

The Christ of Christmas

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[0 : 00] Hebrews chapter 1, verses 1 through 3.

! If you would stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together. 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 in 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. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated?

Every couple of years, Ligonier Ministries conducts a survey of evangelical Christians, people who claim to be born-again Christians, about their theological beliefs.

[1 : 22] In 2022, their study revealed that a significant number of evangelicals have a profound misunderstanding of the nature and character of Jesus. A couple things that stood out to me.

First, 44% of those surveyed said that Jesus was a great teacher, but He was not God. 44%.

73% agreed with the claim that Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.

73%. 73%. This is a huge problem because the New Testament clearly and repeatedly states that Jesus is the Son of God.

John, an eyewitness disciple of Jesus, at the very beginning of his gospel, gives this testimony of Him in chapter 1, verses 1 through 4. 44%.

[2 : 26] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And he adds in verse 14, And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Every New Testament book claims in a variety of ways, using different words, that Jesus is God. So why do so many people, people who say that they have been born again, say that they're believers, why do so many deny Jesus' divinity?

Well, I think an easy answer would be that they haven't read their Bible, or they haven't read and trusted what their Bible says. I think also they've probably listened to liberal scholars who give their expert opinions on who Jesus really was.

But it all boils down to Satan's attempts to deceive and mislead people about the true identity of Jesus Christ.

[3 : 45] John 8 records Jesus' testimony about His being the light of the world. The Pharisees, the religious elite, men who knew the Old Testament Scriptures and were seen in their community as experts, rejected Jesus' claims to be the Son of God.

They thought God was their Father, but Jesus revealed the identity of their true Father in the source of their deception which led them to reject Him.

In John 8, 43 through 47, Jesus asks, Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear My word.

You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him.

When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell you the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?

[4 : 53] Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reasons why you do not hear them is that you are not of God. And we don't know for sure who the human author of the book of Hebrews is because he doesn't identify himself.

Some say Paul, others suggest Barnabas, Apollos, or Luke. Luke, what we can trust is that the Holy Spirit inspired the words penned in this book.

What matters most, though, is the message or the theme of Hebrews, which is to state and demonstrate from Old Testament Scriptures the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

He is better than anything that came before. He is better than any prophet, better than any priest.

He is better than any king. He is better than any sacrifice.

He is better than anyone or anything. That is the message of Hebrews. Now, you might be thinking, okay, Pastor Mike, but this is Christmastime.

[6 : 02] Why not preach a sermon on one of the narratives about Jesus in Matthew or in Luke's gospel? Well, I'll do that next week and on Christmas Eve. But as I've already pointed out, there's a lot of confusion in the church even about the nature of Jesus Christ.

Adding to that confusion is the numerous documentaries and TV shows on streaming networks this time of year that add to that deception. And so I want to arm you and remind you of the Bible's testimony about the nature and person of Jesus to defend you against Satan's deception.

Also, this time of year presents us with ample opportunities to share the gospel, to talk about Jesus. And I hope that you'll invite your unbelieving friends, your relatives, co-workers, classmates, teammates, family members to our Christmas Eve service.

And I promise you that they will hear the gospel of Jesus, which begins not with his birth in Bethlehem, but long ago in a time before time, in eternity past.

When God set forth his redemptive plan to save sinners from their sins. The account of God's saving work recorded in our Bibles is centered on the person of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 39] From creation to recreation, the eternal word of God added a human nature to his divine nature, giving us the complete revelation of God.

He came to die, to rise, to ascend to the right hand of the majesty on high, having accomplished his mission, purifying us of our sins and giving us new life in him.

And so the main idea for this morning's sermon is that Jesus Christ is the complete revelation of God who came to purify us of our sins. Jesus Christ is the complete revelation of God who came to purify us of our sins.

As Christians at Christmas, we celebrate not just a birth, but an incarnation. We celebrate not just an historical event, but an eternal reality.

Not just a baby in a manger, but who that baby truly was, Emmanuel, God with us. God's final superior word.

[8 : 47] A better prophet, a better priest, a better king, a better sacrifice, who in atoning for our sins set us free from sin and who in rising again overcame death, giving us new and eternal life by faith in him.

