

Jesus: Our Total Revelation

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Date: 03 January 2016

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[0 : 00] Why don't we just take 10 seconds, just turn to your neighbour and just wish them a happy new year. What was the favourite thing, this week we could ask them, what was the favourite thing on their Christmas plate at lunchtime, Christmas Day? Go for it.

Okay, well as Ian has mentioned already, it's the new year. And 2016, the first Sunday in the new year, sees us start a new series this morning in the book of Hebrews.

This is going to be fantastic, it's going to take us up to about mid-spring. And I'm really excited having spent the week in this book, and I know John is as well. So why don't we turn in our Bibles to the book of Hebrews towards the end of your New Testaments.

And let's pray as we come to still ourselves before God's holy word this morning. Father, we thank you that as we stand at the threshold of a new year, that although so much around about us changes, Father, that you remain unchanging.

And Lord, we ask that as we come now to look at your unchanging words, Father, that you would speak to us by your Spirit, that you would strengthen our faith, that you would inflame our hearts, and you would lift our eyes to see the beauty and the splendour of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we ask and pray these things.

[1 : 22] Amen. So I want us to begin this morning by trying to think of a time in your life recently when you were tempted to turn back from something, because what was ahead of you was far too difficult for you.

I wonder, I had this experience last week walking down Lothian Roads, down towards Toll Cross, towards town. Then, Storm Frank was on the go. I think in Scotland we should have named him Storm Fergus.

We'll just chuck that one out there. But Storm Frank was on the go, and I'm heading towards town, getting absolutely drenched, howling winds going against it, and I can see a black storm coming at me in the distance.

What do you do on those kind of occasions when everything inside of you wants to turn back because you can see difficulty coming in the future? Well, you see, that question about turning back, that question takes us right to the heart of this letter to the Hebrews.

This is a letter written to a Christian church, probably most likely made up of Jewish Christians, who are seriously tempted to turn back from following Jesus.

[2 : 33] You see, in their lives, Jesus used to be a massive deal. It was a joy to follow him. It was a joy to suffer on account of his name. They used to accept public ridicule from their friends.

They used to stand with their brothers and sisters who were being put in jail because of their faith in Jesus. They even accepted the plundering of their property. And this was all worth it.

Now, why was it all worth it? It was worth it because Jesus was their ultimate treasure. In church every Sunday, this was the playlist. Take the world, but give me Jesus.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way. I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. Where? Down in my heart. But now, the song that they're singing is, I'm not so sure I've decided to follow Jesus.

I'm not so sure I've decided to follow Jesus. I might turn back. I might turn back. Now, you might ask, why are they tempted to turn back? Well, it's probably the same reason that a lot of us, at times in our Christian walk, are tempted to turn back.

[3 : 44] Because do we not know that it's hard to follow and to walk with Jesus? Do we not know that in our lives? It's the easy thing to do, not to keep our heads below the parapet.

This is what these guys are facing. Keep their heads below the parapet. Leave this Jesus stuff behind or simply dilute it. Don't talk about them as much. Blend in with the rest of society.

Join in with the socially acceptable religious practices of the day. Which I guess in this case, it's the Jewish synagogues and their rituals. Because to do that is going to cause less social friction.

It's going to present less awkward moments. And it's going to lead to less heated and tricky situations and conversations. That's why you keep your head below the parapet. Tempted to turn back?

You bet these guys are. That's what's going on in the lives of the people that this letter is written to. And I guess the thing for us to appreciate as 21st century readers is that this, this morning, isn't a systematic theology.

[4 : 51] And it's not a religious blog post that's just kind of posted out there for random people to read on the off chance. This is more like a heartfelt plea from a pastor separated from his congregation who's absolutely devastated.

He's heartbroken because he's heard reports that this flock, his flock, that he loves. They don't think Jesus is a big deal anymore. And they are beginning to become fascinated with other things.

Other things that were never designed to take the center stage. And as a result, Jesus has drifted more and more and more towards the periphery. And incidentally, I think that's all this angels stuff in the background here.

