

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

And In Jesus Christ His Only Son

January 31st 2021

Hebrews 1:1-4

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Hebrews 1.

In this series, we are slowly working through the Apostle's Creed. Scholar Ben Meyers describes the Creed this way:

It is a summary of Christian teaching as well as a solemn pledge of allegiance.¹

That is a very helpful definition. As you recite the Apostle's Creed, you are both declaring WHAT you believe and WHO you belong to. The Creed describes the center of the center of the Christian faith and, as we proclaim it, we join our voices with faithful brothers and sisters in Christ right through the ages! Over the last two weeks, our voices joined as one as we declared:

I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth

¹Ben Myers, *The Apostle's Creed - A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 5.

In doing so, we have drawn a firm line between ourselves and the majority of the culture around us. Most of our neighbours think belief in a divine creator is absolute nonsense. Others believe that *perhaps* there *might* be a God, but that there's no way that we could ever know Him.

But we believe that there IS a God and that we CAN know Him. He is not distant and disinterested. He is present and engaged! Ours is not the God who wound up the clock and then left it to tick away by itself. Ours is the God who is attentively and compassionately and powerfully governing the world He created.

Today, our declaration goes even further. Today, we declare:

I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth **and in Jesus Christ His only Son**

Here you have made a radical divergence from the faith of Judaism. Here you have made a radical divergence from the faith of Islam. The earliest Christians understood that what you believe about Jesus is literally the difference between eternal life and eternal death. As Ben Myers says so well:

At the center of the Christian faith is not an idea or a theory or even a vision of life but the name of a person, Jesus Christ.²

Nearly 70% of the Apostle's Creed is devoted to clarifying our doctrine of Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is to believe that 2,000 years ago, a man named Jesus was born of a virgin. He was not just any man. He was and is the Godman – the eternal Son of God – the second Person of the blessed Trinity. Jesus was born, and lived, and died, and rose, and ascended and then took his seat at the right hand of the Father.

Every link in that chain is of critical importance. Over the next few weeks, we are going to be considering each and every one of those details, but today, we will spend our time meditating on the glorious truth that Jesus Christ is God's only Son.

² Ben Myers, *The Apostle's Creed - A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 37.

Before we jump into that, I want to give a brief warning: In describing Jesus as “Son”, God is speaking to us in a language that we can understand, but throughout the history of the church, men and women have taken this language too far.

Part of the reason why people’s theology can often get squirrely here is because we are always facing the temptation to think about God in human terms. We might think to ourselves, “Was Jesus ALWAYS God’s Son? If Jesus is God’s Son, then doesn’t that mean that he must have been BORN at some point.” But that is to take this language too far. Jesus did not BECOME the Son at some point in history. Jesus has ALWAYS BEEN the Son, and that is who he will forever be.

You might say, “This is ridiculous! Who would say those ridiculous things?” Well, apparently there were some bad teachers in the early church who became confused about this doctrine. In fact, in the later creeds, a line was added to bring further clarity. For example, the Nicene Creed which was written a little over 100 years after the Apostle’s Creed adds the phrase:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,³

BEFORE ALL AGES! For all eternity, God has existed in three persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son has ALWAYS been the Son. This isn’t just an idea that was invented at the council of Nicaea. This is the clear and consistent testimony of Scripture. We see this, for example, in John 1. John tells us that Jesus – the Son – was with the Father in the beginning. He writes:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² He was in the beginning with God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of **the only Son from the Father**, full of grace and truth.
(John 1:1-2, 14 ESV)

He has always been the Son! He was the Son at the very beginning. So, tuck that away in your mind. When we declare that we believe in the Son, we are declaring that we believe in the ETERNAL Son – the Son who has always been and will forever be.

³ Taken from: <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/nicene-creed> Accessed Jan. 26, 2021

This morning we are going to slow down and meditate on this doctrine. I want you to know that Jesus is God's Son, but more than that, I want you to DELIGHT in the fact that Jesus is God's Son. I want you to see clearly and to feel deeply just how important and beautiful this doctrine is. So, this morning, we are going to ask one question of our text. Our question is this:

What Does It Mean That Jesus Is God's Son?

To help answer that question, look with me now in your Bibles to Hebrews 1:1-4. I want to read a passage that makes a big deal out of the fact that Jesus is God's Son – not prophet, not friend, not messenger – SON. So, what does that mean? Let's read the passage and then have that discussion. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

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. (Hebrews 1:1-4 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Most commentators believe that the Book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were living in Rome. It seems as if these Christians were being tempted to return to Judaism.

