

‘The last days’

A man walking along a Scottish beach was deep in prayer when all of a sudden he said aloud, ‘Lord grant me one wish’. The sky clouded and a booming voice said, ‘Because you have tried to be faithful I will grant you one wish.’ The man said, ‘Build a bridge to Ireland so I can drive over anytime I want to.’ The Lord answered, ‘Your request is very materialistic. Think of the logistics of that kind of undertaking. The supports required to reach the bottom of the Irish Sea! The concrete and steel it would take. I can do it, but it is hard for me to justify your desire for worldly things. Take a little more time to think of another wish, a wish you think would honour and glorify me’.

The man thought for a long time and finally said, ‘Lord, I wish that I could understand my wife. I want to know what she feels inside, what she’s thinking when she gives me the silent treatment, why she cries, what she means when she says ‘nothing’, and how I can make a her truly happy?’ After a few minutes, God said, ‘Ok, how many lanes did you want on that bridge?’

It’s amazing how we can’t fully understand the opposite sex sometimes but yet some people claim to fully understand our God. I’ve been asked to speak from the **letter of Hebrews** today but before we get into the text I think it’s important for us to understand the background to this letter first.

This letter, which was written around **65 A.D.** was written to Hebrew Christians. And it was written because thirty years or more after Pentecost, the novelty of the faith had begun to worn off. Things have settled down into some sort of pattern, and any hope of a mass conversion of Israel had faded.

If the Jewish Christians had believed that their fellow Jews would embrace the Gospel as readily as they had themselves, they were disappointed. Some of them may possibly have expected an early return of the Lord, in which case they were again disappointed. The end of the old religion is nowhere in sight, the temple was still standing and the priests were still offering their sacrifices.

And so these Hebrew Christians were beginning to feel isolated, beginning to feel cut off. Think about their position, because they became Christians, they would have been excommunicated from the temple. They would have been unwelcomed in the synagogues. They would have been ostracized from Jewish society. Estranged from their families, and in some instances, no doubt, divorced from their husbands and wives. It’s not surprising then, under those circumstances that some of them may had begun to wonder if they had left Judaism a bit too quickly.

Maybe some of them thought they had made a huge mistake in becoming Christians. In their minds, maybe their thinking they’ve lost a lot more than they had gained. And, apart from the domestic, social and religious excommunication they were experiencing, there was something more, which weighed very heavily on their consciences. They had the feeling that they had abandoned their historic heritage as Jews. They were cut off from their nation’s past, their rich history.

They felt they could no longer speak of being related to the covenants which God had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and all the other Old Testament worthies. For them this would had been a terrible thought. And so for these Hebrew Christians the danger existed that they might slip away from the faith and revert back to Judaism.

And this is why the letter was written, to reassure them that being a Christian was a much better position to be in than being a Jew. It was written to warn them not to go back to Judaism because in doing so, they would miss out on the better promises of God.

Now the letter to the Hebrews is very unique because it begins like no other New Testament letter. It begins like an essay, continues like a sermon and concludes like a letter. Which tells us that we don’t know who wrote the letter and more importantly helps us understand that it wasn’t the apostle Paul or any other apostle who wrote it.

In fact, we know that it wasn’t an apostle because the writer himself says in **Hebrews 2:3** **“This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.”** Notice that the writer doesn’t include himself in the group of those who heard directly from the Lord. And since we know that Paul did hear from the Lord directly, we can conclude that Paul wasn’t the author. So now we have the background to the letter in place let’s go ahead and deal with the text I’ve been assigned.

Hebrews 1:1+2 “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.”

Notice how the writer begins, he writes as a matter of fact. There’s no doubt or question about the existence of God, he simply says, ‘in the past God’. We find a similar style of writing in Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God.” Again, in John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Again, there’s no doubt or question about the existence of God. In other words, the Bible never sets out to argue for the existence of God, it’s taken as a matter of fact that God is, God exists.

And because the writer says, ‘at many times and in various ways’ this actually implies that God had more to say. In other words, each prophet didn’t carry the final message. The whole truth wasn’t out yet, God’s revelation wasn’t complete yet. We know that God first spoke directly to the patriarchs, then God spoke through the written law. Then God spoke in dreams and visions and God also spoke through the prophets. But God wasn’t done revealing His word yet.