This is the truth, that as Christians we delight in, that we defend, and that we celebrate, not just at Christmastime, but at all times.

Hebrews 1, 1 through 3 is a great Christmas text because it introduces Jesus not just as a baby in a manger, but as God's ultimate and complete revelation.

He is before all things. He is at the center of all things. He is the heir of all things. He is the creator of all things. He is the sustainer of all things.

He is the redeemer who provides purification for sins as the eternal word of God who added humanity to his deity to reveal God to us completely and purify us of our sins.

[9 : 50] Today, we look past the manger, down the quarters of Old Testament times to the revelation that God would send his son to save us from our sins.

And so in our text this morning, there's three revelations. Three revelations about Jesus and how he is the complete revelation of God who came to purify us of our sins. The first revelation that we see in verse 1 is the preparation for Jesus, preparation for Jesus.

Verse 1 again says, long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. Now, a few of you might hear that opening statement, and if you're a Star Wars fan, you might have the score playing in your head, you know, or the words roll through the screen, long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away.

Unlike Star Wars, the author of Hebrews takes his audience back to a time long ago, a real time involving real people whom God truly spoke to and through.

The story of God's saving work in Jesus Christ begins not during the time of the Roman Empire, but long ago in the times recorded in Old Testament scriptures when God spoke to his people and progressively revealed his redemptive plan to them.

[11:23] For centuries, God spoke to his people through men in many ways, the author of Hebrews says, sometimes audibly, sometimes in dreams, in visions, sometimes through angelic messengers, and even one time through a donkey.

God inspired men using their personalities and their writing styles to record his word in many different forms of literature, literary genres, historical narrative, poetry, and prophecy, for example. Sometimes in those words that he gave, he issued commands. Sometimes giving moral and ethical instructions, sometimes giving warnings, sometimes encouragement. Over 1,500 years, God inspired more than 40 men to write and record and preserve his word for the benefit of people living in their time, in the time Hebrews was written, and in our time.

Over the course of those years, when the Old Testament was received, God communicated truths. He gave promises which were progressively being built upon one another.

Progressive revelation refers to the way God gradually revealed his redemptive plan over time. His revelation started in the earliest chapters of the Bible.

[12:45] After Adam and Eve sinned, God made a promise. And the promise he made to them serves as the foundational layer of the gospel.

In Genesis 3, 15, after they sinned, God pronounces the curse. And he says to the snake, I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. So we hear from God a promise. A righteous seed of the woman would one day deliver a fatal blow to Satan.

But this blow would also mean affliction for him. In Genesis 15, 6, God builds on that promise, revealing more to Abraham.

Abraham, the righteous seed of the woman, who was promised in Genesis 3, will come through the lineage of Abraham. Genesis 15, 5 through 6, says that God brought Abraham outside, and he said to him, Look toward heaven and number the stars if you are able to number them.

[13:52] Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. Not only was the seed promised to come through Abraham's lineage, but we also learned that salvation from that seed comes through faith.

In Exodus, we see God deliver his people from slavery through the blood of a lamb, symbolizing the truth John the Baptist spoke about when he saw Jesus, and he declared, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

And he did that by shedding his blood on the cross to set his people free from slavery to sin. In Leviticus, God continued to build on his revelation by giving the law to show his people their need for salvation.

The instruction he gives, especially pertaining to the day of atonement in Leviticus chapter 16 and 17, revealed that the wages of sin is death, and that a substitute was needed to be saved and to be spared from God's wrath.

Over time, God continued to add further promises, clarifying those promises and those truths that he gave all the way back in Genesis 3.

[15:14] God promised David an everlasting kingdom in 2 Samuel chapter 7. And through the prophets, God revealed that this promised king would come first as a suffering servant.

Isaiah 53, 4 through 6 says, Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds, we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. The prophets also revealed a coming new covenant that would deal with sin at the heart level.

Jeremiah 31, 31 through 34. God says, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

[16:16] Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their

husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord.

I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people, and no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. In addition to these promises, God gave clues about the birth of the Messiah.

Isaiah 7, 14 says, Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. And behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.

Then Isaiah 9, 6 through 7, We have more light that shed on this promised child. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[17 : 25] Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

In Micah 5, 2, God reveals the location of Messiah's birth. But you, O Bethlehem Ephrata, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be a ruler in Israel.