This letter, then, was written to remind these believers that Jesus is better than everything that they left behind. They didn't need to go back to the temple because Jesus is the better temple! They didn't need to go back to the old priesthood because Jesus is the better priest! They didn't need to return to the sacrificial system because Jesus is the better sacrifice!

“Why would you ever go back?! Jesus is better!!” That is the message of the Book of Hebrews.

And here, in chapter 1, the author explains that Jesus' identity as the Son of God is one of the primary reasons why he is so much better than anything that his readers have left behind. So, let's jump in, and consider why Jesus' Sonship is such great news! First, because Jesus is God's Son:

1. He is of the same essence as the Father

If you remember back to our Christmas series “God Is”, we spent one morning unpacking the glorious truth that our God is Triune. Our God exists in three persons and one essence. As we discovered, there is no analogy that can properly illustrate this doctrine. That tends to frustrate new Christians because we love neat and tidy answers to all of our questions, but we worship a God that surpasses our understanding. Micheal Reeves is helpful here. He notes:

Enter the word *mystery*, a word so soothing it lets us feel that our absolute cluelessness about how God can be both one and three is actually how things are supposed to be.⁴

When you think about the Trinity, do you feel like you are out of your depth? GOOD! You are! God is God! You are not. You are a creature. We tend to stomp our feet and throw a fit when we encounter mysteries that are beyond our comprehension. We need to stop doing that. I think Millard Erickson hits the nail on the head in his systematic theology. He writes:

In the final analysis, the Trinity is incomprehensible. We cannot fully understand its mystery... One cannot explain a mystery, but only acknowledge its presence.⁵

Once again, as we consider how Jesus could be of the same essence as the Father while also being distinct in his person, we find ourselves staring at a divine mystery. Our job now isn't to solve the mystery, but simply to see it and delight in it. Verse 3 is helpful to that end. Describing Jesus, the author writes:

He is the radiance of the glory of God and **the exact imprint of his nature** (Hebrews 1:3a ESV)

The word for “nature” here is the Greek word “hypostasis” and it is an enormously important theological word. It's translated here as “nature,” but you could also translate it as “essence.” Jesus is the EXACT IMPRINT of the ESSENCE of the FATHER. As commentator Leon Morris puts it:

⁴ Micheal Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 11.

⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2013), 310,312.

The Son is such a revelation of the Father that when we see Jesus, we see what God's real being is.⁶

This, by the way, is exactly what Jesus said. In John 14, Jesus said to his disciples:

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9b ESV)

“Do you want to see the Father?” Jesus asked. “Then look at me! If you've seen me, then you have seen Him!”

To say that Jesus is God's only Son is to say that He is not simply one more prophet in the long line of prophets. He is not simply one more priest in the long line of priests. He is not simply one more king in the long line of kings. No – He is GOD. He is the only Son – the exact imprint of the nature of God – of the same essence as the Father. That is incredible news, and that leads to our second point. Because Jesus is God's Son:

2. He speaks with divine authority

Look again at verses 1 and 2:

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,** (Hebrews 1:1-2a ESV)

Because Jesus is the Son of God, his teaching is qualitatively different from anything else that we have ever heard. His words carry a very different weight.

The prophets delivered messages from God. But Jesus IS God. Every time Jesus opened his mouth, God spoke. Going back to the main theme of the Book of Hebrews, the author is saying here that Jesus is the BETTER REVELATION! As one commentator puts it:

He is implying that the finest of the prophets cannot stand comparison with a Son as a means of revelation.⁷

⁶ Leon Morris, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Hebrews - Revelation)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 12, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 14.

⁷ Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews (TNTC)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 67.

Those who heard him speak in his earthly ministry were struck by this divine authority. In Mark 1, for example, we read:

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.²² And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. (Mark 1:21-22 ESV)

In a sense, the scribes were like today's preachers. When I stand up to speak, my only claim to authority is this Book that I am holding. In as far as my words are taken from God's Word, they have unction and authority. But when I step away from the text and share my thoughts on any given issue, that divine authority disappears. As it should! I'm not God! I'm just a messenger. I'm a waiter delivering the food to the table. So were the scribes. So were the pharisees.

