

# Hebrews 1:2-3

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[0:00] I invite you to take your copy of God's Word and turn to Hebrews chapter 1. Our text for this morning will be Hebrews chapter 1, verses 2 and 3.

! To an unknown and obscure group of Hellenistic Jewish Christians, most likely, probably living on the edge of Rome, having been dispersed from Rome, but still living in an urban environment. Likely a small group of people having been pressed out of the synagogues, huddled together in a house. This group of Christians had suffered, and they would suffer.

We don't know the exact nature of their suffering, but we know it was because of the name of Christ. And we get a bit of a taste of it in Hebrews chapter 10, verses 32 and 33.

The writer of Hebrews says, But recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings. Sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

[1:41] We read later in Hebrews chapter 12 that none of them had suffered yet to the point of shedding blood. But the writer of Hebrews seems to be implying there that that day was coming.

And so the writer of Hebrews very pastorally sends to them a letter that is sermonically in format. He states a thesis, and he spends the letter defending it.

And he uses the Scripture to do so. The reason we think that he's a Hellenistic Jew, Greek-speaking Jew, and that these Christians are Hellenistic, Greek-speaking Jews, is that he cites only from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

And he uses it in spades. The book of Hebrews is full of the Old Testament texts. And one of the reasons that we're studying the book of Hebrews is because the Old Testament, the Bible in total, but the Old Testament particularly, is under quite a bit of attack in our day.

And so we want to talk about both the discontinuity and the continuity between the Old Testament and the New. This is an eloquent letter.

[3:08] William Lane, the respected New Testament scholar, stated the language of Hebrews constitutes the finest Greek in the New Testament. And the thesis that the author defends is the supremacy and finality of Jesus Christ.

He states that thesis in the first four verses. Last week, we looked at the first verse of chapter one and just a bit of the second verse and saw that the writer of Hebrews employs his eloquence to speak of the eloquence of God in the past.

Verse one says, Long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. Many different ways he spoke by the prophets.

The prophets then in turn relayed the message of God in many ways. And this is recorded in the Old Testament text. The eloquence of the writer of Hebrews also spoke.

We saw last week to the eloquence of God in the present, he says at the beginning of verse two. But in these last days, he has spoken. Praise God. In these last days. And most think that he's referring to the age of the church.

[4:27] And third, we saw the eloquence of God in the person of Christ. In these last days, he has spoken to us by or in his son.

We have a God who speaks in order to make himself known. Praise God. He is not a silent God. He is a speaking God that we might know him. He wants to be known. And he can be known as he has spoken to us by his son.

So imagine with me, if you will, once again, if you were here last week for the first time, if not. A small, exhausted, suffering church.

Having been enlightened, having been converted to faith in Jesus Christ, and have found no earthly pleasure from doing so. Nothing was going well for them by the standard of the world.

[5:43] And they've gathered together. They've heard this author has sent a letter to them. And they've gathered together to hear its reading and to be encouraged by it.

Some of you may find this exercise of imagination difficult. Because you've not suffered for your faith.

You've not pursued Christ in a way that makes you pleasant to those who are pursuing him and unpleasant to those who are not.

Your life looks like the life of the world. No one has any need of rejecting you because you look just like them.

Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3.12. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

[6:41] If it is difficult for you to imagine this, and you are in Christ, if you are resolute to follow him, you will suffer.

There will come a day, a very soon day, that you will suffer for proclaiming the name of Jesus.

Some of you, I think many of you, have no difficulty whatsoever imagining being this people, beat down and tired.

Because you've been faithfully pursuing this Christ. You've been sharing him with others. And people have not liked you for it. You have felt the pressing back of the world as you try to press the light into it.

But be encouraged this morning by what the writer of Hebrews, God by his pen, would say to you. To encourage you to be perseverers to the end.

So I'll read our text, Hebrews chapter 1, verse 2 and 3. Before I do, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us.

[7:56] It was written for his glory and our good. And we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey his commands. 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.

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. And there it is.

The supremacy and finality of Jesus Christ. This is, in large, the thesis of this entire book.