That's what that's doing. So my question to you this morning, you're the pastor of this church. Just let this Hebrew church.

What do you say to those who are at the exit door? What do you say? Do you say, actually, guys, I'd prefer if you stayed because we've got bills to pay, there's heating to run, and if you go, then we're going to struggle to pay this.

[6 : 00] Don't go because I actually quite like you guys and I don't really want you to go. Why don't we just stay and have a big group hug and a big huddle? It'll be fine. What do you say to people that are at the exit door? People that are going to chuck in their faith in Jesus Christ.

Here's the answer. This is what this guy does. He dazzles them with the all-surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ. He displays for them in glorious technicolor the magnificence of Jesus Christ, who he is, and what he's done.

And if you grasp that, if you see that, then Jesus cannot remain at the periphery. He simply cannot remain at the periphery. He's got to be right at the core. Now, it's that time of year, isn't it, when we make New Year's resolutions?

I wonder if you made any. Maybe I made one to try and get fit this year. We'll see if that happens. But I wonder if you've made any spiritual resolutions.

I wonder if you've thought about your faith and what you'd love 2016 to be for you. Well, if there's one thing that I've been thinking about this week, one thing that I'm praying for for my own life, first and foremost, for the life of my family, for the life of my church family, it's this.

[7 : 13] It's that 2016 would be a year if we could do one thing, it's that we would become so fascinated with Jesus Christ, that his spirit living and working in us, transforming us daily more and more into his likeness, that would continue.

And it would see great fruit grow in this place, that we would taste and see something more of the glory of Jesus Christ day on day, and it would spill out from here into our offices, into our sports teams, into our universities, into our neighborhoods, and many would come to know him.

Because you might be here this morning and actually you're thinking, I'm not that tempted to turn back, Graham. I'm not. I'm not tempted to turn back. Well, let me ask you this this morning. This is what I was asking myself this week.

You might not be turning back, but friends, are you pressing in? Are you pressing in to know more of Jesus Christ day on day? That's why I'm so excited about studying this letter together, because that's what this is all about.

Why should this church stick with Jesus, Mr. Hebrews? Well, because Jesus is better. He's better. That's the big idea of this letter. You'll see the first hint of it in verse 4, if you've got your Bibles there, of chapter 1.

[8 : 30] He mentions the word superior twice. You see, this word better, it crops up 25 times in this letter, which is incidentally more than any other New Testament letter.

Jesus is better. Not better in the sense of, my dad's bigger and stronger than your dad. Not better in a sense of, hearts are better than hebs.

That one's for you, Martin. Not better in a sense of, he provides a slightly better alternative. But better is in the sense of, all these religious rituals that you're contemplating going back to, are nothing but Peter pointers that God designed to point and illuminate the glory of his son, Jesus Christ.

And it's his work, his mission, his glory. It's all about him. He's the fulfillment of all that you're tempted to go back to. So why are you going back? Jesus is everything.

That's what he means by better. All the way through this letter, you'll see him do it time and time again. Jesus is better in this way. Jesus is better in this way.

[9 : 36] Jesus is better in this way. We can't help but get his point. And I guess chapter one, we really only have time to do a brief oversketch of it this morning. It's so deep and dense, but he outlines three of the big ideas that he's going to unpack in the rest of the 12 chapters of this letter.

Why is Jesus better? Well, he gives him three reasons why Jesus is better. First reason why Jesus is better is because he's the ultimate revealer.

Now, I'm from the west coast of Scotland. Originally, don't hold that against me. But I had, she's passed away now, gone to be with the Lord, but I had a typical west coast of Scotland auntie.

She's a kind of grand, if I had to describe her, she's a bit like Isa from Still Game. If anyone knows, watch a Still Game. She was Isa from Still Game. She loves the woolly cardigan, loved the tunnock's tea cake.

