

The Absolutely Unique Son of God
~ Hebrews 1:1-1:4

Pastor Tom
February 7, 2021

Discouragement. Who of us has not felt it as a believer at one time or another? We may experience it because of something that recently happened; a job problem; a health issue; a relationship blow up; a rejection. We may doubt God's goodness because of it. Or we've dealt with some issue for years. It doesn't seem to get better. We wonder if our faith even matters or if God even cares. Or maybe we look back and add up the hard stuff in our lives. We might think if God allowed that to happen to us, do we really want to stick with Him. Commentator George Guthrie puts it like this. "Life, and thus the Christian life, is fraught with trials that suck the emotional winds from our sails. When discouragement comes – the kind of discouragement that screams questions at the faith – we need encouragement and perspective, we need the community of faith; we need help to stay the course of commitment."¹

Good news is, today is the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament offers such help. We don't know who wrote it. But we do know the recipients experienced discouragement in their faith. They were likely Messianic Jews – ethnic Jewish people who believed that

Jesus was their Messiah. They likely resided in Rome, the capital of an empire. It had a population around 1 million. The Jews made up a substantial minority of 40000 to 60000.

Some had accepted the Gospel message about Jesus. Yet it cost them dearly. The organized Jewish community rejected Christianity as a false teaching. Any Jew who received Christ got kicked out of the community. They couldn't go to synagogue to worship. They couldn't buy or trade in the market. They could not even connect with friends and family from their former community. Talk about reasons for discouragement.

Perhaps they gathered in small house churches of 15-20. The hardships of their decision began to hit home. From this letter, it seems some wondered about going back to the Jewish community. Why not enjoy all the benefits of reintegration into their family and culture? Why not go back to deal with their discouragement?

Hebrews addresses this mood. It can also address our discouragement. We're coming up the 1 year anniversary of the initial lockdowns due to COVID-19. We have not been physically together as a church since March 8, 2020. We have made our best effort to stay

¹ George H. Guthrie, The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1998, 18.

together and connected. However, it's been tough to say the least. Maybe you have reached a point of discouragement or apathy concerning your faith. Maybe you have adjusted well to not going to church. You don't really miss it. You may think already decided that this will be your new normal, even when restrictions lift. You might even be unsure about continuing with God.

Before you make that final decision, I invite to come on this journey through Hebrews. I'm excited to share it with you. When I leave for sabbatical in April, the pastors and Elders will continue this journey through this letter. Much treasure awaits mining here. It follows the addictions series nicely. There we learned how deep can get into something like an addiction or sin. We learned that it takes intentional steps, day after day, with God's help to leave such a lifestyle behind.

Knowing Jesus Christ is the most critical piece of the journey to wholeness. We need to know Him more than we ever have. Hebrews is all about Jesus. If we capture the vision of Jesus presented in this letter, it can dispel our discouragement today and in the future. So today we begin this journey. Here's today's big idea. **The absolute uniqueness of God's Son inspires us to keep the faith.** How is God's Son absolutely unique? How might His uniqueness inspire us to keep the faith? That's what we need to answer today. I pray that you

will gain courage and resolve today to keep the faith and keep trusting in the absolutely unique son for whatever you face in life. So please find the letter to the Hebrews. We will look at only at the first four verses today.

Hebrews 1 (ESV)

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.

How is God's Son absolutely unique? He is God's ultimate communication (1:1-2a). He is the highest and most complete communication from God. The letter begins by looking back at God's previous way of communication in verse 1. "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets." When I first read this in preparation for today, two items stood out to me. First, God spoke! He communicated with His people. He did not leave them without word from Him. The second item I noticed was God spoke a lot – "at many times and in many ways." He did this through the prophets. He spoke through male prophets and female prophetesses. He spoke many times. And He spoke in many ways – visions; dreams;

direct conversation, stories, mighty acts, breathtaking appearances and a still small voice.

Yet, there were gaps. Sometimes no prophetic voice spoke for a long time. And their message remained complete. The prophets constantly preached repentance. However, there was no ultimate resolution between humans and God regarding our sin. Yet the prophets looked forward to some sort of deliverer or servant who would bring reconciliation.

We discover him in verse 2. “Yet in these last days he (God) has spoken to us by His Son. Notice the contrasts from verse 1-2. From long ago to these last days; from the forefathers to us; From the prophets (plural) to One Son; from the many ways of communication to one way. God speaks to us through His Son. He not only spoke through His Son’s teaching. He spoke through His everyday life; His ministry; His suffering, death and resurrection.

God spoke through the prophets with helpful and necessary communication. Yet God’s most complete communication came by His Son. If we want to know God, we need to know the Son. He is unique because He alone is the ultimate communication from God.

