

Sunday 9th. December 2018
2nd.Sunday in Advent
Jesus - His Prophetic Office
Hebrews 1 v1-4

Hebrews chapter 1 verse 2 tells us that God has spoken in the past, but now He has spoken to us by His Son. The Jews expected Messiah to come, and in Matthew and John, an aspect of the Messiah is that He would be the great prophet from God.

The Bible ascribes various offices to Christ. These are roles that God has specifically given to Christ, and the three offices are Prophet, Priest and King. We will consider something of these three offices of Christ over the next three weeks. These are not the usual Christmas messages which usually focus on angels and shepherds, wise men and a stable. However, Jesus did not come to earth to be greeted by shepherds, nor to make Mary and Joseph take a long journey. Jesus came to do certain works which were absolutely crucial in God's purpose to save us, and it is these which give the significance to Christmas. The Messiah is the prophet, Priest and King appointed by God.

Hebrews tells us three very significant matters. Firstly that God has spoken. We need to take it on board that God speaks, and our ability to hear is a subject worthy of great care. I have heard people say that they know the Bible says this or that, but they have it from God that He is making an exception for them. I doubt it! It is possible to 'hear' what we want to hear rather than what God actually does say. This in itself is a big subject, and for another day. Only let me say this, that if we claim to have heard something from God that is contrary to the Scripture, then we are certainly wrong!

However, the first thing to know is that God speaks, He is there, and He is not silent. That phrase is the title of an old book by Francis Schaffer, and the title of the book is worth the money spent to buy it! The second thing to note is that God has spoken in the past in different ways. The third thing is to note that God has now spoken by His Son.

That God has spoken in different ways is self-evident to anyone who reads the Old Testament. There are burning bushes and angelic visitations, there are dreams and visions. Angels appear in furnaces, and audible voices shake mountains. There are whispered words after fires and storms, and even large fish get in on the act. However, one of the most obvious ways that God has spoken is by the mouths and writings of prophets. There are different degrees of the prophetic ministry. Some prophets are mentioned who did one or two things that are commented on, while others wrote whole collections of prophetic words.

God spoke to the people through these prophets, and the authority of what they said was attested by the way many of their sayings were introduced by language along this line, 'Thus saith the Lord.' This is not just a device of speech, but is the claim that what followed was the very word and mind of God. The proof was in the fulfillment of what was spoken, and there were severe penalties warned for anyone who spoke in this way

without being commanded to do so by God. False prophets are mentioned in both the Old and the New Testament. Jesus spoke with such authority when He says things such as, 'but I say to you....'

Hebrews 1 verse 2 tells us that after all these ways of speaking to His people over the days of the Old Testament, God has now spoken by His Son. The claim is implicit, that God has spoken not by a merely human servant, but has sent His special envoy, the one who can speak with absolute authority because He came directly from the Father, and is His Son. Can you see the import of this? This is getting God's message from the horse's mouth as we say. This is a way of speaking which has no intermediary to confuse the matter. This is the real deal.

The function of the Old Testament prophet, in the line of which Christ came, was to be the person who spoke to men on behalf of God. Their ministry was to inform men of God's message and commands, and to instruct the people in their frequent periods of unfaithfulness. The purpose of this was to bring the people back to the faith and obedience of God. However, eventually their waywardness was so fixed and their hearts so deaf to God's council, that God punished them. If you are familiar with the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, you will remember that the last chapters of Isaiah refer to the glorious state of Israel when God will bring some of the people out of captivity. Isaiah saw into the post captivity of the people. On the other hand, Jeremiah lived through the process of the captivity coming and saw that seventy years of captivity were to be experienced. This is why Jeremiah is referred to as the weeping prophet, the people did not like what he had to say to them from God, and they gave him a bad time!

However, now God has spoken by His Son, Jesus. Jesus message is authoritative, and it comes in three ways, by who He was, what He said, and what He did.

Jesus came to show us what the Father is like. Jesus said that whoever had seen Him had seen the Father. Therefore, when we read the Gospels and Epistles, we are reading God's revelation of Himself.