And I use the word ‘but’ because that’s the word the writer of this letter uses. And he uses that word to emphasise the contrast between how God spoke and revealed His Word to mankind in the past and how He revealed His complete and final revelation in Jesus. He says, ‘but in these last days’ which is obviously a Messianic reference.

Now there are times when I get a knock at the door and there are usually two very polite religious people telling me how bad the world is today and how Jesus is coming soon because we are living in the last days. They bring to my attention all the wars and famines which are happening throughout the world and try to convince me that these are all ‘signs’ that we’re living in the last days.

But loved ones, we’ve been living in the last days ever since the arrival of Jesus. The last days are the days of the Messiah, not the end of the world. Several centuries before the birth of Christ, the prophet Joel in Joel 2:28+29 foretold that the Spirit of God would be ‘poured out’ in the ‘last days’.

When Peter preached the first Gospel message to the Jews in Acts 2 he says in Acts 2:17 “And in the last days it will be,’ God says, ‘that I will pour out my Spirit on all people, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.”

Peter quotes from Joel 2 and notice how he describes the days in which they were living at that point in time. He describes them at that point in time as living in ‘the last days’. Countless sermons have been preached, thousands of books have been sold which all try tell to tell us that certain things are happening in the world today and they tell us these are all signs that Jesus is about to return. And so they go out on the streets preaching and they have these posters which say, ‘the end is near, we’re in the last days.’

People have been proclaiming the end of the world since 66 A.D. Simon bar Giora who was a member of a Jewish sect was the first to predict the end of the world. The Jehovah’s Witnesses have tried to predict the end of the world at least 3 times. Most recently Harold Camping tried to predict the end of the world twice. And did you know that there are around 13 different new predictions for the end of the world coming up in the next few years?

All of these predictions past and present have claimed the signs are there, to warn us we’re living in the last days. Well loved, of course we’re in the last days, and we’ve been there for the last two thousand years. Look at what Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:1 he tells him, “There will be terrible times in the last days”. And then Paul lists a whole bunch of non-Christ like attitudes but look at what he tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:5 “Have nothing to do with such people.”

This is present tense, have nothing to do with those people who were around at that time. That in itself, tells us that Timothy was living in ‘the last days’. When Peter is talking about the Christ, he says in 1 Peter 1:20 “He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake”. Was Jesus around during the time of the Apostle Peter? Of course, He was. Peter understood he was living in the last times.

Jesus uses a similar kind of language in Matthew 24:1-35. Now remember the disciples have come to Jesus privately to ask Him ‘what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’ And so Jesus is answering their questions.

Let me give you an example of how Jesus answers them, in **Matthew 24:19** Jesus says, “**How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!**” He uses the words ‘**those days**’ throughout this text, when He’s describing the destruction of Jerusalem. But when we carry on reading from **Matthew 24:36** through to **Matthew 26:46**, He uses the words ‘**that day**’ to describe what will happen at the end of the world. Look at **Matthew 24:36** “**But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father**”.

Do you see how His words are more specific? Now if we were studying the topic of ‘**the end of the world**’ that’s one of the texts we would go to. But we’re not studying that today, we’re studying the topic of ‘**the last days**’ which aren’t something still to come. ‘**The last days**’ were then, as the prophets looked forward to the time by speaking of ‘**in those days and at that time**.’ If the world continues for another thousand years, we would still be in the last days.

And so God formerly spoke through the prophets at many times and many ways, but in these ‘**last days**’ He has spoken to us by His Son. **But who are the ‘us’?** Well, many times when a New Testament writer speaks about ‘**us**,’ he speaks as an apostle and about what the apostle’s experienced. But by looking at **Hebrews 2:3** again we notice that the author doesn’t include himself as an eyewitness.