But not Jesus. Jesus was the only one who had the authority to say:

²¹ "You have heard that it was said... But **I say** to you... (Matthew 5:21a,22a ESV)

Jesus can do that. Jesus can give the authoritative interpretation of the Scriptures, because He is the author of the Scriptures. Jesus can pronounce that prophecies and sacrificial systems and covenants are fulfilled in him because He is the author of those institutions.

Jesus speaks with divine authority. By the way, if you believe this, it's part of the reason why your neighbours think you're crazy! They can't even begin to fathom why you would allow the words of a man from 2,000 years ago to speak into your sexuality and your finances and your family life. And, if Jesus were just a man, they would be right to think that we're insane. But he is more than a man. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, therefore, he speaks with DIVINE authority. And, therefore, I listen. Third, because Jesus is the Son of God:

3. He radiates the glory of the Father

When we talk about Jesus, this is one aspect that we don't talk about enough. When we consider Jesus' earthly ministry, our mind immediately goes to the cross. Jesus came to make atonement for our sins. And of course, that's true! But let's also remember that he came to do so much more! For example, in John 17, Jesus prayed:

I 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 ESV)

Jesus came to make the Father known. Did you know that? Do you ever reflect on that? When you read the Gospels, do you every stop to reflect on what Jesus’ words and actions reveal about our great God? When Jesus says here that he came to make the Father’s “name” known, he means more than we might perceive at first glance. Commentator Leon Morris notes:

In antiquity, “the name” meant much more than it does today. We use a name as little more than a distinguishing mark or label to differentiate one person from other people. But in the world of the NT the name concisely sums up all that a person is.⁸

Jesus, in his life and ministry, came to reveal the character and the qualities and the sum of the Father to the world. Because we don’t yet see the Father as we should.

We don’t understand God’s mercy, but we saw a glimpse of it when Jesus walked into leper colonies and touched the untouchables. We don’t understand God’s patience, but we saw a glimpse of it when Jesus repeatedly bore with the hard-headedness of his people. We don’t understand God’s grace, but we saw a glimpse of it when Jesus saved the woman caught in adultery and then told her to go and sin no more. We don’t understand God’s holiness, but we saw a glimpse of it when Jesus willingly bore the weight of our sin on the cross.

The glory of God SHINES in and through Jesus. Look at verse 3 of our text this morning:

He is **the radiance of the glory of God** and the exact imprint of his nature (Hebrews 1:3a ESV)

That word “radiance” is a word that ought to direct our memory back to familiar stories in the Old Testament of how God’s glory was made manifest. For example, do you remember what happened when Solomon dedicated the temple?

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Hebrews - Revelation)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 12, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 14.

As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and **the glory of the Lord filled the temple.** ² And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. ³ When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the **glory of the Lord on the temple,** they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever." (2 Chronicles 7:1-3 ESV)

When God's presence was made manifest, the glory radiated from the temple in such a profound way that the people all fell down on their faces in worship. That's the image we are supposed to have in our mind when we read these words. When we look at Jesus, the glory of God RADIATES out of him and we should fall on our faces in praise and adoration. O that God would give us tender hearts to delight in Jesus like we did at first! As the Apostle Paul said:

He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15 ESV)

When we were in India two years ago, we spent our last morning visiting the Taj Mahal. I was pretty excited about this stop because I had heard lots of great things. It is, after all, one of the seven wonders of the world. I read about the white marble that makes the building shine in the sun. I heard about the millions of precious stones that were meticulously cut to create elaborate decorations. I saw photographs in magazines. It all seemed very impressive.

But then I saw it in person... What a difference! All of the articles and photos were a good primer – they whet my appetite – but they were no substitute for the real thing!

The Prophets told the people about God. There were dreams and visions and accurate descriptions of His character. There was a priesthood and a temple and a sacrificial system that was instituted as an object lesson to display his holiness and his mercy. All of it was good. All of it was GRACE!

But it paled in comparison to the real thing! When Jesus came, he wasn't one more prophet teaching us truths about God. Jesus was and is God in the flesh! He is the eternal Son of God and, in him we see the RADIANCE of the glory of God!

Finally, and there is so much more that we could say here, our text reminds us that because Jesus is God's Son:

4. He is the heir of all things

Look again with me at verse 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. (Hebrews 1:2 ESV)

Jesus holds a unique claim to the blessing of His Father. He is the rightful heir. He is the beloved Son. When Jesus was baptized, the Father spoke from Heaven and said:

“This is my Son, **whom I love**; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17b NIV)

To say that Jesus is the Son of God is to say that he is eternally loved by the Father and that he is the only one who has a rightful claim on the Father's blessing.