How else is God’s Son absolutely unique? **He sits in the place of ultimate exaltation. (1:2b-4).** Notice the Son sat down at the end of

verse 3. Sitting down indicated finished work. It also symbolized a right or authority to sit in an honored place. This place, at the right hand of God, is the highest and most exalted seat in the universe apart from God’s own throne. So how did the Son get to sit in this place of ultimate exaltation? What qualified Him to receive the seat of highest exaltation in the entire universe?

The writer lists the Son’s qualification. **1 - God appointed Him heir of all things.** If we think about an heir, we think of someone who will receive money, possessions, property or land at some point in the future, or we think of the heir to a throne. If a nation lives under a monarch, like a king or queen, it has a succession plan for the nation’s throne. When the ruler dies or is unable to fulfill their office, the heir to throne takes over. Usually this is the firstborn child of that monarch. Today, we also think about heirs to the fortunes of their parents. Some heirs of a fortune get treated like royalty just because of their future wealth or because they will one day inherit an entire kingdom.

So what will Jesus inherit. God appointed Him heir of all things. That is the greatest inheritance in all history. This means that Jesus inherits all the kingdoms of the earth. He inherits all the wealth of every nation – it’s money, buildings, highways and cities. He also inherits all the land – the mountains, oceans, deserts, forests and jungles. He

inherits all people which means He will also inherit all the people's property. Everyone becomes a subject under His reign. Believers become willing subjects who will inherit with Him the glories of the kingdom. Non-believers will receive their inheritance of eternal life apart from Christ. The Son will inherit all things.

So there is no world ruler, king, wealthy person or celebrity who comes remotely close to Jesus' inheritance. He owns the entire world; He owns all their land; treasury and priceless artifacts. Notice also God has already appointed the Son heir. He has the status. Yet He will receive this inheritance for all to see at the end of the age. That is just the first qualification.

The next qualification is also in verse 2. "But in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom He (God) created the world." **Through the Son God created the world. (2)** So this means the Son was actively involved in creation. God could have made the universe apart from His Son. But the New Testament takes great pains to show that He did not do so. The Son is the Father's agent in creation. Colossians 1:16 lays this out clearly for us. "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him." God

created the physical world through the Son. God created the spiritual world – the invisible – through the Son. How did this work?

One commentator describes it like this. Imagine there is a Head Contractor overseeing a massive new shopping center project. He has a son. The Head Contractor assigns His Son the responsibility of actually creating the shopping center. The Son must take the blueprints and actually build the shopping center. The Father oversees the constructions. The Son actually makes it happen. In the same way, the Son was the Father's agent in creation. God spoke. The Son constructed. God designed. The Son produced the design. Through the Son, God created the world.

Qualification 3 - **The Son reflects and displays God.** Verse 3 says "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature." So the writer emphasizes the Son's close association with the Father. He is the radiance of the glory of God. If you take a quick glance at the sun in the sky, you will see both the sun and the radiance or brightness that surrounds it. We cannot easily see where the radiance ends and the sun begins. They are related to each other and close to each other. The radiance is like a revelation of the sun that is actually 93 million miles away from the Earth.

The Son of God is the radiance of the glory of God in a similar way. When people saw Jesus on earth, they saw God's radiance. They didn't see God, the Father, but they saw His radiance or brightness. We also see God's radiance in the Son when we behold Jesus in the Bible. Remember 2 Corinthians 3:18 – a theme verse for our church a couple of years ago. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” So when we see Jesus in the Scriptures, we see the radiance of God's glory. God transforms us to share in that same glory.

Then comes that phrase, back in Hebrews - “He is the exact imprint of his nature. “Exact imprint translates a word describing an instrument used that has an engraving like a seal or a stamp. If you put a stamp on an ink pad, you will see a very close representation of the stamp on the paper. The ink on the paper is not the actual engraving but an imprint of the stamp.

Well in the Son, we have the exact imprint of God's nature. When we look at Jesus, we see the Father's character and attributes. Just as you may see some of the biological features of a father and mother in their child, the Son reveals God's nature in Himself. Christians may give a glimpse of God's nature in them. The Son is the exact imprint of His nature.

So, we've seen 3 characteristics of the Son that point to His right to take the seal of ultimate exaltation. God appointed Him heir of all things. God created the world through Him. He reflects and displays God. The absolute uniqueness of the Son can inspire us to keep going in the faith. It can address our discouragement.

So we will quickly run through the rest of the qualifications and then think about how this can inspire us. Number 4. The writer tells us the Son **upholds the universe by His powerful word.** (1:3). In some way, the Son bears up or sustains the universe. But it is not like He is holding planet earth on his shoulders like the images of the greek god Atlas holding up the world. It is like His Word sustains the universe and keeps it going. The word for 'upholding' means to bear up or sustain.” Somehow Jesus Christ is seen at the center of the continuing stability of the universe.

Five - **He made purification for sin.** In our tradition, this might be the one we are most familiar with. Jesus offered Himself and His own blood to purify us from sin. God taught the Israelites that sin – anything we think, say or do in violation to God's moral law – required atonement or payment. We can't just sin in God's world and as God's creatures and get away with it. God taught Israel that atonement for sin came through sacrifice and blood of animals. God would accept

such an offering for the purification of their sins and the reconciliation or relationship between Him and the worshipper.

