

Guest Preacher - Rev. Hugh Ferrier

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Preacher: Rev. Hugh Ferrier

[0 : 00] Well, friends, would you turn back with me, please, to the words we read together in the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 1. Hebrews chapter 1. Let's again read verses 1 to 4.

Long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. 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, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Whenever Rangers play at Ibrox, their players will come onto the pitch to the sounds of a Tina Turner song, Simply the Best.

It's a rousing anthem designed to get the players and the fans in the mood for the big match. It was a song that used to be sung with great glee, with great gusto by the Rangers fans in the 1990s, early 2000s, when their team was winning games on a regular basis, and not just games but also trophies.

[1 : 20] But in recent years, Rangers have been far from being simply the best. And I can say that as a self-confessed blue nose. In fact, even last season, the Celtic fans started chanting the song at an old firm match, claiming that their team was now the best in Scotland.

Well, that debate is for another day. This morning, we hear the writer to the Hebrews making a very clear, very emphatic point. And his point is this.

Jesus is simply the best. Jesus is simply the best. And we'll divide the verses that we read together under three headings. We're going to look at a better prophet, a better king, and a better priest. Very simple. A better king, a better prophet, a better king, and a better priest. First, we have a better prophet. You see that in verse 1 and the beginning of verse 2. Here, the author focuses on Jesus being the preeminent prophet.

The preeminent prophet. Now, before proceeding, we can note the context. The letter to the Hebrews is a sermon by an unnamed author that was delivered to Christians who had come from a Jewish background.

[2 : 32] They had placed their faith in the crucified and risen Jesus. They had looked to him and to him alone for salvation. But over a period of time, they began to feel pressure to abandon Jesus and return to the rules, the regulations, the sacrifices, the ceremonies of Judaism.

And this whole sermon, this whole letter, is an exhortation to them not to drift away from Jesus, not to depart from Jesus. It's a letter that reminds its audience that Jesus is supreme, that there is nothing and no one like him.

There is nothing and no one better than him. We move from the context to the communication, verse 1 and 2. The author begins by speaking about God's past communication.

Look at verse 1. He says that he draws attention to the fact that God speaks. He is the God of communication. He is the God of revelation.

He is the God who makes himself known. And the author says four things about God's communication, God's revelation. He says that God spoke in the past, long ago.

[3 : 45] He says that God spoke to the patriarchs, to their fathers, to their ancestors. He says that God spoke in a plurality of ways, at many times and in many ways.

And he says that God spoke by the prophets, his divinely appointed spokesman. And having spoken about God's past communication, the author speaks about God's present communication.

Look at verse 2. He speaks about these last days. The Bible frequently conveys the idea that there are two distinct periods of time. There is the present evil age and there is the future age to come, the age of blessing.

And here the author shows this acute awareness that he and his readers are living in the last days of the present evil age. And he carries on.

And he says that God has spoken to them, to us, in these last days. He is the God who continues to communicate. He is the God who continues to reveal himself and to make himself known.

[4 : 55] And he is the God who has spoken directly, personally, to the author and to his readers. And then he says that God has spoken to them in these last days by his son.

This is the first reference to Jesus in this entire letter. And he's identified as God's son through whom God has fully spoken and finally spoken.

As far as the author is concerned, there is now nothing more that God needs to say. He has spoken in these last days by his son, full stop.

Now, friends, as we consider these verses, we're being presented with the fact that Jesus is the prophet who provides God's definitive revelation. Jesus is the prophet who provides God's definitive revelation.

That's what we see in Hebrews 1. The author makes it clear that God spoke in the past by his prophets. And then he says that God has spoken in the present, in these last days, by his son.

[6 : 03] The author sees Jesus as being the prophet par excellence who provides God's final, definitive revelation. And that's important for us to reflect on.

When I was studying in St. Andrews, a group of friends and myself went to hear a special lecture that was being given by Professor Tom Wright on the resurrection.

And Tom Wright is a complex character. He has views that I wouldn't fully endorse. However, he's widely regarded as being one of the world's leading academic defenders of the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And so my friends and I went to this lecture with our notebooks and our pens. This is pre-iPhone days, pre-iPad days. You still had paper. You still had pens.

We were eager to scribble down anything and everything that we could from this man. We wanted to pay very careful attention to this man who was and still is the leading authority on his subject.

[7 : 10] We fully believed that he would give us the final word, the definitive word, when it comes to defending the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And in many ways, that is what he did. He did give us what we would say was the final word, the definitive word, when it comes to defending Jesus' resurrection. Now, the book of Hebrews, friends, makes it very clear that Jesus is the supreme prophet.

He is God's final word. He is God's definitive revelation of himself. Quite simply, Jesus is God's pre-eminent revelation whom people ought to look to, whom people ought to listen to, whom people ought to believe.