That's the kind of grand aunt I had. But I only ever saw her once a year, really, and it was at Christmas time. And without fail, every single Christmas time, she would come to hug me, and then she would stand back, and she would say in the broadest Scottish accent, Och hier, you're looking so like you're Alan.

[10 : 47] Yeah, I know a lot of you didn't get that, did you? Let me translate that into English. What she was saying is that she thought I looked so like my dad. Now, in my pride, I refuted passionately those allegations, but actually she had a point.

So my dad, we look very different, but we've both got this kind of skin under the chin and pin back ears thing going on. I do kind of look like my dad. But do we not know that to be true on a human genetic level?

That there's something in the Son, there's something of the Father in the Son. Do we not know that to be true? If that's true on a human genetic level, then Mr. Hebrews is saying here that it's 100% true on a divine level.

Look what he's saying at verses 1 and 2. In the past, God spoke to us, spoke to our ancestors rather, through the prophets at many times and in various ways.

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.

[11 : 55] The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful words.

Now, if you've got an ESV translation in front of you, you'll see that the ESV uses the word imprint instead of representation. And the words there is the terminology of coin stamps.

What he's saying is that Jesus is the exact imprint of God the Father. Jesus is the exact representation of God the Father. He's the ultimate revelation of God the Father.

We see Jesus, see Jesus, you see God. Jesus is, as Ian used that word earlier, he is God incarnate. Now, that's one of these terms that I think we can find confusing.

But the way I was taught, I think John taught me this to think about it, is think of chili con carne. It's the meal that probably I ate about 90% of the time at university.

[12 : 55] When we used to want to impress people, what we did was we put chili con carne in a giant Yorkshire pudding. Chili con carne means chili with meat.

Incarnate means God with flesh. Jesus is God with flesh. The blinding brightness and brilliance of God's glory, which in the Old Testament was veiled to human beings, that same glory is now on show for everyone to see in the person of Jesus Christ.

See Jesus, see God. You might be here this morning and you're thinking to yourself, how do I really know what God is like? How do I know what he's like?

That's a great question to ask. This Christian God, is the description of him that you have here, is it really just your best guess at what he's like? Isn't God just anything that I want him to be?

Well, here's the thing. This passage is telling us that God's not playing hard to get. God's not playing a game of divine hide and seek. God didn't wait for us to somehow figure him out.

[14 : 03] God made the first move. He revealed himself to us. He's a relational God. He's a speaking God. He's a God who has made himself known. And he spoke to their ancestors by the prophets in the Old Testament.

But now he is speaking. He has spoken and is speaking in a fuller, final and better way in the person of his son, Jesus. The one through whom the cosmos was created.

And the one who is sustaining it to this very second. Jesus came down to us. He walked and he talked with us. We looked at God.

What more revelation do you need? You see, God isn't some kind of divine Mr. Potato Head that we can dress up according to our tastes and our preferences. He's not some kind of divine whiteboard where we can just insert the adjectives of our liking on the screen and rub out the ones that we don't like.

God has nothing more to say about himself than what we've seen and what we see in the person of his son. You want to know what God the Father is like? Look at Jesus.

[15 : 14] Get to know him as you encounter him in the Bible, in the Gospels. Don't just take my word for it. This is what Jesus said about himself. If you've seen me, you've seen the Father. So do you see what Mr. Hebrews is saying to his readers?

Is that in Jesus Christ, we have a better revelation. See Jesus, read about him, hear him speak, hear God speak. That's what happens.

And so in that sense, do you see how Jesus is the ultimate prophet who speaks God's word to us? In Jesus, we have a better revelation. Second reason he's better is because he's the ultimate reconciler.

You know, Alex and I, my wife, we were down in our wedding in Bath the summer before last, and a good friend of mine called Toby was getting married. And I always loved weddings, and I think the best bit about a wedding I love is listening to the best man's speech.

Has anyone ever done a best man's speech in here? Because you find out things about people, don't you, in a best man's speech that you would never find out otherwise? Well, here's what I found out about my friend Toby. He waited an awful long time before he told his bride-to-be that he loved her.

