

Hebrews 1:1-4 - Why has Jesus come?

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[0 : 0 0] Well tonight I'd like us to spend a few minutes looking together at Hebrews chapter 1 and 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 there. Now I think it's pretty much impossible to imagine a more stunning introduction to a letter. Imagine being the Hebrews, whoever that group of people were, imagine they got this letter and they open it up and they're about to start reading and perhaps they're expecting a greeting or a word of introduction and they are just hit with these stunning words. There's no messing about, there's no kind of preamble. The writer of this letter goes straight in there with one of the most glorious introductions that we could read and these verses belong with the other great introductions into the Bible. You go to Genesis chapter 1, you have that stunning introduction to God's word. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and then you read this magnificent chapter that describes the perfection of how God created the world. John chapter 1 is another one, in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. Again, words of just absolute incredible teaching and richness and you just go straight in there with it and it's amazing and I think it's the best preachers in the world do the very same thing.

When you hear a preacher like Donald MacLeod, he's not like me who tends to say too much and waffle too much. Donald MacLeod just goes straight in and 30 seconds into the sermon and you're already being fed with the richest and deepest and most wonderful teaching. That's what the writer to the Hebrews was like. He goes straight in and teaches us some astonishing things in his first four verses and we could spend weeks on these verses. There are so many amazing things contained in them but one of the most wonderful things about these verses is that instantly our focus is on Jesus. These words grab our attention and they turn our eyes and our minds and our hearts straight to the Son of God and that is so appropriate because this letter is a letter about Jesus. It's a letter about the superiority and perfection of Jesus and the author wants us from the moment we start reading Hebrews to be thinking all about Jesus and about his superiority and his greatness. So they are amazing verses these and we could spend a long long time meditating upon them and so as we look at them tonight we will as always just barely be scratching the surface but I hope as we do look at them we can be encouraged and that we can be taught by what these words have to teach us and so we're going to look at verses one to four and in doing so we're going to just ask a very simple question. Why has Jesus come? And of course at this time of year we are being reminded of the coming of Jesus as we think of Christmas and all that is associated with that and so let's ask that simple question. Why has Jesus come? Now of course there are many many many answers to that question and we are just going to focus on three that we can take from these verses together this evening. So first of all I want us to begin by noticing that in these verses the writer is drawing a contrast an immediate contrast between long ago and these last days. Do you notice that if you look at it first two words long ago and many times in many ways God spoke to her father by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son and so there's this contrast between long ago and these last days and that contrast emphasizes two really important points. First of all it reminds us that the coming of

Jesus is part of a much bigger story. Long ago it's referring back to the days of the Old Testament and to the fact that God revealed himself to his people in the words of the Old Testament and the message of the Old Testament was a message of anticipation. The Old Testament is ultimately a

message that is looking forward to something else. There is this sense of expectation, this sense of anticipation and so we see first of all that we are immediately been drawn to think about the whole message of scripture, the great big story contained within it and that leads us on to the second thing which emphasizes the fact that the birth of Jesus brings a definitive fulfillment to that message. Notice it doesn't say long ago and these days it says long ago and these last days and the word last is really important because it's emphasizing the fact that