You don't need anything more than Jesus. You don't need a fresh vision. You don't need a fresh word. You don't need a fresh experience.

Jesus is everything you need. Jesus is all sufficient. Ligon Duncan puts it this way in a sermon that he preached on this passage. He says this, The writer is claiming that you, dear Christian, have a clearer and fuller revelation of God in Jesus, in the gospel, than any of the greatest Old Testament saints.

[8 : 38] You have had a fuller revelation of God given to you in Jesus than Moses did, than Abram did, than David did. What a blessing, what a privilege, what an accountability that we have been given the full revelation of God to us in Jesus.

It therefore calls upon us to believe the Son, Jesus, is God's final word. And so this morning I want to ask a very simple question.

My friend, are you someone who recognizes Jesus to be the prophet who provides God's final definitive revelation of himself?

Or are you someone who is still wanting and looking for something else? Something more? And you say to yourself, I'll believe once I've had this experience.

I'll believe once I've seen this. I'll believe once I've encountered that, my friend. Jesus is everything you need when it comes to knowing who God is and what God is like.

[9 : 53] And if Moses could believe, if David could believe, if Abram could believe the word of God, having not been confronted with that great revelation, then, friends, you and I are called to believe, having seen God's final definitive revelation of himself in Jesus.

So a better prophet. Second, a better king. Look at verse 2 and 3. The author now focuses on Jesus being the preeminent king. The preeminent king.

Verse 2 and the beginning of verse 3, the author speaks about who Jesus is. He says that God's Son has been appointed the heir of all things. In the ancient world, the Son, especially the eldest Son, would be the heir of the Father's estate, all that belonged to the Father.

And now the author of Hebrews says that God's Son has been appointed the heir of all things. God's holy state, the whole creation, the whole cosmos belongs to Jesus.

The author goes on and says that God's Son is the one through whom God created the world. Now remember, the author is writing to Christians who have come from a Jewish background.

[11 : 12] And in coming from a Jewish background, they would have confessed that the living God was the maker of heaven and earth. And here the author says that God's Son is the one through whom God created the world.

And when he says that he's the one through whom God created the world, he is also saying that he didn't simply create the physical world, but also the ages of the world.

That is a staple New Testament teaching, isn't it? Where we find John, we find Paul, and now we find the author to the Hebrews all saying, all emphasizing that Jesus is the one who created the world.

The author goes further and says that God's Son is the radiance of the glory of God. Glory is the splendor of God. Glory is the weighty worth of God.

And here the author says that God's Son is the radiance of God's glory. Every word that Jesus spoke, every work that Jesus performed, radiated, showed off, manifested, displayed the splendor of God to a watching world.

[12 : 27] And then the author says that God's Son is the exact imprint of God's nature. In the ancient world, a coin would often bear the image, the representation, the likeness, the imprint of a figure such as an emperor or possibly even a god.

And here we find the author saying that God's Son is the exact imprint, the exact likeness, the exact representation of God's nature.

In other words, if people want to know what God is like, they don't need to look any further than Jesus. And the author moves from speaking about who Jesus is to speaking about what Jesus does.

Look at verse 3. He says now that God's Son upholds the universe. The author has just said that all things have been made by Jesus, by God's Son.

Now he says that all things are maintained by Jesus, by God's Son. He is the author and he's the administrator of his creation.

[13 : 37] He is the one who has created all things and not simply created all things and then walked away, but now carries all things toward their appointed end.

It is an exhaustive, it is an all-inclusive control. And then the author says that God's Son upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Do you remember how in the book of Genesis we find God speaking all things into existence? And now we find the author of this letter saying that God's Son sustains and he governs and he directs his creation and he says that he sustains, he governs, he directs his creation by his speech, by the word of his power, or as some of your versions may have it, by his powerful word.

As far as the author is concerned, nothing happens, whether it be the fall of a leaf or the fall of an empire, without the word, the command, the speech of Jesus.

And so friends, as we consider these verses, we are being presented with the fact that Jesus is the King who rules over all things. Jesus is the King who rules over all things.

[15 : 04] That's what we see in Hebrews 1. The author informs his readers that Jesus is the Son who has been appointed the heir of all things and through whom God created the world.

And then he goes on to inform his readers that he is the one who upholds the universe by his powerful word. The author sees Jesus as being the King par excellence who rules over all things. And again, that's important to reflect on. A few years ago, we sang the hymn, He's Got the Whole World in His Hands at one of our congregation services.

