

“An Anchor for the Soul: God Speaks”

Hebrews 1:1-14

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX
Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • September 20, 2015

I am really excited about this new series we are starting this morning. Since we finished our study of Matthew last December we have been doing topical sermon series like our series on the *With God* life that we finished last week and our series on prayer going through the Lord's Prayer. Well now for the next few months we will return to studying a book of the Bible as we dig into the New Testament book of Hebrews together.

No doubt you have heard about the unrest in the Middle East recently as the organization called the Islamic State violently takes control of various areas. One of the main issues in those areas now is the systematic persecution, and often execution, of Christians simply because of their faith in Jesus. Many of these Christians have been forced to flee their homes and frequently their country. In the last few years over 600,000 Christians have fled Syria to avoid brutal torture and death.

In the world today Christians are the most persecuted group of people and it's getting worse. Which is why it's so important to study Hebrews. We don't know who actually wrote Hebrews but scholars generally agree that it was written to a group of Jewish Christians around the middle of the first century, probably a house church and most likely in Rome. Because they had become Christians they had experienced persecution from two different groups. First, they were banished from the synagogue by the Jewish leaders because they were Christians. In the early years the Christians considered themselves still a part of the Jewish faith as Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. But they had also experienced the loss of property and privilege under the Roman Emperor Claudius a few years earlier and now there was the renewed threat of persecution under Nero.

Because of these threats, the members of these house churches were scared to death. Kent Hughes writes, "Some had begun to avoid contact with outsiders. Some had even

withdrawn from the worshiping community altogether. The author feared there might be those who, if arrested, would succumb to the conditions of release—a public denial of Christ." They were asking a lot of questions, I'm sure. Like, "Is God listening? Does he care about our problem? Why is God silent?"

I don't know about you but I have asked those same questions. Prayers go unanswered. Problems persist. It seems sometimes as if God is silent. But in the midst of these questions this letter arrives. The church gathers, probably in that little house and someone stands up to read it. "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." Through these words that little, struggling church and you and I come face to face with the God who speaks. God is not silent, He speaks. And He has been speaking for quite some time.

Genesis 1:3 says, "God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light." Over and over in the creation story God says "Let it be" and it was so. The only reason that anything in the universe exists is because God speaks. Not only that but it's by His word that everything continues to exist. As we heard from Psalm 19, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." In other words, the natural world reveals the God who speaks.

The Apostle Paul puts it like this at the beginning of Romans, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have

been made.” There are two attributes of the natural world that scientists have determined. Nature is complex and it is ordered, which pretty well rules out random chance. God speaks and reveals Himself through His creation.

But creation itself does not give us a complete picture of who God is. Thankfully, God’s people have always had more than just nature to be able to know God. “At many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.” Our Bible consists of sixty-six books that were written by more than forty different people over more than thirteen hundred years. It contains poetry and history and prophecy and a number of different literary styles. But the miracle of the Bible is that it contains one unified message. James Montgomery Boice said, “It is, in short, a single story of divine redemption begun in Israel, centered in Jesus Christ and culminating at the end of history. Behind the efforts of the more than forty human authors is the one perfect, sovereign and guiding mind of God.”

2 Timothy 3 reminds us that, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” Because God really speaks through the Bible then it has “divine authority.” We must conform our thoughts and our actions to God’s Word. It also means that the Scriptures are always relevant. Through the Bible God speaks to whatever situation you are facing today. There is no better manual on living than God’s Word.

In addition to the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, we find that sometimes God has spoken through angels. For some reason many people are overly fascinated with angels. Maybe it’s because we know so little about them that people are able to believe whatever they want about angels. We’re not going to spend much time today talking about angels but there are two things I want us to see. First, as verse 14 says, angels are “ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.” The word angel literally means

messenger. Angels are God’s messengers. Remember the angel Gabriel who told Mary and Joseph that Mary would have a baby. The more important thing to know about angels is that they are inferior to Jesus. Verses 4 through 13 repeatedly make the assertion that Jesus is superior to the angels.

That brings us to the third way God speaks. In addition to speaking through creation, through His Word and through angels, “in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” The Old Testament prophets give us a clearer picture of who God is but it’s still incomplete. God had to communicate with us in a way that we could understand and that way was to become one of us.

For the last two thousand years there has been a lot of debate about who Jesus really is. Over and over again the New Testament is clear that Jesus is God in the flesh, emmanuel, God with us. Here in Hebrews 1 we see that Jesus is the Son of God, the heir of *all* things, and the creator, redeemer and sustainer of the world. Verse 3 says that Jesus is the “exact imprint of God’s nature.” In Jesus the invisible God is visible. Today we can have a clear picture of what God is like in Jesus. When Jesus speaks it’s God speaking. When Jesus acts it’s God acting. “Through the incarnation, God made it possible for us to know him as we never before could.”

The amazing thing, for me at least, is that God didn’t just speak thousands of years ago. He still speaks today. In many ways, like those early Christians in Rome, we are tempted to deny Christ. Maybe it’s to keep our friends or our job. Or maybe it’s out of self-indulgence. Following Jesus is not easy. It will cost you something. But when you put your faith in Christ, the one who made you and everything around you, you can hear God speak. When you know the truth you will be able to hear God speak through the beauty and complexity and order of the natural world. Better yet, you will be able to hear Him speak through the Scriptures. Most importantly you will hear Him speak through the Son.

Whatever you are going through in your life, God is NOT silent. Jesus said, "Do not be afraid." He promised, "I am with you always" and "I will never leave you or forsake you." He says to each of us, "I do not condemn you. Go and sin no more." When the world is turned against us Jesus reminds us, "I have overcome

the world." Perhaps, though, the most important thing God says to each of us today is, "follow me." As we will see in the coming weeks, the two main themes of Hebrews are the exceeding greatness of Christ and our response.

Amen