Look at who Jesus was while on earth. He was liked by ordinary people. He was safe to be about women and children, the sick, the demonized, the sinful. He let people paw Him and come up behind Him and grasp His coat. There was only one time the disciples acted as security guards, and Jesus rebuked them for not letting the children come to Him! He was gentle with the weak, kind to the poor, patient with the sinful. He let those who rejected Him turn and walk away, even though this saddened Him. He put Himself out for people who sometimes only wanted to use Him, and He neglected His own needs of food and rest for people who no-one else would give the time of day to. Read the story of the woman at the well, and you will see this. These are only some of the ways that Jesus showed people what God is like by His manner of life.

Then there is what He said. The longest reported speeches of Christ are the Sermon on the Mount, and the discourse and prayer of John 14 to 17. Most people recognize that the Sermon on the Mount is unlike any other piece of literature in the world. It says so

much in a short space of time, so much so, that ever since its utterance, we have never got to the end of its teaching and implications. Jesus spoke and preached and taught and confronted people not only with words of instruction, but also of correction and rebuke. Do you recall the section of the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says, 'You have heard that it was said, but I say to you...' Here Jesus is challenging the accepted wisdom of how to understand the Law given through Moses, and is giving God's requirements as something much deeper than conformity to an external adherence to God's commands. For example when he deals with the law of chastity, it was, and is never enough just to refrain from an actual immoral act, but God is looking internally to see and legislate for our internal dispositions! This takes things to a totally new dimension, but such instruction came from the lips of Jesus and hence from God Himself.

All this is so important today, because we have reached a state in our nation where day is being called night, and white is being called black! The moral standards of our nation have been flushed down the toilet, and we are being lost in a maze of views which leave us with both feet firmly fixed in this air. The moral foundations have all but been washed away, and morality is almost left to the dictates of a few in society. No wonder our children are more depressed, suicidal and troubled than we ever were at their age! All this has happened as the Word of God, and the knowledge that God speaks, has been lost from the consciousness of so many, and this is even true of the Church.

The serious thing is that at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned of what would happen if people did not hear and act on what He said. The Sermon comes to the end with a parable. Jesus speaks of two men and two homes. One is built on the sand, the other requires, I reckon, more effort, and is built on the rock. Now, most of us know the parable, and know what follows even if we don't apply it. However, let me tell you a story, not made up or added to in any way. A while back, I was talking to another minister, who lives a long, long way off. I don't remember what the discussion was, but I referred in some way to this building parable. This person at once replied that this was somewhat of an antiquated and ignorant parable with falseness in it. He pointed out that something built on sand was a very stable structure, just as paving stones were laid on sand, so a building built on sand was built on an intrinsically stable substrate. The conclusion was that Jesus got it wrong in this story. The implication then was the Jesus could also be wrong in other assertions He made!

I was a little taken aback, and did not think of anything to say for a moment or two! However, here is the answer I should have made. Do you remember the floods of a couple of years ago? Upstream on the River Dee, there is a tower that used to be a distance back from the river bank. Not any more. The tower was built on land composed of boulders, but such was the force of the flood, that yards of boulder bank were washed away and the tower was in danger of being lost. Now, if that is what a flood can do to boulders, what do you think will happen to a house built on sand when the flood comes? The sand is quickly washed away, and the house is lost. Sand may be fine when all is at rest and quiet, but when the flood comes, only what is built on the rock will stand the test.

This parable is told to warn and instruct us about holding to the teaching of Christ. Our lives may appear to be OK, all peaceful and successful, but the trial will expose our foolishness and pride at not obeying what Christ teaches and requires! Jesus is telling us that we need to trust and obey God.

What then are some of the revelations that Jesus makes of the Father which are major subjects of His life and talk?

We all take this first thing for granted because Jesus refers to God so often as Father. Jesus came to show us and tell us about the Father. God's plan is that many, many people would come into a relationship with God of close kinship. He becomes our Father and we become His children. Prodigals are brought back to His house and restored to kinship. Other terms are used, each of which has a slightly different emphasis, but each speaks of a close, intimate relationship. Those who believe in Christ become members of His body, the Church. They become the Bride of Christ and the family of God. All of these descriptions are intimate and close, and are to be mutually enjoyed and appreciated.

Jesus also spoke of God's ultimate purpose in our salvation. We are to be a holy people, Christ-like in heart and character, and this he describes in the Beatitudes. Holiness is not an option, because even though we are made perfect through death, we are required to pursue holiness in this life.

