

January 1, 2017

Hebrews 1: 1-14

“Who is Jesus Really”

Ask any building contractor, he or she will agree that the most important part of a house is its FOUNDATION. I mean if a house doesn't have a good footing—before long you begin to see things like this—and this. Then in a few years, houses look like this—and this—and this.

Well, a good foundation is not just important in homes. It's also VERY important for the church itself—and I'm not referring to the church building but rather to the people who come together to form a local body of believers. You could say everything we are as a church has been built on Jesus. I can't help but think of a couple old hymn lyrics: *“The church's ONE FOUNDATION is Jesus Christ her Lord.”* And, *“My hope is BUILT on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name.”* Sing the chorus with me:

“On Christ the solid Rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand.”

Well, our understanding of Jesus is a foundational root we need to continue to NURTURE if we are to continue to BUILD up this local body. In fact, if we ever STOP embracing a proper understanding of Who Jesus is, One Christian will collapse just like these homes. With that in mind this morning we are beginning a series of sermons on the book of Hebrews entitled, *“I must Tell Jesus.”* This title fits a study of Hebrews because it's entire focus is Jesus. And—this

is a timely subject to deal with because many people in our world do not embrace a proper understanding of Jesus.

- A recent Barna study revealed that nearly half of all Americans don't believe Jesus was God. For younger Americans—the next generation—it's far MORE than half. That saddens me greatly.
- This Barna study also showed that the same percentage of people in our nation don't believe Jesus was sinless.
- And with those two stats in mind it's not surprising that a growing number of Americans believe they don't need Jesus to get to Heaven—they think they can get there on their own based on good works.

My point is that most people DON'T embrace a belief about Jesus that is accurate—Biblical. They don't really understand Who He is. A stark example of this was seen few years back in an interview with *Parade* magazine when Elton John revealed his belief about Jesus by saying, “Jesus was a compassionate, super-intelligent gay man who understood human problems.”

And confusion over Jesus isn't something you only see in the secular world. It's seen in Christians circles as well. I'm thinking of a New Testament professor at Wheaton who told *TIME* magazine recently, “*Jesus was a really, really good guy*” I'm hoping he was quoted out of context—because a NT professor should know better—should know JESUS better—than that.

So—this study of Hebrews is important for many reasons—especially if we are to be able to communicate clearly Who Jesus really is to a culture that has forgotten. As Dr. David Jeremiah puts it: “[*Hebrews*] explains in more detail than any other book in the New Testament—just Who Jesus is, what He accomplished—and therefore why He should be worshipped with reverence and awe.”

Okay—let’s begin our study with a look at the BACKGROUND. Hebrews was written sometime between 70 and 80 A.D. —written to encourage Hebrew Christians in that time period who were in danger of giving up in the face of suffering. Understand, these Christians were 2nd generation believers. More specifically they were JEWS who were won to faith in Jesus by those who had known Jesus during His earthly ministry. These 2nd generation believers had never met Jesus in the flesh—had never seen His miracles—were not present at Pentecost. And, the persecution they were facing for their decision to build their lives on Jesus was tempting them to drift—to slip back into Judaism.

Okay—here’s a few other facts about Hebrews. It has the best Greek in the entire NT and has been called “*the orphan epistle*” because the book doesn’t tell us who the author is. People think either Paul wrote it or Apollos. Some say Barnabas or Silas is the author. Some even say Priscilla wrote it and remained anonymous because it was best to do so in that male dominated culture. But the fact is, as Origen put it, “*Only God knows who wrote Hebrews.*” And Origen’s words point us to an important truth. You see, whereas most New Testament books begin with the author’s name, like Romans 1:1 which says, “***Paul a bondservant of Jesus Christ...***” —the

epistle to the Hebrews begins with **“GOD”** and when you think about it—that is enough because God inspired every word of the Bible. I mean no matter what human vessel He used—God Himself is the Author of every book in the Bible—including this one. So, it’s not really an ORPHAN epistle in that our Heavenly Father authored it.

Okay—take your Bibles and turn to Hebrews chapter 1. Follow along as I read.

1 – In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 – but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, Whom He appointed heir of all things, and through Whom also He made the universe. 3 – The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful Word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven. 4 – So He became as much superior to the angels as the name He has inherited is superior to theirs. 5 – For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father?” Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be My Son?” 6 – And again, when God brings His firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship Him.” 7 – In speaking of the angels He says, “He makes His angels spirits, and His servants flames of fire.” 8 – “But about the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of Your kingdom. 9 – You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has set You above Your companions by anointing You with the oil of joy.” 10 – He also says, “In the beginning, Lord, You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 – They will perish, but

You remain; they will all wear out like a garment. 12 – You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But You remain the same, and Your years will never end.” 13 – To which of the angels did God ever say, “Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?” 14 – Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? Okay—based on this first chapter how can we nurture this foundational root of our church? How can we use it to answer this question: “*Who is Jesus, Really?*”

First, this text reminds us that Jesus is GOD. Look at verse 3: “*The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being.*” I’m reminded of what Paul said in the book of Colossians, “*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.*”

(Colossians 2:9) In other words, Jesus is a man—a human being just like us—only different.