Let's do some Biblical theology this morning. Think for a moment about all of those stories in the Old Testament that featured a father blessing his first-born son. Have you ever stopped to think that one of the reasons why God wrote those stories into your Bible was to prepare you to understand the gospel? We learn clearly in the Old Testament that the firstborn son is the rightful heir.

But then, think about the story of Jacob and Esau. If you are using the RMM reading plan, then you would have read that story this week. Esau was the oldest son, and he should have been the rightful heir, but when the two boys were born, God said:

“Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the older shall serve the younger.” (Genesis 25:23 ESV)

In the story of Jacob and Esau, God introduces a plot twist. The older son – the son who SHOULD have been the heir by birth order – did not receive the blessing. Yet the younger son who had no

rightful claim to the blessing was the one who received it. Here we learn that God, in His mercy, sometimes chooses to share the inheritance with people who by nature have no rightful claim to it.

This same theme develops into the New Testament where the Gentiles are grafted into the church. People are confused and angry! The Gentiles aren't the descendants of Abraham! The covenant that God made with Abraham should only apply to Abraham and his children! And yet, God brings us Gentiles – us foreigners – into the family to enjoy all of the blessings that were promised to Abraham.

Think about that for a moment: As you follow this theme through Scripture, you learn two things. First, you learn that the firstborn son is the rightful heir. Second, you learn that God is a God who sometimes chooses to share the inheritance with those who have no rightful claim to it.

Now look at Jesus.

Jesus is the only true Son of God. Jesus is the only rightful heir. Jesus has a rightful claim to the blessings of the Father. Jesus has a rightful claim to the love of the Father. All of that is rightfully His because He is the Son.

We can't make that claim. The Bible says that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. In fact, rather than being God's children, the Apostle Paul tells us that we were:

by nature **children of wrath**, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:3b ESV)

We had no claim to the inheritance! But thankfully, our God has consistently shown Himself to be the God who shares the inheritance with those who have no rightful claim to it. That's what He did with Jacob, and it's what He did for the Gentiles, and it's what He does for everyone who places their trust in His Son. The Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 4:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, **so that we might receive adoption as sons.**⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"⁷ **So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.** (Galatians 4:4-7 ESV)

Why does it matter that Jesus is the Son of God? Because only the Son of God had claim to the inheritance. The Son is the rightful heir, and in an act of UNIMAGINABLE kindness, God sent forth his only Son to redeem us and ingraft us into His family so that we could become children and heirs! In Romans 8, Paul says:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but **you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons**, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ **and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ** (Romans 8:14-17a ESV)

Christian, you are a child of God! And because you are a child of God, you now have a claim to the inheritance! You will rule with Christ in the new heavens and the new earth. You are going to be restored to a reality that will be even BETTER than Eden. You will exercise dominion over God’s creation. In that place, you will never grow tired and there will be no tears and there will be no darkness. It will be perfect, eternal, bliss!

But the real substance of our inheritance is not the STUFF, or even the TITLE. The real substance of our inheritance is the relationship. Look again at verse 17 of Romans 8:

and if children, then heirs—**heirs of God** and fellow heirs with Christ, (Romans 8:17a ESV)

Heirs of God! The real inheritance is God Himself. We used to be God’s enemies. We were rebels and sinners and fools! But, through Christ, we have been made children. Look back at Galatians 4 and at Romans 8. In both passages, Paul celebrates the fact that because Christ has made us children and fellow heirs, we can cry out: “ABBA! FATHER!”

The true glory of your inheritance, Christian, is that you can now come before the throne of grace as a beloved child. You have the ear of your Father in heaven. The Holy Spirit is in you and the Holy Spirit is crying out on your behalf, “This man is Your son! This woman is your daughter! This one is an heir!”

And that SCANDALOUS adoption – that GLORIOUS grace – was only made possible because of the Son, Jesus Christ. If Jesus were not the Son of God, we would have no hope of ever rising above the rank of slaves and enemies. But He IS the Son! And through him, by faith, we have become children and heirs. So, I want to invite you to stand up with me and proclaim once again with faith and understanding:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;
and in Jesus Christ His only Son

Amen. Let's pray together.