[6 : 30] Jesus has come as the definitive fulfillment and culmination of the Old Testament message. The Old Testament said days are coming like Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 31 days are coming but now that Jesus has come the days are here and we are living in these last days that means that God's message to us is complete. We are not waiting for further revelation, we are simply waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ. Everything else is complete. Now that is an immense privilege for us. We can look at the completed message of the Bible and we can see how it all fits together and we've spent many Sunday evenings over the past few weeks looking at how it all fits together and how privileged we are to see that. It's a bit like you think of the castle in Stornoway for a long time you saw the outside but everybody knew that the inside was falling apart but now we can go in and see the renovated inside as well and we see the whole building and it looks beautiful and so we are the same with the Bible. We now have a privilege that the Old Testament believers did not have. We see the whole message so we are privileged but in the Bible and with God privilege always comes alongside responsibility and we have a responsibility to listen and to respond. We can't say to God, I didn't know. We can't say to God, you didn't tell me. Privilege and responsibility go hand in hand. So if we're asking our question why has Jesus come, the first thing we can say is that Jesus has come to bring fulfillment of all that was said in the Old Testament long ago and it's really interesting to notice this and I just want to stop pause for two minutes to do this very quickly. Over the past two or three months we've been doing a study saying looking at how the whole Bible fits together. Now if any of you weren't here I'll just explain very briefly what we did. We looked at the beginning of the Bible, we looked at the end of the Bible and we looked at the fact that there are certain themes running through the whole Bible and we identified six themes that are at the start and at the end and that run all the way through. It was the theme of land, the theme of family, the theme of temple, the theme of law, the theme of kingdom and the theme of covenant. These six themes running right right through the Bible and it's amazing to see how it all fits together but do you notice that if you read verses one to four of Hebrews chapter one they are all there. All of our themes are there. Did you see that? Look at it. The land talks about creating the world, talks about upholding the universe, that's the land theme. Talks about family, says that he's the heir of all things. He's heir is a family term isn't it? It talks about temple because it refers to the glory of God and whenever you see that word glory you should be thinking temple because that's where the glory of God dwells. It talks about law because it points us to law because when it mentions purification for sins that's talking about the requirements of God's law. It talks about kingdom because it mentions the majesty on high and it's pointing us to the theme of covenant when it emphasizes the fact that God has spoken to us through his son because his son is a mediator in a covenant relationship. As Hebrews 9 15 says he is the mediator of the new of a new covenant. So it's all there. It all fits together. Jesus has come as the fulfillment of all that the Bible is pointing towards. Now this raises another really really important point that we must make sure we grasp. We all need Jesus more than anything else and [11 : 03] I know that you know that and I know that you know that. But it's really important to remember that you don't need more than Jesus because the devil has caused havoc by telling two desperate lies to the world. On the one hand he has told the world that you don't need Jesus and many many people are listening to that. But on the other hand the devil is telling a lot of people you need more than Jesus and we see that in so many different ways. You see that in so many false religions. Islam is a great message that you need more than Jesus. Roman Catholicism is a great message that says you need more than Jesus. Mormonism is a message that says you need more than Jesus. And even we in our own context can fall into this trap because we can think that we have to add our own goodness. We need to be make ourselves good enough or we can feed to ourselves we need to have a remarkable experience. There needs to be something dramatic for me to be converted.

That's just another way of saying that you need more than Jesus if you think you need an experience like that. Or maybe it might be our own legalistic habits whereby we think well if I do this

every week, if I go to church every week, if I read my Bible every night, if I do this, that and the next thing then I'll be alright. All of these are different ways of saying that we need more than Jesus and the great message of the letter to the Hebrews is that you need Jesus. You need faith in Jesus Christ and you don't need to add to that.

And the devil is leading many many people to hell on the basis of these two lies.

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's message of salvation. It is Jesus Christ that we need. So that's the first thing that we see in this passage. Jesus has come as a great fulfillment of God's plans and God's purposes. The second thing we want to know. As I said at the beginning these are very very rich words. There are a lot of big theological terms here. There's a lot of things that we could look at. There's a lot of rich teaching in these verses. But if you look at chapter at Hebrews 1 verses 1 to 4 there is one main phrase in that paragraph. Can you spot it?

Whenever you're reading the Bible, if you're reading a verse, if you're reading a passage, it's always good to ask yourself what is the main word or the main phrase. And then in this passage there's a main phrase. Part of this passage is background information, which comes before the main phrase. Part of this passage is explanatory information that comes after the main phrase.

[14:28] But all of these things are complementing the main phrase. So can you see it? What's the main phrase? Main phrase, God has spoken to us by his Son. Can you see that? Verse 1 comes before it as background information. Long ago at many times in many ways God spoke to her father by the prophets. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. And then from then on it's explanatory information whom he appointed the eight of all things. That's just telling you who the Son is. And through whom he created the world, that's telling you a bit more about the Son. He's the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. That's more information about the Son. He upholds the universe by the word of his power. That's more information about the Son. After making purification for sin, 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. That's more information about the Son. The main phrase is that God has spoken to us by his Son. And so if we return to our question, why has Jesus come? The main answer that this passage is giving us, and the specific answer that verse two is giving us, is that Jesus has come to speak to us. Now isn't that interesting?

Because supposing somebody walked up to you on the street and said, why did Jesus come? The first thing that would come to our minds, certainly to my mind, I would probably say something like, he came to save us from our sins. He came to die on the cross. He came to give us eternal life. That's how I would have answered that question. And all that is absolutely true.

But Hebrews chapter one verse two is telling us that we should also answer that question by saying, Jesus came to speak to us. That's what that passage is saying. Now at one level that sounds so simple. But it is actually one of the most important and one of the most profound things that we have to make sure we are grasping. Because if we stop and think about it, where would we be if God didn't speak to us?

Where would we be? Imagine humanity fell in Adam and Eve and God stayed silent.

Where would we be? We would be blindly wandering through a world that was and a life that was meaningless. We would have no idea what was right or wrong. And we would just please ourselves and we would do what was right in our own eyes. We would have no idea what was really through.