Listen to this, whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days. There are other Old Testament passages that I could go to, but I think you get the point, the point that the author of Hebrews is making in verse 1.

God has spoken, revealing himself as our holy, sovereign creator, progressively revealing his plan to provide the promised one, the seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head through his own suffering, bearing our sins to save us, change us, and grant us access to his kingdom without end.

He's revealed that this Messiah will be born miraculously through a virgin in the tiniest of towns in Bethlehem. However, this baby is unlike us, is from old, he's from ancient days, he's from a time before time.

[19 : 05] He is the eternal word of God, God's complete and final revelation of himself, the fulfillment of all of God's promises, the completer of all of God's plans.

And he came to purify us of our sins. I remember in elementary school, our teacher giving us graphs, and you would plot points on the graph.

You guys, I'm sure, have done that. She'd give us these worksheets, and the worksheets had problems, and you'd solve the problem, and the problem, the answer would give you a point to plot on the graph. And as you plotted all of those points, if you did it right, you'd connect all the dots, and they would make a picture, which you would color in.

Usually that picture was something like an animal, or like a dog, or a cat, or something like that. In the Old Testament, God reveals who he is. He is holy. He reveals our problem.

We are sinful. He plots the points for us throughout his word in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, we are able to connect all the dots, and we get the complete and full picture, the full revelation, the ultimate solution to our problem.

[20 : 21] Jesus Christ, the eternal word of God, who emptied himself of heaven's glories, adding humanity to his divinity, humbling himself by coming in the form of a servant, living sinlessly, dying sacrificially, to purify us of our sins.

He is the Prince of Peace, who gives us peace with God, and peace with others, by redeeming us, cleansing us, saving us, that by faith in him, the Father adopts us as his children.

The Apostle Paul connects all these dots in Galatians 4, 4 through 5. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

The preparation of God the Father sovereignly orchestrating events from long ago, making promises, progressively revealing the identity of the one who was to come to crush the serpent's head, means at least four things for us today.

First, when Scripture speaks, God speaks. When you read the Bible, you are reading God's word.

[21 : 49] You can trust your Bible. God wants you to believe what he said in his word, to see that he is a promise keeper and that you should trust him.

Second, God is sovereign. No matter how much things seem to be falling apart in this world or in your life, the truth of Scripture, the promise of God is that he works all things together for the good of those who love him.

God's never in a state of panic. God is never not sure what's going to happen next. He is sovereign. He is in control. Third, since God is sovereign and he keeps his promises, you don't need to live in fear or worry.

The Bible demonstrates God's control over the past and it reveals his control of the future.

Everything is progressing towards the end that he has predetermined from the beginning.

Since God is trustworthy and good and faithful to keep his promises, we can live peacefully in the present. And then fourthly, keep your eyes on Jesus always.

[23 : 02] As the author of Hebrews will encourage his audience in chapter 12, verse 2, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God, looking to Jesus, looking to him as the fulfillment of God's promises, looking to him as the complete revelation of God to us, looking to him as the only source of our salvation, the one who gives us hope today because he redeemed us in the past and promised us an eternal future for those who have trusted in him and who he has promised to bring with him, to be with him in glory.

In verse 1, we see the revelation long ago in Old Testament scriptures from God to prepare the world for the coming of his promised son. Verse 2 moves from the revelation from long ago to these last days with the second revelation, the presentation of Jesus, the presentation of Jesus.

Look at how Jesus is presented in verse 2. But in these last days, he, referring to God the Father, has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

God used to speak in many different ways through many different people, but he has finally, the author says, spoken to us in one way through one person, his Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the types and the shadows and the symbols of the Old Testament. When we get to the New Testament, we have the complete revelation of God with the presentation of Jesus.

[24 : 54] The Gospels present us with his story, his miraculous birth in Bethlehem, his authoritative teaching which caused many to marvel, his miracles which demonstrated his power over nature, demons, illness, and death.

It presents us with his sinless life, his sacrificial death, his victorious resurrection, his commissioning, his disciples to go and make disciples before ascending back into heaven with the promise that he would one day return.