The writer will go on to defend it. He is more excellent than anything that you think is excellent.

Place Christ above that thing because he is supreme and he is final.

[9:13] Kent Hughes, who's a contemporary pastor and wrote a really wonderful commentary on the book of Hebrews, said this, Christ is held up like a great jewel to the sunlight of God's revelation.

And as the light courses through it, seven facets flash with gleaming brilliance. Christ's supremacy and finality is refracted for us to consider.

So think about this, right? The writer of Hebrews is saying Christ is better. He is greater. He is above all things. And he is the final word for how it is we are to know God.

And this text takes that reality and refracts it, splits it into seven things for us to consider together this morning. So let's give these seven refractions some titles to help us in our study.

I'm going to read them to you quickly. And then, of course, I'll go through them each one by one with some expedience this morning. Christ is number one, inheritor.

[10:29] Number two, creator. Number three, sustainer. Number four, radiator. Number five, representer.

Number six, purifier. And number seven, ruler. I know you'd stayed with me until representer. Number five, representer. Number six, purifier. Number seven, ruler. Number one, Christ is inheritor.

In these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. In the middle there, verse two says, whom he, being God, appointed the heir of all things.

It follows that because Jesus is the son of God, then he is also the heir of God. He will receive the inheritance of God. The writer of Hebrews identifies for us Jesus Christ as the anointed and son of Psalm 2, when he cites Psalm 2, 7 in verse 5 of chapter 1.

[11:49] Here's if you look down just a little bit. He's citing here from the Septuagint. Psalm 2, 7. You are my son. Today, I have begotten you.

Going on in Psalm 2, the psalmist writes in verse 8, Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

So let me read that to you together. Hebrews 1, 5, which is Psalm 2, 7, and into verse 8. You are my son. Today, I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, or inheritance, and the ends of the earth your possession.

So Psalm 2 teaches us that the inheritance of Jesus Christ is the earth and its peoples. But Colossians chapter 1 and verse 6 takes us a bit further, doesn't it?

Oh, verse 16, excuse me. That all things, so the cosmos themselves were created for him. That's not an accident that the children are learning Colossians 1, 15 through 20 right now.

[13:05] But not only that, beloved, if you are in Christ Jesus, then you, specifically you, are his inheritance.

Through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on the cross, he has purchased you, and he treasures you as his inheritance. In Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 18, Paul tells the Ephesian believers that he always prays that they may know what are the riches of his, Christ's, glorious inheritance in the saints.

Paul prays that the Ephesian believers would understand that they are Christ's inheritance, that he treasures them as such.

What an astounding truth. If you are in Christ, then you are treasured by him as in his inheritance. But not only are we Christ's inheritance, we are also his co-heirs. In Romans chapter 8 and verse 17, Paul calls us heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

[14:24] So if Christ is the heir of all things, if he's the heir of God, all things belong to him. But as followers of Christ, we are found in Christ.

And so we are also heirs. Amazing. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 21 and following, For all things are yours.

Whether Paul or Apollos, Cephas or the world, or life or death, or the present, or the future, all are yours and you are Christ and Christ is God's.

He makes the case in the opposite direction. Because Christ is God's, then all things are Christ's, and therefore all things are ours. Christ is the inheritor.

Secondly, Christ is the creator. It makes sense that he inherits all things that he made. The end of verse 2, through whom also he created the world.

[15:35] God creating the world through Christ. Not only does Christ inherit all things, but he also created them. The Greek word here, translated world, is *ionas*.

Probably not pronouncing it correctly. More literally, ages. Ages. More literally, ages. This is a wonderful word because it includes all things.

Not only space, but also time. It's a very elastic word. It means more than just those things that we can see, but everything outside of that as well.

Well, Brooke Foss Westcott, who's a 19th century British theologian, defines this Greek word as the sum of the periods of time, including all that is manifested in and through them, an order which exists through time developed in successive stages.

He just says in a lot of words, the space-time continuum is what he is saying. This is what this word means. Through Christ, God created the space-time continuum and all that is contained within it.

[16:55] Astounding. An incredible reality. People have been guessing for ages at how it is that the universe came into existence.

