

Jesus Is the Center (Heb 1.1-2)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. At the heart of the Christian faith is the reality of *knowing* and *following* Jesus Christ. Because of this, it is essential for us to seek to grow in our understanding of who Jesus is according to what has been revealed about him in the Scriptures.
- B. There are many voices today declaring to promote and follow the true or real Jesus. Many of these voices seek to establish Jesus as an example of compassion and acceptance, or merely a voice of hope or wisdom. However, many visions of Christ today that are offered in our culture fall far short of what has been revealed to be true of him in his word.
- C. Jesus warned that there would be many false teachers and prophets who would come to seek to separate his people from the pure and undefiled truth of his person.

¹¹And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹²And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold... ²³Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. ²⁴For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect (Matt 24.11, 23-24)

- D. Paul was also clear to warn followers of Christ of the potential for deceptive schemes of darkness that would filter into the church designed to separate them from pure and simple devotion to the true Jesus.

³But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. (2 Cor 11.3-5)

- E. Because of this, we must seek to remain steadfast and secure against the schemes of deception and must hold fast to the truth of Christ as it has been revealed in his word and passed down through the ages — specifically as it relates to the *person of Jesus Christ*.

⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor 10.4-5)

³Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3)

- F. We cannot truly hope to follow Jesus if we do not seek to continually grow in the *knowledge of him* in truth.

²¹Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven... ²³I will declare to them, 'I never knew you' (Matt 7.21, 23)

- G. If growing in the knowledge of Jesus is of such importance, we might ask the question: *How do we know Jesus?* If growing in the knowledge of him (who he truly is) is essential to our relationship with him and our obedience to him, how can we be certain that we can know who he truly is?

- H. To situate the answer to this question requires that we seek to understand the truth and the necessity of *revelation* in order to know, follow, and wholly obey Christ.

- I. This brief passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews highlights the reality that Jesus is the definitive and full revelatory word of God. To understand this helps us to see that Jesus at the center of God's revelation, the center of God's redemption, and at the center of the Scripture itself.

II. GOD HAS SPOKEN

- A. The beginning of this passage in Hebrews brings us face to face with an essential truth when seeking to understand God's purposes in general — and seeking to understand the person of Jesus Christ specifically. The author of Hebrews begins the whole of his letter by declaring a foundational and important truth: ***God has spoken.***

¹Long ago... God spoke (Heb 1.1)

- B. To say that God spoke is shorthand for the Scriptural reality that God has made himself known. For God to speak means that he has communicated something of himself to his people throughout the history of redemption.
- C. The Bible teaches that there is no one who can know or see God at any time *apart* from his own sovereign choice to make himself known. This truth is what the Bible refers to as ***revelation.***

²⁷no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Matt 11.27)

- D. Revelation is the truth that God has, according to his own desire and will, chosen to reveal aspects of himself to people in order that they might know him, understand his character (or his attributes), and understand his purposes and will.
- E. Throughout the Scripture there are two broad categories of how God reveals himself:

1. ***General revelation:*** this speaks of how God reveals himself to all people. The Bible is clear that every person has a basic understanding of God's existence and his power (through ***creation***) and understands at some level the nature of moral law (through ***conscience***). The reality of general revelation is sufficient enough for people to *know that God exists* and to *understand basic morality* (and therefore hold them accountable to such knowledge) but is not sufficient enough for *salvation*.

¹The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ²Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. ⁴Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. (Ps 19.1-4)

¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Rom 1.19-20)

¹¹Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. (Eccl 3.11)

¹⁴For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them. (Rom 2.14-15)

2. ***Specific/salvific revelation:*** this speaks of how God reveals himself through redemption in order to bring people into communion with himself. The avenues for specific revelation ultimately center on Jesus Christ — but include the Scripture, the covenants, etc.

- F. The author of Hebrews here goes on to declare not only that God does speak but ***how he has spoken*** throughout history. He proclaims that God has spoken in various times and in various ways through the mouths of the prophets *so that* God's people could know him and understand his desires.

¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets (Heb 1.1)

- G. The author of Hebrews here outlines the nature of God's redemptive purposes as he led his people throughout the Old Covenant. He declares that God would stir prophets to speak his *true* and *faithful words* in order that his people might truly know him and might truly know his will.
- H. The result of this form of speaking is contained in the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the compilation of the ***utterances of God*** to his people throughout redemptive history. It is important for us to believe certain realities about the Scripture in order that we might receive them as God's word to us, spoken in many times and in many ways.