[17:37] And so we would be in this mess where everybody is making up their own ideas. And nobody is able to answer the big important questions in life. If God didn't speak to us, we would be in a total mess. And the desperate, desperate truth of our world today is that we are in that mess. But it's not because God hasn't spoken. It's because humanity is not listening.

But the glorious message of the Bible is that God is a God who speaks. And this is what we mean by the doctrine of revelation. God communicates with us and in doing so he reveals himself to us by talking to us. God is a God who speaks. And in fact, if you look at the Bible, you see that God accomplishes his purposes by speaking. And Hebrews 1 1 to 4 points us towards that. Verse 2 tells us that that it was through God the Son that the world was created. So that's immediately pointing us back to Genesis 1 and to the creation of the universe. And how did that creation happen?

God said, let there be light. Genesis 1 is a great act of speech by God. As Hebrews 11 3 says, by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God. God spoke.

And the universe came into being. And verse 3 points us to the doctrine of providence. It says that God the Son upholds the universe. And how does he do that? Can you see? By the word of his

power.

God accomplishes his purposes by speaking. That's why the prophet's great message was always, thus says the Lord. And that's why Jesus was a preacher. He came to speak to us. Luke 20 verse 1, Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel. Jesus has come to speak to you. And do you know he has got some amazing things to say.

[20 : 04] And you can look at the words of Jesus and you will see and hear astonishing things. And I've picked just three examples. I suppose this is just a bit of a random choice but they're all amazing. Jesus said to them in John 6 35, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. Matthew 11 28, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. And John 10 27, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. Now I'm sure that we are all fairly familiar with these words but we should stop and we should meditate on them because let me ask you, have you ever heard anybody speak in that way?

Have you ever heard anybody say anything like these words? Can anybody speak in that way?

[21 : 34] No, of course they can't. Nobody can make that kind of claim, nobody can make that kind of promise except God the Son. Jesus has come to tell you amazing things and when he speaks he gives us the most profound teaching, teaching us about his relationship with God the Father and about the fact that we can share in that relationship with himself. He gives us the words that are of the greatest comfort. Even these words, no one will snatch them out of my hand and all the other words of comfort that Jesus proclaims. Jesus extends the most loving, loving invitation to people to come to him and he preaches the best news that the world has ever, ever, ever heard.

Nobody's speech compares to this man's speech. Nothing, nothing can compare to the words of Jesus and it's no wonder that when you read in the Gospels in John chapter 7 that when the Pharisees sent some officers to arrest Jesus they came back and what did they say? No one ever spoke like this Jesus's words are astonishing and Jesus has come to speak and that's why the enduring foundation of Christianity is a collection of words. The Bible. The Bible is a book of words because Jesus has come to speak. Now other religions have various things. They might have places in the world that they focus on. They might have images that they bow down to or statues that they worship. They might have practices and habits and works that they think are absolutely essential but Christianity is founded on words, on the word of God, on the fact that God has spoken. Now that raises some really important points. First of all that is why the Bible is authoritative and when we come to the Bible we are coming to the perfect, inherent word of God.

It is absolutely authoritative and that's why if you abandon the Bible then you are abandoning Christianity and you are abandoning the good news. But this is also why it is so, so important to read your Bible and please do read your Bible. I'm sure many of you do but read your Bible but don't just read your Bible. Read it and listen to it and think. Now when I was young I think I used to be, I think a lot of my Bible reading was driven by guilt and I feel a bit ashamed admitting that but I have to be honest and say that I think I used to think I better read my Bible, I better read a whole chapter and you try and fly through this chapter to think I've read this chapter and I've done what I should do because she felt so guilty if you didn't but that wasn't really the right mindset to go into reading the Bible.

When you go to read the Bible you are going to hear the voice of God and that's not something that should be rushed, that's not something that should be done out of guilt. When you read your Bible just listen to what he's saying and if you want to read a verse or if you want to read a chapter it doesn't really matter because there's no rush.

[25 : 33] Take your time and let God's word really sink in. So I don't mind if you just read a verse or two or if you read a chapter or two we're all different in what we find easier and it probably depends which part of the Bible you're reading but please take your time, please think, please listen and if you do have questions just ask, there's no such thing as a silly question and it's so good to just ask, ask, ask. You can ask me or you can ask other people here in the congregation and if you get asked a question you don't know the answer to don't worry just say I'm not sure but always good to ask, always good to talk about the Bible. Jesus has come to speak and that's why he's left us his word but do you notice two very small but very very important words?

I love the little words in Bible passages. Jesus has come to speak in these last days he has spoken but do you notice the two little words that come next? He has spoken to us.