You see, we are human and ONLY human. Jesus is fully human and ALSO fully divine, fully GOD. Now, how is this possible? How can seeing Jesus be the same as seeing God? Because

as the writer of Hebrews says, Jesus is “*the radiance of God’s glory and the EXACT REPRESENTATION of His being.*” The phrase “express image” refers to something “engraved” or “impressed” as, for instance, a coin or a seal that bears line-for-line all the features of the instrument making it. It’s a perfect duplicate—an EXACT representation.

In our text we are reminded that the prophets of old represented God as well—but they only did so in a fragmentary way. You see, each prophet grasped and expressed part of the truth of God.

For example, through Amos, God spoke of justice. Through Isaiah, He spoke of holiness.

Through Hosea, God spoke of forgiving love. Each of these was only a fragment of the totality of God’s character. But with Jesus it was different. What God revealed partially in the

prophets, he expressed fully in Jesus. Jesus was not a fragmentary revelation of God. He was and is the full EXACT revelation of God. These 2nd generation Jewish believers needed to hear this because many of them were embracing the belief that Jesus was an angel—perhaps the greatest of angels but not God. This way of thinking was attractive to them because if they embraced it they would be accepted back into the temple and escape the awful pressure faced by Christians. Making Jesus an angel—perhaps the greatest angel—was tantalizing to these guys because it did not require an outright denial of Christ—but only a different affirmation of Him and His greatness. It was kind of like that prof—in that they were saying Jesus was not God but He was a really, really, good angel! And many Christians today can relate to this because the supremacy of Jesus brings tension in everyday life. The world bristles at “Jesus only.” But one does not have to deny Him outright to get along. Rather we are encouraged to simply affirm that He was the very best of men to every walk this planet—that His ethics were exalted that His life was heroic from beginning to end, kind of like ole Elton believes. We’ll look at the subject of angels more next week but for now suffice it to say that the writer of Hebrews is addressing this issue by saying Jesus was NOT an angel. Jesus was MORE than even the GREATEST of angels. Jesus was and is GOD!

Now look carefully at verse 8. The author is quoting the Father: “*But about the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever.”*” Did you get that? The Father called the Son by His own name. He called him God. That’s Who Jesus REALLY is: He is God in the flesh.

Secondly, according to this first chapter of Hebrews a second way we can answer this question is to say Jesus is CREATOR.

As verse 2 says, through Jesus God, “*made the universe.*” And this Greek word for “*universe*” — “*aionas*” fits with what we now know about our expanding universe. You see, “*Aionas*” refers to both physical things like planets—and time itself. At the risk of causing you a headache, let me attempt a more detailed explanation. Cambridge physicist Stephen Hawking, who has been called “*the most brilliant theoretical physicist since Einstein,*” says that our galaxy is an average-sized spiral galaxy that is over 100,000 light-years across—about six hundred trillion miles. He says, “*We now know that our galaxy is only one of some hundred thousand million that can be seen through modern telescopes—each galaxy itself containing some hundred thousand million stars.*” It is commonly held that the average distance between these hundred thousand million galaxies—(each of which are six hundred trillion miles across and contain one hundred thousand million stars) the distance between them is three million light-years!

On top of Hawking’s input, the work of Edwin Hubble, based on the Doppler effect has shown that these galaxies are moving away from us. So the universe is constantly expanding. Some estimates say that the most distant galaxy is eight billion light-years away—and racing away at two hundred million miles an hour. So what we see when we look up at the stars happened LONG ago. We’re seeing the light they emitted way back in time. Of course this expanding universe demands a beginning. Something—or Someone had to start the expansion.

I mention all of this to emphasize the mind-boggling creative power of Christ. As the Alpha and Omega—the beginning and the end—He created all of EVERYTHING! He created every speck of dust in the hundred thousand million galaxies of the ever-expanding universe. He created every atom—the sub-microscopic solar systems with their whimsically named quarks and leptons and electrons and neutrinos. David Jeremiah sums it up well by saying, *“Jesus creative power is not limited to dimensions of space, but extends to dimensions of TIME. As Lord of all time and space, the Son is responsible for every star, planet, astronomical body, age, era, dispensation, black hole, white hole, and worm hole—the entire glorious space-time continuum—every aspect of Carl Sagan’s and Stephen Hawking’s wildest imaginings combined and then some.”*

By the way Sir John Echols, Nobel laureate in neurophysiology, said that the odds against the right combination of circumstances occurring to have evolved intelligent life on earth—are about 400 thousand trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion to one. Yet millions of people embrace these odds. They believe all this happened by accident. I think these same people think they will get rich playing the lottery!