Jesus also revealed to humanity the absolute Sovereignty of God. Jesus work and miracles displayed God as Sovereign over sin and death, sickness and the demonic, over nature and any other rule that exists on earth. This is very important for us in the West to embrace. We are so used to thinking that we can solve anything and everything that confronts us. It is so sad how often when everything is going as we want, we are confident and feel God loves us. However when our wills are crossed, when sadness, illness and age overtake us, how often our faith seems to fail and our emotions scream out! Fortunately, we are in good company! Many of David's Psalms begin with him fearing for his life or thinking that it is all over because God seems to have become deaf to his cries. The answer to this can be found in 2 Corinthians 1 verse 9. Now there is something to think and pray about!

It's not all hard, Jesus shows us the compassion of God by showing himself to be the Good Shepherd. However, even this is gritty and strong. What about Psalm 23, the Shepherd Psalm, it talks about the valley of the shadow of death! But this is where it matters, even there, our shepherd leads us!

There is something more, without which all these doctrines above will be of no benefit to us. Every one of these doctrines is true, but become operative either by an act of God's sovereign mercy, or by us exercising faith. It is wonderful to see how often God seems to wrap new believers in cotton wool and before they know hardly anything he helps them, delivers them and rescues them from all sorts of things. However, as believers

grow, God requires us to live by faith and not by sight, to mature, grow up, and bear weight and responsibilities suitable for those who are no longer babies.

One of the most pressing truths God speaks to us is that we must have and use faith if we are to please God. Faith comes before understanding. Our understanding of God will never be complete, but we believe in order to understand, not the other way around. We believe, and then in due course, feeling may come, but not always, and we are to live by what we believe, we believe what God has revealed because it is God who has revealed it, so faith and hope are based on the rock of who God is and what He says, not on our reason first, nor on our circumstances, feelings or desires.

God and Christ are compassionate and patient, but they are not wishy-washy. It is a noble and dignified thing to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is not a cop out or something limp and pathetic. Jesus had very serious questions to pose and ask regarding the faith of His disciples and others. I will comment on one, and give a few other places where Jesus is direct with people.

In Mark 4 verse 40 we read of a question he posed to His fisherman disciples. They are out on a boat, fishermen are used to boats, so if they were in fear of their lives because of the fierceness of the sudden storm, then it must have been bad. Such conditions were not infrequent because of the geography of the locality. Jesus was asleep in the stern of the boat. The disciples woke Jesus up with the question so often on our lips, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?' notice how Jesus replies. He does not say, 'sorry lads, I didn't realise what was happening!', or anything like that.

The words that Jesus said could have been taken in many ways, but there is a message in them that we miss at our peril. Jesus replied, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?' Jesus was looking for faith in the disciples at the worst of times as well as in the best. Is it a rebuke? There is an element of that in it. Is He angry? No. Is He disappointed? It may sound like that, but that is not the most important thing. Jesus questions told them that this is the sort of situation where faith, and only faith, comes into its own. It tells us that these disciples could have believed in Christ in this situation, and that this is what they should do next time they are in a life and death situation. It is a question of what we will do in the trial, believe in Jesus, even if we have no idea what He will do, but trust Him for himself. The only other option is fear!

Does that seem mean of Jesus? We better get used to it. Peter speaks of faith as more precious than gold, so when we are called on to believe, to exercise faith in God, God is actually bestowing riches on us – that is why James tells us we are to look on it as all joy when we fall into trials! No, it's not easy, but it is God's way.

Look up these other passages for other times where Jesus directed and called for faith, or poses a hard question in those who had come to Him. Mark 10.21, Mark 5.36, Matthew 14.31, 11.29 and 16.24.

A robust faith is important, because it is the first grace given to us, and it is the grace which receives everything else that God has for us. It is the grace which brings us into the love of the Father, the transforming of our natures to become holy, the grace which secures our feet on the Sovereign rock of Christ, and which enables us to walk with Christ in the valley of the shadow of death with as much peace and confidence as when we walk in green pastures and beside still waters.

God has spoken last of all by His Son. The way God has ordained matters is that this message becomes effective in us when we receive and act faith on it. The Bible has sat in people's homes for years and it has done them no good. For the message of Christ to become effective in us we must hear it, believe it, and act in faith on it. This is how the Holy Spirit causes it to work within us to change us and transform us.

There is much to read in Scripture about all these prime doctrines, it would pay us well to note them, and do what the voice on the Mount of Transfiguration said, 'This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.'