Jesus has come to speak to you and this is where we see how deeply personal Jesus's message is. Jesus has not come to speak in an elevated exclusive realm, he's not come just to speak to the high fliers of society or of theology or whatever and if you think of the way things are today if a world leader came to Britain, say President Trump when he becomes president comes to Britain I doubt very much he's going to be chatting to Joe blogs in the state he will be chatting to the elite or to the press or to the privileged few but Jesus was not like that. Jesus has come to speak to us. If you go back to the Gospels and read through Jesus's ministry you will find that he spent a lot of time speaking to people that nobody else wanted to talk to.

Now if you feel like that sometimes that can be one of the worst feelings in life that feeling where you're in a crowd you're in somewhere unfamiliar and you feel like nobody wants to talk to you and you're kind of isolated and cut off. There was a lot of people in the New Testament time who are like that. There was a woman whose life was a mess and she had had bad relationship after bad relationship after bad relationship. She'd actually had six husbands and now she was living with a man who was unmarried. She was a public disgrace. She was the kind of woman that would have been in a tabloid newspaper and one day she goes to a well in John chapter 4 and I'm quite sure the rest of the town kept their distance but Jesus spoke to her. And then there was another man who had an absolutely horrific skin disease that was contagious and disgusting and off-putting and nobody wanted to go near him because he had leprosy. An outcast of society just the scum of the town is probably how people would have looked at him. Just somebody who was just an outcast, worthless, disgusting. But Jesus speaks to him doesn't he? Mark chapter 1 you can read about that. And it's not even people who have maybe gotten to bad situations because circumstances are against them. Even people who are in a mess because of their own doing. In Luke 23 you read about a convicted criminal who is in the process of being executed. Somebody who is rebelled against society.

[29 : 57] Somebody who has just lost the plot in terms of his behaviour and he's been caught, he's been tried and he is in the process of being executed. He is hanging on a cross. A criminal about to die.

But Jesus speaks to him and he tells him some very amazing things. And so I want you to imagine all the people in our society that people don't want to talk to.

All the people whose lives are the wreckage of this world and all its sin and temptation and corruption and immorality. What would Jesus do with these people who are lying on the streets of their cities and who are at home right now with a bottle? What would Jesus do with these people? He would speak to them. And of course we must do the same. Jesus came not to speak to the select few but to speak to us. And these two little words remind us that all the amazing things that Jesus has to say, he is saying them to us. Jesus wants you to hear his words and he is saying them to you. So when Jesus says, whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. He is saying that so that your hunger will be relieved and so that your thirst will be quenched. Now do you thirst for peace? Do you thirst for salvation? Do you thirst for assurance that you are going to heaven and that you are safe when the day of your death comes? Do you thirst for that? Jesus is saying to you come to me and you'll never thirst again. Jesus wants you to hear that. When Jesus says come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest, he is saying that so that your burden might be lifted and he is saying that so that your soul might be at rest. When Jesus says my sheep hear my voice,

I know them, they follow me, I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. Jesus is saying that so that your worrying mind will be comforted so that your bruised heart will be at peace. Jesus is wanting to say all of this to you.

[32 : 59] Jesus has come to speak to us and I want you to imagine Jesus walking right up to you and standing right in front of you and saying this message is for you. I have come because I want to tell you something. I have come because I want you to hear this message. Your name is on the envelope of this message. It's for you. Jesus wants to talk to you and he wants you to listen.

Now that's amazing because remember God does not need to speak to you. God is not under any obligation to speak to you and if anything we have just done more than enough to provoke him into turning away and Hebrews 1 verses 1 and 2 could so easily say long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to her father by the prophets but in these last days he has run out of

patience so he doesn't speak anymore but it doesn't say that does it.

Thanks be to God it says but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son. So if you ask the question why has Jesus come he has come to speak to you and I hope that you can see just how astounding a truth that is and I really really hope that you're listening.

Thirdly I suppose the question that that immediately is raised by this if God the father is speaking to us through Jesus what does he want his son's message to be?

Well that brings us to verses 3 and 4 which again are two astonishing verses. 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 there. Now again we could spend a long time in these two verses and we can only scratch the surface in fact I only just want to say a little bit about the first part of verse 3 where it says he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

[35 : 50] Now there is a huge amount of teaching in these words but I want us just to focus on the very basic truth that is being emphasised that Jesus Christ shows us what God is really like.