Michael Egnor, a leading brain surgeon, used to think a scientific worldview was incompatible with any form of religion. Ironically, it was science itself that showed him how mistaken he was. Engor was raised as an agnostic who regarded Christianity as an inspiring set of moral tales—lessons that were spiritually uplifting but not true. Why was he so certain?

Engor explained, *“As a science major in college, I was steeped in Darwinian evolution—which seemed to demonstrate that life could be explained perfectly well by material mechanisms alone. There was no reason to invoke God.”* Egnor’s studies also covered Freud, whose theories persuaded him that *“religion is wish fulfillment.”* He continued, *“Every time I even considered Christianity, I was stopped cold by the thought that it would mean abandoning scientific integrity.”* Over the years, Egnor rose to the top of his field.

He was appointed professor and vice president of neurosurgery at Stony Brook University and became an award-winning brain surgeon—named one of New York’s best doctors by New York Magazine. One of his specialties is the treatment of hydrocephalus (water on the brain)—and while developing a theory of blood flow to the brain, his research took a surprising turn. He realized the cranial system he was studying was like an ingeniously designed gadget. The filter that protects the delicate capillaries from the pulsating force of the heartbeat is a finely tuned mechanism like the vibration dampers widely used in engineering.

“In fact,” Engor said, *“most of what I needed to know was not in biology textbooks but in engineering textbooks.”* Eventually Egnor realized that virtually all biological research operates on the presumption of design. That presumption led him to faith in an Engineer—a Designer—and then to faith in Christ as the Designer in human flesh. So Jesus is GOD. He is Creator.

And then here’s a third thing our text tells us about Jesus. He is SUSTAINER. Verse 3 says that Christ, *“upholds all things by the word of His power.”* In other words, not only did Jesus create all things by His powerful Word. He also upholds all things by that same powerful

Word. Jesus is the eternal Word of God Who has been holding all creation together for all eternity. Jesus upholds all things according to His purposes. And He always will.

Think of just some of the implications of this fact. The sun has a surface temperature of 12,000 degrees F. If it were any closer we would burn up; if it were any further away we would freeze. Our globe is tilted on an exact angle of 23 degrees, providing us with four seasons. If it were not so tilted, vapors from the oceans would move north and south and develop into monstrous continents of ice. If the moon did not retain its exact distance from the earth tides would flood the land completely, twice a day. If the atmosphere did not remain at its present density, but thinned out even a little—many of the meteors which now harmless burn up when they hit the atmosphere would constantly bombard us. If the earth rotated just a little slower than it does the oceans would flood the land masses. How does everything from our world to the galaxy-filled universe stay in this kind of fantastically delicate balance? Well you can choose to believe that it is the result of millions of years of evolution or you can accept that as the Bible says—Jesus sustains and monitors all its movement and inter-workings. Christ, the preeminent Power maintains it all. So—Who is Jesus REALLY? He is God. He is Creator. He is Sustainer and finally...

He is the Redeemer. Look at verse 3 again where it says, *“After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven.”* And WHERE He sat down also tells us about his position of AUTHORITY. He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven. He didn’t take his place at the throne of God in order to be our judge. He sat where He sat in order to speak on our behalf. Jumping forward a few chapters,

the writer of Hebrews says, *“Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.”* (Hebrews 7:25) This means Jesus is speaking to God on your behalf right now. When you fail, when you sin fellow Christian—and we all do—Jesus speaks to the Father for you. He says, *“My death paid the price for this wrong. Forgive him in My name.”* He says that for you as many as times as it is necessary. He always lives to intercede for you.”

In the fall of 2010, billions of people around the globe were captivated by the story of the Chilean miners. Trapped beneath two thousand feet of solid rock, the thirty-three men were desperate. The collapse of a main tunnel had sealed their exit and thrust them into survival mode. They ate two spoonfuls of tuna, a sip of milk, and a morsel of peaches—every other day. For two months down in that darkness they prayed for someone to save them. On the surface above, the Chilean rescue team worked around the clock, consulting NASA, meeting with experts. They designed a thirteen-foot-tall capsule and drilled, first a communication hole, then an excavation tunnel. There was no guarantee of success. No one had ever been trapped underground this long and lived to tell about it. Now 33 someones have. They trusted someone else to save them. No one returned the rescue offer with a declaration of independence: *“I can get out of here on my own. Just give me a new drill.”* No—they had stared at the stone tomb long enough to reach the unanimous opinion: *“We need help. We need someone to penetrate this world and pull us out.”* And when the rescue capsule came, they climbed in

This morning—after looking to Hebrews 1 to understand Who Jesus really is—God, Creator, Sustainer, REDEEMER—why not do the same thing? Why not “climb in?” Why not accept Jesus’ offer of rescue—redemption?

LET US PRAY