And they are guesses at best. All theories of knowledge have at their base some foundation. And for most, they are guesses.

But for followers of Jesus Christ, we know exactly what that foundation is. It's Jesus himself. He created all things.

Our universe is astounding. I hope the little thing I did with the kids was even a bit helpful to you.

Let's just talk in larger terms. Our solar system is part of a galaxy called the Milky Way.

Our galaxy is an average-sized spiral galaxy over 100,000 light-years across. It contains thousands of millions of solar systems.

[18:01] These numbers are staggering, right? It's about 100,000 light-years across, which is 600 trillion miles. This is a crazy thing.

This is just our galaxy. We can see with modern telescopes about 100,000 million galaxies. 100,000 million galaxies.

This is just what we can see in the universe with modern telescopes. Each galaxy contains 100,000 million stars.

The average distance between these galaxies is 3 million light-years. It's an astounding reality of how big the universe is.

And theoretic physicists say that it's expanding as well. This is included in this idea of ages. It's ever-expanding. What? The universe is absolutely astounding.

[19:09] And it was created by Christ, and it was created for Christ. If you have never seen images from the Hubble Space Telescope, I encourage you to go Google that this afternoon.

The astounding beauty of the world in which we live. And it is screaming, right? Praise Jesus, the maker of all these things.

The New Testament has quite a bit in it, right? Saying this very reality. John 1, verse 3. All things were made through Him, Christ, and without Him was not anything made.

That was made. 1 Corinthians 8, 6. Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and for whom we exist. And one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we exist.

Colossians 1, 16 in its totality. 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.

[20:20] And Romans 11, verse 36. For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever.

Amen. The cosmos were created that we might praise Christ. Everything that has been made was made for Him.

We, those of us who are in Christ, are a new creation. We have been made new. Created and then recreated new for the praise of Christ.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5, 17. For if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come.

So Christ is creator. Third, Christ is sustainer. Again, verse 3.

[21:27] And He upholds the universe. Upholds the universe by the word of His power. Jesus Christ created all things and He sustains all things.

I love that the author of Hebrews uses the word upholds. Not like Atlas upholding a static globe of stone. But He does it with His words.

And it's not just the earth, it's the universe. This great expanse that we have just considered. He upholds all of this. He sustains all of it by the word of His power.

He actively sustains by the word of His power. This means that Jesus says to the world, move like this.

Behave like that. Rain here, snow there, and the world obeys. This means that nothing will cease to do exactly as it is told until Jesus says to do otherwise.

[22:36] He says orbit, and it orbits until He says stop. It continues to go just the way He commands it to go.

Now, I want to go off point just for a sec. Well, it's on point, but just to make your head hurt a little bit. Many of you know that I really love Jonathan Edwards.

Most will say he's the greatest theological mind that America has ever produced. He was rather brilliant, and he believed in a doctrine called continuous creation. And I'm just going to tell you a little bit about it and let your mind trip a little bit, and then we're going to get back to what we're

talking about.

But essentially it's this, that Jesus is continually speaking the world into existence.

So even now, the fact that I exist is being sustained by the fact that Jesus is causing me to exist in successive moments. He wrote this.

[23:38] It is plain, this won't be plain to you, it's not to me. He says, this is Edwards for you, it is plain, nothing can exert itself or operate when and where it is not existing because what is past entirely ceases when present existence begins.

It does no more coexist with it than it does any other moment that it ceased 20 years ago. They don't coexist, right? And essentially what he's saying is the past does not have the power to sustain that which is in the present or in the future.

My present self doesn't have the ability to sustain my future self. He also said, God's upholding created substance or causing his existence in each successive moment is altogether equivalent to an immediate production out of nothing.

He's speaking us into existence now out of nothing is what Edwards is postulating. At each moment because its existence at this moment is not merely in part from God but wholly from him and not in any part or degree from its antecedent existence.

So exactly what he's saying is if Jesus were to stop speaking we would also cease to exist. That's hard to wrap your mind around.