That's what this phrase is saying and this one writer says the Son is the embodiment of God as he really is. So if you want to know what God is like then you look at Jesus Christ and that is emphasising so many different ways that's why he is called Immanuel God with us the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Immanuel which means God with us and as God with us he is the one who reveals God to us no one has ever seen God John says in verse 18 of chapter 1 of his gospel the only God who is at the Father's side that's referring to Jesus he has made him know. Jesus is the one who shows us the Father that's what Jesus was talking about in John chapter 14. Jesus said I am the way and the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except through me if you had known me you'd have known my Father also from now on you do know him and

I've seen him. Philip said to him Lord show us the Father and it's enough for us Jesus said to him have I been with you so long and you still don't know me Philip whoever has seen me has seen the Father how can you say show us the Father do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me the words that I speak to you I do not speak of my own authority but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Jesus is saying if you've seen me you've seen the Father that's because Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and he is the exact imprint of his nature so why has Jesus come he's come to fulfill the Old Testament he has come to speak to us and he has come to reveal God to us he has come to show us the Father. Now there's two amazing truths that arise from that first this verse is emphasizing that Jesus has come so that you might know the glory of God he is the radiance of the glory of God and it's the language kind of of of shining and of reflecting and just that the glory of God shines through Jesus Christ you think of the glory of God you think of the the Old Testament temple how the glory of God dwelt there and you think of how that was emphasized in Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration where it said he was transfigured before them his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as light it was an overwhelming thing to behold because the glory of God was radiating through Jesus Christ and there we get a glimpse of the worth of God just how perfect he is and that is exactly why Jesus has come so that we might know the glory of God the word became flesh and dwelt among us we have seen his glory glory as of the only son from the father full of grace and truth so that's the first amazing thing you look at Jesus you read about Jesus you see and you know the glory of God but the second thing I think is even more amazing because Jesus has not come just so that you would know the glory of God Jesus has come so that you might know the God of glory

Jesus hasn't just come so that you would know about God Jesus has come so that you will know God as he says himself in John 17 3 this is eternal life that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent and this is the heart of why Jesus came and this is the heart of why Jesus is speaking to you because God wants you to know him and that means a lot more than just knowing about him and this is really what lies at the heart of being a Christian Christian because you might know a lot about God you might know that God is strong but God wants you to know him as your strength your strength when you are weak your strength when life is hard your strength when you have feel you have made too many mistakes God wants you to know him and to know that he will be strong for you now many of us will feel weak tomorrow morning as we go back to the routine of our week but God wants you to know him as your strength and God is saying my

strength is for you you might know that God is wise but God wants you to know him as your guide and your teacher and so when we feel disillusioned when we feel confused when we feel perplexed when life just seems to make no sense at all God wants us to know his voice and his words as our comfort and their guide that's why when we open our Bibles we're not just performing some empty religious routine we are listening to the voice of God speaking to us and so when the world is going against God we want to follow him as our wisdom as our guide you might know that God is loving but God wants you to know that he loves you and that's a huge part of why Jesus has come he has come so that you and I can see and know for certain that God loves you and that he loves you with an astounding love God wants us to be like John when he says we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in him God doesn't just want you to know that he's loving God wants you to know that he loves you and he loves you with a love that is immeasurable and remember the fact that God's loves you is his business it's not yours in a sense it's not up to you to decide whether God loves you or not it's up to God and he says I do and I always will God wants you to know that he loves you and you might know that God is a father because you might know that the Lord's prayer says it or the Bible teaches us but God wants you to know him as your father as your own father and ultimately that is why God the Son has come so that you too can know God as your father not a father that is that is that is harsh and cold like some fathers can be in this world which is tragic but us are perfectly loving gentle proud father a father who just adores and delights in his children God wants you to know all of that for real in your life not in theory but in reality God has sent his son so that you can say I know God and there is no higher privilege than that and this is where real Christian theology is just the greatest thing that we can learn because theology teaches us what God is like and so as we study the Bible we learn all these amazing things about God don't we we learn God's amazing attributes his amazing characteristics his amazing nature we learn all these incredible things about God and then God says I want to be all of these things for you that is what God wants for you and that is why Jesus came he came to fulfill God's plan he came to speak the words of eternal life to us all and he came to reveal

[46 : 18] God to us so that we might know him and that's why the gospel is just the most incredible message and the coming of Jesus and the work of Jesus it's just amazing but so many people are saying I don't want to know and I really really hope that you aren't one of them God wants you to know him and that's the simplest thing in the world getting to know somebody is actually very very simple you think of getting to know somebody new you think of when I came here as a minister very few of you knew me how did you get to know me you spoke to me you spent time with me and I spent time with you and I got to know you and it was all very simple it's just as simple as God just talk to him just listen to him just spend time with him and don't ever say to God I don't want to know let's pray