The epistles that follow the Gospels present us with commentary on Jesus' life and on his teaching and what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Revelation presents us with the culmination of all things, Jesus' return and final victory over Satan, the new heaven and the new earth and paradise that awaits those who have placed their faith in Jesus.

The Old Testament was given to men in bits and pieces, in fragments, all pointing, though, towards Jesus as the final and complete revelation of God, the New Testament completes the picture.

[26 : 11] If you've ever put a puzzle together, you know that the best strategy is to find the border pieces, the pieces with edges. And once you've done that, then you group other pieces by colors.

And you start putting the border together, moving from the edges of the puzzle inward. forward.

Sometimes you find a piece in that puzzle and you're like, I think this piece doesn't belong to this puzzle.

It doesn't fit anywhere, but it does fit. Slowly, but surely, piece by piece connects until you see the big picture.

Danny, my wife, likes to do puzzles and she likes these puzzles where you put the puzzle together and after you've put it together, there's an envelope, a secret envelope that comes with the puzzle that has the center piece of the puzzle.

That picture of that center piece isn't on the cover of the box of the puzzle. You can tell by the other images surrounding the puzzle what the theme of the center piece will be, but you don't know what it is until you start putting together the mysterious center pieces.

[27 : 33] I think that's a good way for us to think about progressive revelation in our Bibles. The Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible form a border for us.

Everything that follows in the historic books and the poetic books and the prophetic books build inwards towards this center piece and when we come to the New Testament we have that center piece and it's Jesus.

The New Testament completes the progressive revelation begun in the Old Testament. The incarnation of Jesus marked a transition from a time long ago to these last days.

In verse 2 we read, the phrase last days was familiar to the Jews living in the days when Hebrews was written. Whenever a Jew heard these words last days, they would immediately be reminded of Old Testament scriptures like Jeremiah 33, 14 through 6, Micah 5, 1 through 4, Zechariah 9, 9 and 16.

The author of Hebrews wants his audience to understand that Jesus is the Messiah that was promised to come in these last days. That as the Messiah he is God's divine son.

[28 : 49] He is the fullest, most complete revelation of the Father possible since he shares the Father's divine nature as the second member of the Trinity.

The author then makes the point that Jesus is God's heir and he's the heir of all things. Again, this helps us to understand the author's first century Jewish audience and how they would have understood this.

An heir in this time and culture and place was fully invested with the authority of their father. The heir had the father's full authority to speak on his behalf.

And so to speak to the son was like speaking to the father. The son's word was taken as the father's word. And so we see that Jesus is the heir of all things.

All things which he created. In Colossians 1 15-20 the apostle Paul said of Jesus that he is the image of the invisible God the firstborn of all creation.

[29 : 58] 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. And he is before all things and in him all things hold together and he is the head of the body of the church.

He is the beginning the firstborn from the dead that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross.

So please see that the Bible doesn't merely present Jesus as just a good moral teacher or a miracle worker or anything else along those lines.

It presents him as fully divine. not created but the eternal word of God through whom all things were created.

Why does this matter? Because if you get this wrong if you miss the aspect of the nature of Jesus you'll get it all wrong. If you don't have the right doctrine about creation you won't have the right doctrine about redemption.

[31 : 12] Al Mohler said creation and the gospel are inextricably linked. Friend brother sister I hope you know this you are not a highly evolved primate you were created in the image of God.

God that image has been marred by sin which separates us from our holy God.

But God has spoken and he's revealed he has promised to send one to defeat the enemies that we could not defeat.

The Old Testament tells us how God prepared the world for his arrival. The New Testament tells us about his arrival that Jesus is not just a man he is the God man.

As the God man he was able to fulfill what the law required perfection no sin. He was able to give his life as the God man as a sacrifice on the cross to atone for our sins.

[32 : 36] He was able to defeat death for us as the God man by rising again. Jesus is better. Jesus is greater than you.

He's greater than me. He's greater than anyone else because while we were all created in God's image Jesus is the exact imprint of God as verse three reveals the preeminence of Jesus the third revelation.