[25:01] Edwards apparently had. That doesn't necessarily make it true but isn't it incredible to think about the very nature by which Jesus sustains the world by the word of his power.

Whether or not this continuing creation thing is a reality doesn't minimize the fact that Jesus is upholding what is happening now is happening because of Jesus' mighty word.

It's because of his sustaining work that we have our life and our being. If Jesus Christ has the power to sustain the world which he does then he also has the power to sustain our faith.

Having made us new creations he has the power to continue in us this new creation. This is why Paul was able to say with such confidence to the Philippian believers in chapter 1 verse 6 of Philippians I am sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ.

Nothing escapes him everything is upheld by the word of his power including our faith. What a confidence we have in our pursuit of him.

[26:36] Fourth Christ is radiator. Christ is radiator. He is the radiance of the glory of God.

And he is the radiance of the glory of God. Radiance here in the English Standard Version is a better translation than the oft-used reflection.

Some of you may have a Bible translation that says reflection and that doesn't make it a bad translation necessarily but in this case the word radiance is a better word for what's trying to be communicated here because the moon reflects the light of the sun the sun radiates that light. Jesus does not merely reflect God's glory. He is part and parcel of God's glory. This is speaking to Jesus' very being.

He is the radiance of the glory of God. We are created as creation to reflect God's glory.

[27:55] But Christ as creator is part and parcel of God's glory. John chapter 1 verse 18 no one has ever seen God the only God referring to Jesus who is at the Father's side.

He has made him known. Right? Radiated him out to us. Jesus is God.

I'm always looking with the children for the specific answer of Jesus and when I say God I go yeah. Right? Yes. Because Jesus is God. The Nicene Creed 325 AD this is on your bulletin this little excerpt from it says we believe in one Lord Jesus Christ the only Son of God begotten from the Father before all ages God from God light from light true God from true God begotten not made of the same essence as the Father this is what they're communicating right?

This is an expansion of this idea of Jesus being the radiance of the glory of God right? He is God himself so when we see Jesus we see God Colossians chapter 1 beginning of verse 15 Jesus is the image of the invisible God so Christ is radiator Christ is also fifthly representer the middle there verse 3 says and the exact imprint of his nature and this phrase balances out the previous phrase

Christ as radiator and representer Jesus is God's radiance speaks to his oneness with the father Jesus is God Jesus as God's representer or imprint speaks to his distinctness as the son so the author of

Hebrews gives us a taste an inkling of the mystery that is the trinitarian nature of God it is a confusing thing to think about God as one but three in one it is a thing that we cannot in our finite knighthness fully understand every analogy I have ever heard is woefully lacking to this come and tell me your analogies later and if you have one I will appreciate it likely I will say nope and here's why the apple doesn't work states of water doesn't work he is always existing in one but he is also always existing as three in one but beloved this should move us toward odd speculation some kind of criticism of it but wow who is this God a God who's one but is three in one this is a mystery that I hope that you with me look forward to having unraveled for us in glory fully comprehending the trinitarian nature of God what an incredible thing to understand right so

[31:24] Christ is God but he is also distinct from God the father as God the son he is an imprint and this refers as phrase to the image on a coin made by a die a stamp right the image stamped onto a coin once again when we see Jesus we see God we know how God thinks we know how God speaks we know how God feels we know how he relates!

to mankind God has spoken to us by his son in these last days Christ is representer six Christ is purifier Christ is purifier after making purification for sins our text says Christ made purification for sins Jesus Christ is the supreme priest mediator between God and man he was the agent of the purification for our sins and he was the sacrifice necessary for that purification he offered up himself he is the supreme priest and the final priest priest the author of