Unfortunately, we had to cut the service short because there was a power cut that plunged the whole building into darkness. And one of the elders helpfully handed me a torch and said, well, you can still preach by the light of a torch, but the building, it was a winter's day, began to get very cold. So I could hardly read my notes and I could see the congregation getting bluer and bluer in front of me. And so we had to cut the service short. We sung the opening psalm, we had the opening prayer, we did the children's talk and the congregation by this stage, you could see them rubbing their hands and rubbing their feet just trying to stay warm.

[16:21] And so I said, well, we'll just sing, he's got the whole world in his hands and we'll disband the service. And I was absolutely gutted because I wasn't able to preach the sermon that I'd been spending the past week preparing.

And those of you who might know me know I'm a creature of habit. I've got my preaching calendar mapped out a year in advance. I don't like things upsetting my preaching calendar. But a couple who were at the service spoke to me a few weeks later and they said how much singing he's got the whole world in his hands had meant to them that day.

They had a newborn child who was facing major surgery and what brought them comfort over these days and over these weeks was knowing that Jesus had their tiny little baby, their tiny little girl, their tiny little Lucy in his hands.

He was in full control, total control of a situation that was completely beyond their control. The book of Hebrews, friends, makes it clear that Jesus is the supreme king.

He's the one who rules over all things. There is nothing going on in your life today, friends, nor the lives of your loved ones that is outside of Jesus' control. There is nothing going on in your congregation.

[17:50] There is nothing going on in our presbytery. There is nothing going on in our denomination that is outside of Jesus' control. And there is nothing going on in the world today, not the political realm, not the natural realm, not even the spiritual realm that is outside of Jesus' control.

The Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper put it well when he said, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry mine.

Isn't that a wonderful thought, friends? That whatever you might see going on in your own life, whatever you might see going on in the lives of your loved ones, whatever you might see going on in your congregation, whatever you might see going on in the world today, Jesus says, that's mine. I've got this. I'm in control. And so this morning I want to ask another very simple question and the question is this, my friend, are you someone who is resting on the fact that Jesus is the King who is ruling over everything and over everyone?

Are you resting on the fact that Jesus does indeed have the whole world in His hands? Or are you living in a state of constant restlessness, relentless fear, relentless worry about the things that you have absolutely no control over?

[19:28] Third and finally, we come to a better priest. Look at verses three and four. The author now focuses on Jesus being the preeminent priest.

Verse three, the author speaks about Jesus' sacrifice. The author continues speaking about the Son and he speaks about what God's Son did. He writes that He made, past tense, purification for sins.

That word purification comes from the Old Testament sacrificial system where the moral defilement of sin would be dealt with through the slaughter, the blood shedding of various animals.

It was a means of covering sin. It was a means of diverting divine wrath. Later in this letter, the author will speak about Jesus who makes an offering to deal with sin and he will also speak about Jesus being the offering who deals with sin.

But for now, he chooses to impress! impress upon his readers that Jesus has made purification for the sins of his people. He has dealt with their moral defilement once and for all.

[20:38] And the author goes on and he speaks about where God's Son now is. He says that after making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

At one level, the author is emphasizing that Jesus occupies the place of honor from which he now exercises sovereignty over his whole creation. But the author is saying something a little more.

I'm sure many of you can remember Murdo's series on the tabernacle that he did. I think it was at the prayer meeting. And you remember how the tabernacle in the Old Testament was the place where the various sacrifices were offered and that the tabernacle contained, and Murdo would have gone over this with you, many objects.

We read about altars. We read about wash basins. We read about tables. We read about lampstands. We read about the Ark of the Covenant. All these objects. All these items of furniture. But there is no mention of any chair. The priests were to always be on their feet. The work of the priest was never finished. But now in Hebrews 1, we find that Jesus is the priest who has made once and for all purification for the sins of his people and he proceeds to sit down.

[22 : 04] In other words, his work is finished. His work is complete. And we move from Jesus' sacrifice to his supremacy in verse 4.

The author speaks about angels. At this time of year, many schools start thinking about nativity plays and when we were in primary school, it used to always be the cutest, blondest little girls who always were the angels in the school nativity play.

It might have been different in Barvis, but that's how it worked in Olne and Invergordon. But in first century Judaism, angels were not cute little girls angels with tinsel in their hair and little wings made of cardboard.

In Judaism, angels were seen as being mediators of God's revelation. Others saw angels as being objects worthy of veneration and worship.

But the majority of first century Jews saw angels as being the most exalted beings that a person could possibly think of apart from God himself.

[23 : 10] wealth. And now the author speaks about God's Son's supremacy even over the angels. He wants his readers to think of the greatest, the grandest, the most glorious beings on the face of the earth.

And then he says that God's Son is superior to the angels. He is better than the angels. And he adds that he is superior to the angels because he has inherited a more excellent name than the angels.

He has the name Son of God. And so as we consider these verses, friends, we're being presented with the fact that Jesus is the priest who comprehensively removes sin.