Verse three says 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 purifications for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

I share a lot of similarities with my father Jack my son shares similarities with me and with my father too but I'm not the exact imprint of my father and Jack is not the exact imprint of me you know you

could set us side by side and you'd be like I don't know which one of you is which you would know you could tell some similarities but he is not the exact imprint of me but Jesus is the exact imprint the exact representation of the father he and the father are of the same divine essence this is why we must affirm that Jesus isn't just a way to God but affirm and confirm and boldly say what he said that he is the only way to God Buddha

Muhammad Confucius Joseph Smith nor any other religious figure claim to be the exact imprint of God because they weren't and their ways to salvation are truly Satan's ways to blind people to the reality of who Jesus is the author of Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus is better than the prophets of old who heard a word from God but were not the word of God the author of Hebrews states another important truth about Jesus here in verse 3 when he talks about Jesus is making purification for our sins in the Old Testament times priests offered sacrifices on behalf of the people to purify them of their sins all the time they did this and as it will go on to show and we'll be going through the book of Hebrews we'll pick back up in January we'll see sometime next year that Jesus is the true and better priest who offered himself once and for all you don't need another sacrifice you don't need another priest you have the best and he purifies you of your sins additionally when the author of [35 : 37] Hebrews talks about how Jesus sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high after making purification he is talking about the authority of Jesus as king of kings he is reminding us of the reality that Jesus is above all things he is the ruler of all things he intercedes also for us right now at the right hand of the father he is preeminent he is the better prophet he is the final spokesman of God he is the better priest the final and complete atoning sacrifice for sins he is the better king ruling reigning controlling sustaining and seated at the right hand of the majesty on high for all time and it didn't start at a manger it started in eternity past in time before time D.A.

Carson wrote a poem and I don't want to fall into the stigma Southern Baptist pastors have of three points and a poem but this is a good poem and so I'm going to read it so you got three points here's your poem before there was a universe before a star or planet when time had still not yet begun I scarcely understand it the eternal word was with his God God's very self expression the eternal word was God himself and God had planned redemption the word became our flesh and blood the stuff of his creation the word was God the word was flesh astounding incarnation but when he came to visit us we did not recognize him although we owed him everything we haughtily despised him in days gone by

God showed himself in grace and truth to Moses but in the word of God made flesh Their climax he discloses for grace and truth and fullness came and showed the father's glory when Jesus donned our flesh and died this is the gospel story all who delighted in his name all who did receive him all who by grace were born of God all who in truth believed him to them he gave a stunning right becoming God's dear children here will I stay in grateful trust here I will fix my vision before there was a universe before time had not yet begun I scarcely understand it the eternal word was with his God God's very self expression the eternal word was God himself and God had planned redemption how do we adjust according to what we've read and heard

God's word praise Jesus you might think well that's too simple pastor Mike no it's not that's what you were created to do to praise Jesus celebrate Christmas with joy Christ has come you know who he is you know what he came to do you know what he's going to do when he one day comes back be merry!

Be bright! Be joyful! Talk about Jesus with others and tell them he is the Christ of Christmas we looked at the past let God's word have the final word as we look to the future praising Jesus Revelation 5:13 and I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them saying to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever let's pray Lord we thank you again for the truth of your word for the promises that you have given to see their fulfillment and

[40 : 09] Lord the hope that gives us that the promises that have yet to be fulfilled will be fulfilled because you're a God who keeps His word you're a God who sent his word to dwell among us becoming our Emmanuel God with us and being fully human and fully divine he was able to do what none of us could do and without his coming Lord we would all be without hope but Lord he came to live sinlessly and he came to die sacrificially and he rose victorious on the third day thank you Lord for who you are and thank you Lord for what you came to do to purify us of our sins give us new and everlasting life God of all people in this world of all people we have the most reason to celebrate we have the greatest reason to be joyful and so

God I pray that not just this time of year but at all times that as we move in this world as your lights that people would see the joy that we have because we know who Jesus is we know what Jesus has done we know you Jesus personally and we know what you're going to do and so God I pray that if there's anybody here this morning who does not know you they've come face to face with that and I pray!

Lord that in your grace you would have been gracious to save again I pray that this time of year in all times Father that people would see the joy that we have in you and that we would share that joy in our hopes that you would save more and receive all the glory and we ask this in Jesus name
Amen