In other words, this ‘**us**’ isn’t an apostolic ‘**us**’, the writer is simply identifying himself with his audience in his sermon. He’s saying that God had spoken to all of His followers through His Son. Before God spoke through the prophets at many times and in many ways. But now God spoke through His Son which actually suggests finality. God’s final speech was through His Son, God’s message is now complete. God isn’t still speaking at many times and in many ways by the Son.

Look again what the text says, ‘**God has spoken**’, past tense ‘**by His Son**’. God has revealed His total truth and that truth is now out. That final truth wasn’t revealed through prophets, it was revealed through His Son. **But why did God choose His Son to be the final message?** Well simply because Jesus is the One whom God appointed to have all authority.

The writer says, “**in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.**” In other words God has spoken through His Son and His Son carries great authority. The Son has been appointed heir of all things and because He has this authority, the Son can make good on the words He has declared.

The authority of the Son is so great that it is through the Son that ‘**the universe was made**’. The Son is authoritative, the Son’s word is authoritative. The Son is the final, completed message of God. That’s why John in his Gospel says in **John 1:1** that the Son is the ‘**logos**’, the Word. And remember Jesus didn’t exist as Jesus before He came, He was known as the Word until He became flesh and then He became known as Jesus, as **John 1:14** tells us.

Now before we get into all the practical implications of our theme, I don’t believe we would be doing any justice to the writer without reading the next verse in Hebrews. Because what we are going to see is that it actually emphasises more not only about who Jesus is but what that actually means for us today in terms of revelations from God.

Hebrews 1:3 “**The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.**”

Now I don’t know about you but I find this sentence in **verse 3** simply mind-blowing. I find it mind-blowing because it’s so powerful and so vivid. Jesus is so great that He is described as the radiance of God’s glory, shining the brightness of God’s glory. **Isaiah 40:3-5** says, “**A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”**”

Jesus is the fulfilment of prophecy concerning the glory of God. And the writer tells us that Jesus is also the exact representation of God’s nature. In other words, when you see Jesus, you see God. We haven’t seen God, but we have seen Jesus. The Son gives a clear picture of the very character of God, the Son is exactly like the Father, Jesus is identical.

Now this is the passage to use when people try to persuade us that Jesus was a lesser god or a created god.

The text is actually saying that Jesus is the carbon copy of God, completely identical in every way. Or to be more literal, Jesus is of the exact same substance of God.

A friend of mine used to own a farm on which he kept good horses. Sadly, one night the barn caught fire. He and some of his sons went out to rescue the horses. But the horses wouldn't leave the stable, thinking that they were secure there. They tried shouting and talking to the horses to get them out to safety but the horses simply didn't understand what they were saying. So in desperation some of them they blindfolded and let out. Others just wouldn't go and died in the blaze. A few weeks later on reflection they were still pretty upset about the horses that died in the blaze. My other friend tried to comfort them by saying, 'the only way you could have saved them all, was by being able to speak their language and the only way to speak their language is by becoming a horse yourself'.

Well in a sense that's what God had tried in various ways. He tried to warn people about sin and its consequences but they didn't understand, they didn't understand the danger they were in. And so, in effect God came down to earth as a human, in the form of Jesus, so He could speak to us in a language we could understand. People wouldn't listen to the prophets, people wouldn't pay attention to the signs, miracles and wonders, so God, to help us understand, became a man.

God spoke through prophets before, but now God has spoken definitively and completely through the Son. The Son is superior in His message, His powerful words uphold the universe. And notice what else the Son is, He is a priest. The writer says, 'the Son made purification for sins' which means the Son whose powerful word upholds the universe and whose words contain the final, complete message of God is a priest.

But He is no ordinary priest, **Hebrews 5** tells us He is our High Priest, but here in **Hebrews 1**, He is described as a special priest because He made purification for sins, notice again its past tense. In word words, the Son took care of sin, He made a cleansing of sin, and He was able to remove the stain of sin. When John the baptiser stood on the banks of the river Jordan, he saw Jesus coming toward him and **what did he say?**

John 1:29 "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Notice he doesn't say, 'sins' of the world, but 'sin'. That's because Jesus came to remove sin in it's totally, He came to take away the total consequences of sin. When Jesus went to Bethany because his friend Lazarus had died, when he got there, Mary and the others were crying and John tells us in **John 11:35** that "Jesus wept". **Why's He crying?** Well it's certainly not because his friend had died, after all He's about to raise him back to life. No! He's crying because He saw what we fail to see time and time again, He saw the total consequences of sin.

