

Then the third thing is we see God's care on display because through the Son we learn of the great care that the Father has for his church, for his people. It's through the Son that we learn that the Father is the divine Gardener. He cares for the church. He cares about the branches, you and I. He cares about our spiritual growth. He cares about where we are in our lives and the nature of our lives and the burdens. We would never know that about God who is spirit until God was in Christ. God demonstrating his love towards us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for our sins. God, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

That's where we see God in action. We see God in action, God the Father in action, particularly in Christ. God the Father in the care he takes over the time he took to reveal himself to the prophets bit by bit lest they be overwhelmed. God the Father still at work in Christ by the Holy Spirit in our hearts, giving us time and space and mental insight and regenerate intelligence that our minds might slowly be conformed to his mind, and that something of the glory of Christ might become apparent to us.

People sometimes want to know the secret of a long and happy life as a minister and they ask me, for some reason. It's become an appalling thing to me to realize that I've been a minister for 44 years. It will surprise you too, no doubt, I hope. But probably not. What is it that keeps you going in the long haul? I'll tell you what's kept me going: you pay me to do the thing that I most love to do. Very few people in life get that privilege and I'm sensible of that privilege. You need to know that. I get to be in the Bible every day. And do you know, the more I go on in my Christian life, the more glorious. It's hard to find, I don't want to use religious language that's meaningless or becomes meaningless through overuse, but the more riches, the more treasure, the more wonders come breaking out of Scripture all the time. I mean, seriously. I have to get up in my rooms sometimes and just walk around and do this kind of thing and you would think I was a charismatic but I'm not. Why? Because these things, you're not scratching the surface after 44 years, scratching the surface of the depths of the riches of the knowledge of God. And it's those things that build your faith up as you see them making sense, not only of the Bible but of life and history and the world. They make sense. They enlarge your faith. They put concrete down your backbone. I was going to say they put hairs on your chest but they haven't done that for me yet. But anyway, they make you strong in trial.

The knowledge of God. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "What is eternal life? It is to know you, Father, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." And in the end, you see, the business of the Christian life is not simply the little rules that I need for what I'll do tomorrow at work. It is a big expansive view of God. Forty-four years ago when I was ordained, the hymn I chose, one of the hymns I chose had these words,

"I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers;

My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
While life, and thought, and being last,
And immortality endures."

Let's pray.

Father, we pray that you would enlarge our hearts for love of you, our minds for thoughts of you, our mouths with praises of you, and our lives of obedience to you, that you may be our all absorbing pleasure, delight. We praise you. We praise you for your Son in whom we see you most clearly and we pray that our lives would be Christ-focused, God-glorifying, Spirit-endued to the praise of your glory. Amen.