[16 : 30] I mean, we're not talking months, we're talking years. And the fact that her name was Grace, I think, is very fitting. But the first time, I asked him about this, why did you wait so long?

But he said this, the first time that I wanted Grace to hear me tell her that I loved her, I wanted the very next words out of my mouth to be what?

What do you think? Help me out here, brother, go on. Will you marry me? Even I thought that was cute. Now, I asked him why he waited so long, and the reason he waited so long is that he wanted those words, when they came out of his mouth, to mean something.

When he said, I love you for the first time, he wanted it not to be based on butterfly feelings, but he wanted to be able to follow through his words with a commitment. Now, before we go crowning him the new Mr. Darcy, let me burst his bubble.

That wasn't an original thought of his. You see, I opened the wedding order of service, and inside, in amongst the pretty pink ribbon and glittery red hearts, was printed this.

[17 : 39] This is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

This Jesus, God in the beginning, God in the flesh, he didn't come down just to talk niceties. This wasn't some kind of charity gig that God was putting on to let us know that he was still there.

God backed up his words of love with action. Jesus came on a mission, and his mission was to bring us back, to make us right, to reconcile us to God the Father.

And how is he going to do that? Well, God eternal became God on a cross. The life giver allowed his life to be taken from him. The one truly innocent was treated as he was the one truly guilty.

And why? Well, Mr. Hebrews says, to make purification for sins. Now, remember Mr. Hebrews, he's writing to Jewish Christians, people who know their sins and their failures, people who know the holiness of God, and people who understand that their sin and the holiness of God do not match up, that their sin has put them at odds with God, and they know what God requires of them in order that they stay in a right relationship with him.

[18 : 59] Because we might not get that purification word straight off the bat, but these readers, they instantly get it. Purification, it's a priestly word. Purification, it's a priestly word. The priest would be the one who would represent the people before God.

The priest was the one who would stand in the gap and who would intercede for the people before God. Now, how does a priest make purification? Well, God requires that he makes a sacrifice.

The blood of a perfect, unblemished, spotless lamb to make amends for his sin and to make amends for the sins of the people so they can be made right with God once again.

Now, imagine just for a second, okay, that you're an Old Testament priest and your full-time job is to go to the temple every day to perform that sacrificial role.

And you come home at the end of every day tired, hungry, clothed, stinking, and covered in blood. And as you sit down in your armchair at the end of the day, the thought comes to you, oh, goodness, I've got to do that all again tomorrow.

[20 : 06] And the next day, and the day after that, and the day after that, and then you think of the people that they've got to bring their sacrifices to you for you to do your priestly stuff every day.

What do you think you're thinking? Are you not thinking, is there a day when this is ever going to end? Will there ever come a day when I can stop doing this stuff?

Will there ever come a day when I can offer just one, one sacrifice to God, and that will be it. Done. Paid for. I think that's what I'd be thinking. But you see, God didn't need the blood of animals.

That was to get the people thinking rightly that real sins require a real sacrifice. That we do need someone to stand in the gap and to mediate permanently and perfectly between us and God.

Because the lambs were always a pointer, a visual aid, if you like, that was preparing the people for the real McCoy when it came along. Or should I say when he came along. Because what do we have?

[21 : 09] John chapter 1, John the Baptist points to Jesus as he sees him coming, and he proclaims, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus gave his life, shed his blood, to pay the price of our sin so that we, the guilty, could go free. He is the ultimate reconciler.

He is the ultimate perfect and permanent priest. And I was reading this week that there were no seats in the temple. And why? Well, because if you're a priest, you're interceding work.

It is never over. It's never over. Well, did you notice, as you look at the passage, what does Mr. Hebrews tell us where Jesus is sitting? He's sat down.

He's sat down. Now, why is he sitting down? Because his work is finished. It's done. Do you see what he's trying to get them to understand? That in Jesus, they've got something far greater, far better.

[22 : 11] Something that works and is superior in every single way. So don't go back to the old religious system where you have to offer imperfect sacrifices all the time.