Hebrews will go on to expand on both of those realities quite extensively we'll get to spend a lot of time thinking about this together in the coming months but let me read to you from Hebrews chapter 10 beginning in verse 11 and following the author says and every priest stands daily at his service offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins they're insufficient for that task and so verse 11 says the priest is constantly doing this work right this work that isn't sufficient to take away to be a finished work it's not sufficient for that so it has to go on and on and on and in verse 12 the author says but when christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins he sat down at the right hand of god waiting from that time until his enemy should be made a footstool for his feet for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified his sacrifice was a complete and final sacrifice for god's people for all time this is an astounding reality right what the author of hebrews is trying to explain to his original audience and to us is all that's encapsulated in jesus's final word recorded in john chapter 19 it is finished the sacrificial work that was necessary to atone for our sins to purify us that we might be in relationship with god is finished when christ died on the cross right he paid the full penalty he was the sufficient sacrifice romans 6 10 paul says for the death he died he died to sin once for all a fully sufficient sacrifice to accomplish exactly that which it's intended to accomplish right the salvation of god's church for the death he died to sin once for all and then paul in all his inspired brilliance says but the life he lives right he didn't stay dead but the life he lives he lives to god right toward god for the glory of god as he's now ascended and seated at his right hand so christ is purifier this speaks to us and it should speak loudly to us about our need of him if we're ever to be found right with god you've ever felt the weight of your sin carried the guilt of it as you should because you are guilty of your sin it should cause us to cry out for the perfect once for all work of christ this should if we are the new creation cause us to love god's sustaining grace to us in christ if we've yet to receive this mercy it should cause us to flee to christ the perfect sacrifice christ is purifier and lastly christ is ruler christ is ruler having been sacrificed once for all raised on the third day he ascended and he sat down our text says he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high jesus christ does not have to work as the levitical priests work as i

said they never sat they were continually making sacrifice for the sins of israel and all of the careful instruction for the tabernacle and then the temple there were never seats there's no need for seats if you were working in the temple you were making sacrifice when you cocked out you went home but when you were there you were constantly making sacrifice the writer of hebrews words are absolutely astonishing here don't let this be lost on you 21st century american christians his original listeners would have taken such courage from this phrase he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high this is massively significant they would have remembered at the opening of this

letter that jesus is sacrificial work is finished all that it guarantees will happen because it's finished all the promises of god find their yes in christ it is finished this is massively significant paul wrote in romans chapter 3 verse 21 and 22 but now the righteousness of god has been manifested apart from the law although the law and the prophets bear witness to it there's the continuity of the old testament and the reason we should still use it the righteousness of god through faith in jesus christ for all who believe finished work and now we believe in this finished work and we're granted the righteousness of christ it is of great significance that jesus is at the right hand of the majesty on high the right hand was the place of highest honor and power paul writes in ephesians 4 10 right as a as a parenthetical he who descended being christ is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things right bring to pass everything that his death and resurrection guaranteed would come to pass that he would finish the work of the church and bring heaven down to earth in jesus's session sitting at the right hand paul tells us something that he is doing specifically for those who believe in him so if you've yet to be encouraged i hope you'll find this of great encouragement to you i know that these listeners of this letter would have taken great courage from it they would have pressed on they would have persevered to the end as they heard just these opening comments from the author of this letter paul tells us romans chapter 8 verse 31 and following just after a grand explanation of god's elective purposes what then shall we say to these things if god is for us who can be against us he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things who can bring any charge against god's elect it is god who justifies who is to condemn christ jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised who is at the right hand of god so here's this language again right seated at the right hand

of god and then paul says who indeed is interceding for us beloved he is praying for us he is speaking on our behalf to god this is astounding astounding truth as he is the ruler and bringing all things to pass he's doing so by the power of spirit in his people and he is praying for us so christ is inheritor creator sustainer radiator representor purifier and ruler i hope you're seeing the supremacy and the finality of jesus christ right this is the theme right this is the ark that's going to rest over the top of this entire letter we're going to continue to develop it out further in the coming month in closing let me repeat to you my hope for our study of the book of hebrews number one that we would greater appreciate both the continuity and the discontinuity of the old and new covenants and therefore the old and new testaments that our scripture right the canon all 66 books of it will become more precious to us as we study this book of the bible together that it would be greater concreted in our hearts right that this is god's inspired inerrant authoritative sufficient word to us and second that we would greater love the risen christ that we would so love the risen christ that we would worship him with greater fervor in the face of opposition that we would be a people who persevere to the end for the glory of god let's pray together