Now I know that animal lovers find this one really hard to deal with. And it is hard. It doesn't seem right that animals were slaughtered for people's sins. Yet I think God chose to do this to impress upon the terrible cost of sin. It cost the Israelites financially to sacrifice one of their animals. It cost them in the terrible moment of slaughter of those animals. The Israelite with a heart for God realized this. Thankfully, we don't have to do that anymore because Jesus offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice. We will learn from Hebrews that the blood of animals did not completely purify the people's sins. Hebrews 10:4 says "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." But, God could accept these sacrifices from the Israelites before Christ because He could look forward to the ultimate sacrifice that His Son would make. We see this in Romans 3:23-25. You may have heard this one before. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and (those who believe) are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation (or sacrifice of atonement) by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance, he passed over former sins." So that means

God could pass over the sins of Old Testament believers who offered sacrifices of animal blood before Christ, because He could look forward to Jesus' sacrifice. I don't know about you. But this kind of stuff really bolsters my confidence in God. There are no loose ends. God didn't somehow compromise justice before Christ. He had it all worked out in advance.

It's Jesus who made a once for all sacrifice that purified sins of believers past, present and future. Again, that's just one of his qualifications. The last two, we will have more time to look at in the future. So I will just quickly mention them. Six - **He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high** – an absolutely unique act - No one else could sit there or earn qualifications to sit there. *The Majesty on high* is a respectful way of speaking of God. Seven - **He became much superior to the angels in position and name.** We will talk more about this next week. God's son is absolutely unique because He is God's ultimate communication and sits in the place of ultimate exaltation.

How might this inspire us to keep the faith? It reminds us of the great power and authority of the One who walks with us every day. Jesus is not some old idea whose time has passed. He is not some dead hero or weakling whose word means something to old

people like me. He's not like some politicians who promise the world and deliver a kernel of truth. He is the living Son of God. He is God's ultimate communication to us. He inherits all things. He is wealthier than Bill Gates, Elon Musk and Warren Buffet combined. His creative ability is on display through the variety in the animal world. He ensures the universe keeps functioning by His Word.

He sits in the most powerful place in the universe beside God. Vladimir Putin or President Biden have communion cup of power compared to the oceans of power Jesus wields. He has the name above every other name in all of history. He is higher and greater than Plato, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Cleopatra, Muhammed, Napoleon, Darwin, Gandhi, Ironman, the Kardashians, Taylor Swift and Arianna Grande. He is more unique than the Mona Lisa, Blarney Stone and Stonehenge. He is not some washed up historical figure that only exists on the yellowed pages of the family Bible at your grandparents. He is the living Son of God who reigns over the entire universe right now.

This absolutely unique Jesus has not forgotten about you. If you're going through some illness, hardship or time of grief He has not abandoned you. He is not too busy for you. He is not overwhelmed or lacking in power to help you. He is not unsure about what He's doing

or why He asks you to wait. This Jesus is with you, welcoming you and watching you each step of your life's journey. Hebrews 5:2 tells us, "He deals gently with us."

The solution to your troubles today is not to give up your faith in Him but lean harder on Him. He is a rock who will not shatter no matter what pressure your situation brings on Him.

If you don't know Him, if you have never put the trust of your life onto Him, you can do that today. You can stop trying to make sense of this world and your life by the flimsy and confused explanations our world tries to offer. Instead, you can lay all of your life, questions and past onto Him. He will forgive you for your wrongs – not just out of the goodness of His heart by His blood on the cross. His Father will receive you as one of His own. He will immediately adopt you into His family and you will become a co-heir with the absolutely unique Son.

So if you will receive Him and believe on His name, if you will confess your past wrongs, God is faithful and just to forgive you from sins, cleanse you from unrighteousness and start a new life with Him. If you would like to act on that now, you can respond during the prayer. I am about to pray. If you are already a believer, you can respond by praising the unique Son of God, or turning back to Him.

“Lord God, we thank you for speaking to us today by Your Son. Lord Jesus we recognize you as the absolutely unique Lord over the universe. There might be some present here today in this building or watching online who have not believed in this reality about you until this moment. Now they desire to receive you and place the trust of their lives on you. If those are here or watching want to trust Christ today, I invite you to just slip up your hand or raise the hand of your heart to the Lord indicating your desire to put the trust of your life on Christ now. Lord Jesus, you see the hands I don’t and can’t. I pray that will now make your dwelling place in the lives of those calling out to you. Father God, will you adopt them as your kids as our new brothers and sisters. For those of us who already know you, thank you for this jolt to our faith today. Lord Jesus, might your absolute uniqueness inspire us today to keep going, keep trusting and keep living by Your power and strength. To that end, we give you glory for all you have done in us and for us. Amen.”