Don't go back to shadow land. But trust in the one who those sacrifices were always pointing to. Trust in the once and for all complete sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

See, we're saying that Jesus is the better reconciler. And so in that sense, he's the ultimate priest. Third reason why Jesus is better is because he's the ultimate ruler.

See verses four and five. What does he write? So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

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.

[23 : 11] You see, one of the biggest conundrums in the Old Testament as you read it through, the conundrum is where is God's king going to come from? Where is this perfect king who will lead God's people into God's presence?

In fact, I can make a pretty good case that that is a big strapline for the Old Testament history. Where is this king coming from? Is this the promised king? No, he's not the promised king. Is this guy the promised king?

No, he's not the promised king. Where is this long-awaited king? Where is he coming from? We'll see at verse 5. Mr. Hebrews, he quotes from two passages.

Firstly, he quotes from Psalm 2. What does that psalm tell us? Well, that psalm tells us that God will set his king in place and that king will be untouchable.

He will rule and reign as God's chosen king. He will triumph over his enemies. He will reign in righteousness for God's people. And he will be to God as a son.

[24 : 13] And as well as Psalm 2, really quickly, there's a quotation there from 2 Samuel 7. Now there, David is Israel's king and the tabernacle has come to rest in Jerusalem.

So we have God's king, God's presence in God's city. And David, you can imagine, he's ecstatic at this. He exclaims, God, I want to build a house for you. I want to build a house for you.

What does God say in return? He says, no, David. You're not going to build a house for me. I'm going to build a house for you. Not a physical house, but a dynasty, a kingdom.

And one will arise after you, a son, a king, who will take this kingdom and the kingdom will last forever. And he will be a permanent king, ruling and leading God's people.

And he will sit eternally on the throne. And so do you see that as Mr. Hebrews, as he brings those two quotations together, what is he saying? He's saying that Jesus is that promised king.

[25 : 12] You're not still awaiting him. He's here. And this king, he didn't stay dead. He conquered death. And he sits victoriously. Where does he sit? He sits at God's right hand.

It's the Old Testament image of power, of superiority, of ultimate achievement. That's where Jesus is now. He's at the right hand of God the Father. And the name he has inherited, the rank, the status, the fame, the title, it's what we were singing earlier, isn't it?

Jesus, the name above all names. That name is superior to every name. And what does God say of this king? Well, as we close, look at verse eight.

But about the sun, he says, your throne, O God, will last forever and ever. A scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.

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. See what I'm saying?

[26 : 21] Jesus is the better ruler. And in that sense, he's the ultimate king. He's the ultimate prophet. He's the ultimate priest. He's the ultimate king. He's better in every way.

I was telling you at the start, I was walking down Lothian Road last week with Storm Frank in front of me. Do you know what kept me going? In amongst my drenched quotes, was the fact that I had a voucher for a free coffee in my pocket?

And I proceeded to walk into Starbucks and order the most expensive thing on the menu. And four pound ten later, I was sitting there drinking my coffee. But I valued the thing in my pocket.

That's what kept me going. Now, it's a stupid example, isn't it? But how much more should we keep going because of the all superior value of Jesus Christ? It's the lesson to this generation.

It's the lesson and the appeal to our generation. Do you see what he's saying? That Jesus is better. In Jesus Christ, you possess something. You have someone infinitely more valuable, more glorious, far better than any would-be pretender.

[27 : 29] So understand that Jesus is better. Become captivated by him. Put him back at the center of your lives. And whatever you do, whatever you do, don't turn back.

Let's pray as we finish. Father God, we thank you that Jesus is truly better.

And Lord, it's our prayer that you would help us grasp something more of his greatness and his glory this week. Would you help us by your spirit to have him at the forefront of our minds, that he would not remain in the periphery, but he would come and he would dictate everything.

Our words, our actions, our thoughts would reflect something of how much we love and value him. And so, Father, this is our prayer in his name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.