And so after making purification for sins, 'He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven'. Now to sit down suggests that the work of the Son was complete. He has done what was needed to be accomplished. There is no more to do, His work is complete, and the work of purification for sins was completed. The work of revealing the glory of God was completed. The work of being God's final message to the world was completed. In His own words, it is what Jesus who said in **John 19:30**, "It is finished." He is the prophet whom Moses wrote about in **Deuteronomy 18:18** through whom God's final, complete message has been revealed.

So what have we learned so far? Jesus is superior because God's final message came through Him. Jesus is superior because creation occurred through Him. Jesus is superior because He upholds the universe by His powerful word. Jesus is superior because He is the radiance of God's glory. Jesus is superior because He is the exact representation of God's character. Jesus is superior because He made purification for sins. Jesus is superior because He sat down with His worked finished at God's right hand as prophet, priest, and king. We serve a great Lord and Saviour in Jesus, **don't we?**

Now let's go ahead and look at some of the implications this means if we believe everything I've just spoken about. **If Jesus was God's final revelation to mankind, what are we to make of those who claim that God is still revealing His will to them today?** Because I've personally met people who claim that God spoke to them in a dream.

I've personally met people who claim that God told them to divorce their husbands because God wanted them to go to Ghana on a mission trip. I've personally spoke with people who claim that God told them they would work in the Whitehouse. I even know people who claim they are on first name terms with the angel Gabriel.

I remember studying with one young woman who claimed that God was communicating with her through her dreams and after some discussion I took her to **Hebrews 1:1+2**.

We spoke about what God was saying to her, and I showed her that everything she claimed had already been revealed in Scripture, there was nothing new she had been told, a few weeks later she became Christian. The woman who divorced her husband because she claimed that God told her to go to Ghana for mission work. I asked her, **do you really believe that God wants you to divorce your husband? Or is it you who just wants to give up on your marriage?** I never saw her again.

The woman who said that God told her she would work in the Whitehouse, I simply asked her, **isn't it amazing how God never tells us to do something we don't want to do anyway?** The people who claimed that God sent Gabriel to them with a special message, all of them admitted that every message had already been revealed within the Scriptures.

Now the truth of the matter is when you talk with many of these people you will often find that the message they supposedly received from God can be found within Scripture. There are no new messages from God because He revealed everything we need to know in and through Christ and in His Word. **2 Timothy 3:16+17 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."**

The Bible either thoroughly equips us or it doesn't. If the Scriptures equip us thoroughly, we don't need a direct, audio message from the Lord. Yes, God used to speak directly to people like Adam and Abraham and Moses etc. Yes, He spoke to people like Joseph in dreams and yes He spoke with people like Isaiah in visions. Yes, God used angels to convey His words to mankind.

Did the Bereans who were noble people wait for a direct message from God to see if what they were being taught was true or not? Acts 17:11 "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." They didn't wait for a message from God, they examined the Scriptures every day to find out if what Paul was teaching was true or not.

Jude says in **Jude 3 "I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to God's holy people."** Jude says the faith which is God's complete revealed message, has been delivered once for all, so again there's no need for an on-going, direct communication from God.

Now let me tell you the problem with people claiming that God has given them a direct message. The problem is that anyone can make things up and no one can prove them wrong. In other words, anything goes.

I remember many years ago a friend of mine went into a meeting place where people were supposedly prophesying. The preacher was about to get on stage to deliver his message when a younger man in the audience said that God told him he was to speak today. The preacher calmly asked him, 'when did God tell you that you were to speak today'? The young man said, 'He told me late last night'. To which the preacher said, 'well, God spoke directly to me first thing this morning, so I guess He's changed His mind'.