Jesus is the priest who comprehensively removes sin. That's what we see in Hebrews 1. The author speaks about Jesus being the Son who has made once and for all purification for sins.

And then he speaks about Jesus sitting down at the right hand of the majesty on high, his work finished, his work complete. The author sees Jesus as being the priest par excellence who comprehensively, completely, conclusively removes the sin of his people.

[24 : 37] And again, that's important to reflect on. Some of you might be familiar with Shakespeare's tragedy, Macbeth. It's a tragedy about how Macbeth and his wife, Lady Macbeth, become increasingly corrupted and compromised by power and their desire to have power and their desire to hold on to the power that they've attained.

And toward the end of the play, Lady Macbeth is seen pacing about the rooms of their castle. She's haunted by the memory of her ruthless deeds, her ruthless actions, the various people that she and Macbeth had been involved in murdering.

And she looks at her hands and she asks if there is anything in the world, the perfumes of Arabia, that might get the spot of blood, the guilt, out of her hands.

And eventually, Lady Macbeth takes her life, overcome by guilt, overcome by despair, overcome by a sense of hopelessness that nothing can be done for her.

The book of Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus is the supreme priest. He's the one who has made purification for all the sins of all his people.

[25 : 56] Jeff Thomas, Welsh preacher, speaks very vividly about laundry being opened at Golgotha, at Calvary, at the place where Jesus died.

And he says that the foulest, the dirtiest, the messiest of people can be made clean at Calvary's laundry. It is the place where any sin and every sin can be completely, comprehensively, conclusively washed away by the blood of Jesus who cleanses a person not from some sins, not from most of their sins, not from 99.9% of their sins, but from all their sins.

That is the good news of the gospel, friends. Because Jesus has made purification for the sins of his people, his people don't need to live in fear that their sins will somehow bring them under God's

eternal judgment and condemnation.

Because Jesus has made purification for sins, his people don't need to strive, they don't need to strain to win and earn and merit the favor, the forgiveness, the acceptance, the approval, the adoption of God.

Because Jesus has made purification for sins, his people don't need to live their lives crippled by an unrelenting sense of guilt and shame.

[27 : 27] And because Jesus has made purification for sins, his people can celebrate that there is nothing and there is no one in the whole creation that can now separate them from the love of God.

Two years ago at this time, it was my granny's funeral. Granny was a very practical person and she planned her funeral down to the last detail.

She chose all the psalms that she wanted sung, she chose the readings that she wanted read, she expressly forbade her minister from giving any form of a tribute or eulogy to her and she chose the verse that she wanted placed on the order of service.

The words were those of 1 John 1 verse 7, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our sin. That was granny's confidence, her comfort as she prepared for death.

Not the fact that she had been raised in a manse in the Black Isle with a father and grandfather who were both free church ministers. Not the fact that she herself had been married to a man who had been in the ministry for 60 years.

[28 : 48] Not the fact that she had led various Bible studies and kept an open manse for many years, many decades. Not all the Bible knowledge that she had accumulated, all the verses that she could quote verbatim.

Granny's confidence, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our sin. And so as we close I want to ask a final simple question.

My friend, are you someone who is rejoicing that Jesus is the priest who has completely, comprehensively, conclusively removed all your sin at the laundry room of Golgotha?

Or are you someone who is hopelessly looking for something or someone else to do that for you?

Well, today we have seen that Jesus is quite simply the best, the better prophet, the better king, the better priest.

God, how can we not worship him now in response? Let's sing to his praise the words of Psalm 72.

[30 : 17] Psalm 72, Scottish Psalter version, verses 17 to 19, this messianic psalm that anticipates the coming king, the Lord Jesus, his name forever shall endure, last like the sun it shall, men shall be blessed in him and blessed, all nations shall him call.

Now blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel, for he alone doth wondrous works in glory that excel. And blessed be his glorious name to all eternity, the whole earth let his glory fill, amen.

So let it be. These verses of Psalm 72, and if you're able to sing for the singing, please do so.

Amen. His name forever shall endure, thus like the sun it shall.

Men shall be blessed in him unblessed, for nations shall shout in call.

Now blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel, for he the Lord the Lord of wondrous works in glory that excel.

[32 : 12] And blessed be his glorious name to all eternity, the whole earth let his glory fill, amen, so let it be.

let's pray. Our God and our Father, we thank you and we bless you for these moments that we have had to consider Jesus, the true and better prophet, priest, and king for his people.

And our prayer is that you might open our hearts to receive these truths and rejoice in these truths and that through this our lips might also be opened that we would praise and worship in response.

Please part us now with your blessing and bring us again together this evening with a renewed desire to magnify and make much of your name as we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. for you.