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Tim 3.16)

²¹For no prophecy was every produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet 1.21)

1. The Scriptures are ***inspired***: this simply means that the words of the Bible are the words of God himself. In other words, the Scriptures contain the words of God as he breathed them out to individuals as they wrote them. This is what the Scripture claims for itself.
 2. The Scriptures are ***authoritative***: closely related to this is the concept of believing that the Scriptures are the authoritative word of God. If the Scriptures are breathed out from God himself, and are truly his word, then to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.
 3. The Scriptures are ***without error***: simply stated, this means that the Bible *always tells the truth* and that it is *always wholly true* concerning all that it speaks about.
- I. If the Scripture teaches this about itself, then if we are to receive its teachings, we must submit to ***it as God's word to us***. In order for us to rightly know Jesus as he truly is, we must be willing to submit ourselves in faith to the authority of his own word to us.
 - J. We must not seek to conform the word of God to our own preconceived ideas and desires. Rather, we must come as those who are truly submitted to what he has revealed to be true in order that we would rightly know him, more fully understand his will, and live in communion with him.

III. IN THESE LAST DAYS

- A. The author of Hebrews is not simply giving us a portrait of what God has done throughout redemptive history in the Old Covenant. He is bringing us to a point where we can see the reality that God has spoken in a definitive and a unique way in ***his Son Jesus***.

²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Heb 1.2)

- B. At the center of God's revelation, his redemptive purpose, and the Scriptures themselves is Jesus Christ. He is the glorious point of all of God's dealings with humanity from the beginning of creation into all eternity.
- C. Jesus is at the center of God's ***revelation***.

1. Jesus fully and wholly *reveals* what God is like.

³He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature (Heb 1.3)

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God... ¹⁹for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Col 1.15, 19)

2. To see Jesus is to *see God*.

¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (John 1.18)

⁹Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? (John 14.9-10)

D. Jesus is at the center of God's *redemption*.

1. Jesus is the only way to experience the salvation of God

⁵³Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you (John 6.53)

⁶¹I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14.6)

¹²And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4.12)

2. All of created order will be brought together in Christ Jesus

⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph 1.9-10)

E. Jesus is at the center of God's *word* (Scriptures)

1. Jesus fulfills the promises God has made through the Scriptures

²⁵And [Jesus] said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24.25-27)

2. Jesus was the one the prophets spoke of and longed to see

¹⁰Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ¹²It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. (1 Pet 1.10)

IV. BEHOLDING JESUS WITH THE EYES OF FAITH

- A. In the Old Testament, Moses prayed to see (experience) God's glory on Mount Sinai. God answered Moses not by demonstrating more of his power or majesty, but by coming to him and declaring his name (character). God's name was expressed to Moses as a portrait of God's character and emotions — particularly highlighting how he *feels* toward his people as it is expressed in how he *acts*.

¹⁸Moses said, "Please show me your glory." ¹⁹And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'the Lord.' ... ^{34.6}The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty. (Exod 33.18-19; 34.6-7)

- B. What we see from this encounter is that God's glory is *his nature made manifest*. We are to see and experience the glory of God in this life *primarily* by experiencing and understanding the demonstrations of God's character in his leadership of his people.
- C. Jesus alludes to this encounter in his high priestly prayer — demonstrating that in his life (through the incarnation) he fully and perfectly *declared God's name* (i.e., he is the perfect revelation of the Father). Jesus also prayed that his followers would continue to experience the glory of God as God continued to declare his name through a spirit of revelation.

²⁶I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17.26)

- D. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul outlines the relationship between Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai to the reality of every believer in Christ because of the new covenant. He declares that the reality of *each and every believer* is far more glorious than Moses experienced because we now all partake of *beholding the glory of God* in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? ⁹For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. ¹⁰Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. ¹¹For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory... ¹⁴but their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And 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. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor 3.7-18)

- E. Paul declares that we have now, because of the gift of the Spirit, received the ability to see the truth of God's word *without a veil covering our hearts*. This means that the true and full revelation of God's intended purposes has been made known in Christ Jesus. In light of his life, death, and resurrection, we now have eyes to see what God has always designed for his people.

- F. Although we are called behold this, we must rightly understand that we do so as through a "dim mirror". This means that we all experience a lack of zeal, vigor, and focus when seeking to meditate on the glorious realities of God's glory. Yet, we must continue to pursue this in a spirit of faith.

¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Cor 13.12)

- G. The children of Israel saw many demonstrations of God's raw power yet did not respond to his word in a spirit of faith.

¹For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. (1 Cor 10.1-5)

- H. One of the primary ways we behold God is by *meditating* on his character, his attributes, and his works as they have been revealed in his word. Biblical meditation is the practice of rehearsing, "chewing on", or praying through aspects of how God has revealed himself in his presence. We do this by praying his word back to him with a spirit of thanksgiving, asking him for more revelation of his word, and setting our hearts to follow him in a spirit of obedience.

- I. We should set our hearts to do this whether we *feel* something or not. Often, we believe that to rehearse, even longingly, a truth when we do not feel it is manipulative or inauthentic. However, the Scripture is filled with places where we are shown pictures of agreeing our way into changed experience.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you (Ps 42.5-6)

¹⁵Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you..." ¹⁸be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²¹giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 5.14-21)