Loved ones it wasn't all that long ago where a Birmingham man murdered his family because he claimed that God told him to do it. **Does God change His mind? Does He contradict Himself by commanding one thing in the Scriptures and commanding the opposite if He speaks directly to us?**

1 Corinthians 13:8-10 tells us that the supernatural gifts of tongues, knowledge and prophecy will cease when that which is perfect arrives. **And what is that which is perfect?** It's the final and complete Word of God, the Bible. Now either Paul misunderstood what the Holy Spirit inspired him to write or people are still using supernatural gifts today to reveal God's will. But we can't ignore what the **Hebrew** writer says, **'God used to speak to people in various way and at different times but now He speaks through His Son'.**

So what's happening in the religious world around us today? I believe there are people who are genuine in their beliefs and truly love God with all their hearts but they're looking for spirituality in all the wrong areas. They're spirituality is based on their feelings and emotions. But we are supposed to judge our emotions and experiences by the Word of God.

Sadly, some people do this in reverse and they put their emotions and feelings before the Word of God. Or as Solomon once said in **Proverbs 14:12 "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death"**.

I know one man who went along to a meeting one evening, said the ‘sinner’s prayer’, the pastor had a line of people all ready to impart the gift of the Holy Spirit along with the gifts of tongues. There were about ten people in that line and that young man was near the end of the queue and he didn’t know what to expect. The people before him, as the pastor was laying his hands on them and speaking in so called tongues, begun to fall to the ground one at a time and started speaking in so called tongues. Some fell to the ground and started throwing themselves around as if they were having a seizure or a fit.

Well, the pastor came to that young man, laid his hands on him, started speaking in so called tongues but the young man felt nothing except the gentle push the pastor gave him in order for him to fall back. So he didn’t resist, he fell back and pretended to speak in so called tongues.

Loved ones that young man just did what was expected of him because he wanted to fit in and didn’t want to feel out of place. He wanted God so badly in his life, he just went along with the crowd because he was desperate for forgiveness. Now thankfully years later he did find God, not through some dream or vision but through a simple Bible study. Now that’s a true story and I know it’s a true story because that young man was me. People, like I was, are so desperate for spiritually and so desperate to feel spiritually important they will believe and claim almost anything.

And how do we deal with people who claim God speaks to them today through the miraculous? Well, we certainly don’t put them down and call them delusional. No, we do what Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos, Acts 18:26 “When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.”

We are living in the last days, we have been for the last 2000 years and will continue to live in the last days until Jesus comes to take us home. There are no new revelations from God because everything God wanted us to know has already been revealed either through His creation and in His word. Jesus is God’s final spokesman to mankind in this last age, He brought the fullness of God’s revelation to us, and because of that there are no more messages.

But does God still speak to us today? Of course He does. He speaks to us every time we read the Bible. He speaks to us every time we sit in a Bible study. He speaks to us every time we see that rainbow in the sky. He speaks to us every time we stop long enough to admire His creation. He speaks to us every time we talk to other Christians about Christian things. He speaks to us every time we hear a sermon being preached.

And I don’t know about you but there have been times when I’m listening to a sermon and I think to myself, is the preacher speaking directly to me? Well yes, he is, God is using the preacher, who’s preaching from God’s Word a message that God wants us to hear. And so, God can rebuke us, encourage us, inspire us, comfort us, console us, guide us, and challenge us and so much more in different ways today.

Jesus will come one day soon and I use the word ‘soon’ not because there are signs to tell us, He’s on His way. But simply because the New Testament writers speak of Christ’s returning ‘soon’ with the apparent expectation that He might return in the writers’ own lifetimes. However, the meaning of returning ‘soon’ is that it would happen ‘at any moment.’

It’s a bit like my answering machine on my house phone. The message informs the caller that I can’t reach the phone right now but if they leave a message I’ll get back to them ‘soon’. Now I use that same message whether I expect to be gone for two minutes or two weeks, for the very simple reason that I want to encourage the person to stay in touch without revealing exactly how long I will be gone.

Jesus is coming soon and we don’t need to be looking for signs of the times, but we should be living like Martin Luther once said, ‘I have only had two days on my calendar, today and that day.’ The question isn’t are we living in the last days? We’ve already established that we are. The question is are we ready for Jesus’ return?