

THE LATEST AND LAST WORD FROM GOD

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Albert Einstein was scheduled to be the speaker at a banquet for distinguished Americans. When it came time for him to speak, he rose slowly amid hearty applause, moved to the podium, and quietly noted, “I am sorry, but I have nothing to say.” He paused and silence gripped the audience. Then, he added, “But when I do, I will come back!” Six months later he did return and made an important speech.

God did something similar. The author of Hebrews says, *“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us by the Son...”* After the prophecies of Malachi, God stopped speaking to the world and the Hebrew scriptures were closed. For 450 years there was silence. Then came what Christians call “the incarnation.” God made his ultimate speech in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. (1)

The Epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament asserts that God is a God who speaks, who reveals himself. In the past, Hebrews notes, God spoke in many and various ways – in dreams, through a pillar of fire, via the prophets. Then for a long time there was silence. However, now God has spoken through his Son. Jesus is the zenith of God’s self-disclosure. God’s revelation is not limited to Jesus, but in Jesus is it superior to all others.

Specifically, Hebrews asserts God has progressively revealed himself. It’s what theologians call “progressive revelation.” (2) There is progress and movement within the

Bible. God is more fully revealed by the end of the New Testament in Revelation than at the end of the Old Testament in Malachi. Yet, it is not a case where the New Testament corrects or improves the Old Testament. In science new knowledge often corrects old knowledge. For instance, before Copernicus and Columbus many postulated that the world was flat and if you ventured out far enough, you'd fall off the edge. They believed the earth was the center of the universe and the sun revolved around it. Such was the commonly held scientific view. However, with the travels of Columbus and development of astronomy, we learned that the world is round. The earth revolves around the sun with moon revolving around the earth. New science corrected old science.

This is not how progressive revelation works. It is not the case that God revealed himself in many and various ways in the O.T. and then during the 450 year period of silence said, "You know I really gave those folks the wrong impression of me and they jumped to some erroneous conclusions. I'd better correct that." The N.T. does not correct the O.T., it fulfills it. Jesus said he came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Revelation is the process of filling in the pieces of a puzzle. Over time as God revealed the divine will and way, pieces of the puzzle of life – the nature and character of God, the nature of the universe, the nature of humankind, the question or what happens to us at death, the basis of ethics and the meaning of history – have been gradually filled in. More remains to be known. Jesus Christ is the key piece of the puzzle.

Hebrews explains why. It says Jesus Christ is the radiance of God's glory and the exact replica of God's being. He is the creator of all things. He sustains all things by his

powerful word. He is the destined heir of creation. He is the redeemer who made purification for our sins. He is the victor who sits at God the Father's right hand. All the reasons listed here are compelling, but the most compelling is "*(Jesus Christ) is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being.*" This is very similar to what John says of Jesus, "*In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.*"

This description of Jesus as the radiance of God is a great description for contemporary readers of Hebrews like us this morning. We live in the nuclear age. We are knowledgeable about atomic energy. For instance we know that anytime radiation is detected, it comes from a radiating source. The radiation the source gives off can be called effulgence or radiance. This is particularly true with light. It is primary radiation coming straight from a source. If there is radiation, there must be a radiating source, and a radiating source must radiate.

In atomic laboratories an atomic reactor must have a shield to protect bystanders. But to retain access to the reactor a small door is provided in the shield through which instruments may be inserted for testing or maintenance. Humorously, the scientists call this "the glory hole." Like an atomic reactor God radiates glory. God is glorious like the sun and must shine forth. It is God's nature to do so. (4) Jesus Christ is the radiance of God's glory. In him God shines forth.

And, Hebrews declares, Jesus Christ is "*the exact imprint of God's very being.*" This phrase "*the exact imprint*" may also be translated as "the express image" and "*of God's very being*" may also be translated as "of God's very essence." (5)

Jesus Christ is the essence of God. This is why he has said, “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*” (John 14.9) It is why the Nicene Creed says Jesus is of “one substance with the Father.” The Son is made of the same stuff as the Father, or whatever God is Jesus is that too.

A small boy peered at a painting of Jesus and pondered it for a long time in thoughtful silence. His father was surprised and amused by his son’s studious quietness. So he asked him, “What are you doing son?” “Looking at this picture of Jesus,” he replied. Then with an approving nod added, “That’s the best picture God ever had made.”

The author of Hebrews would say, “Amen.” Jesus Christ is the best picture of God that God ever made. He is the ultimate revelation of God and the exact imprint of God’s being. Nowhere else, from no one else, can we gain such insight into God’s nature and character, and into God’s will and way for us. Throughout history God has revealed himself in a variety of ways but Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God. He is God’s latest and last word. For this reason we worship and serve him.

SOURCES:

1. *Pulpit Digest*, “Something to Say,” S. Robert Weaver, Nov.-Dec. 1981, p.59.
2. R.C. Sproul, “Themes from Hebrews,” LVSC, Tape One, Side Two.
3. Louis Evans Jr., *The Communicators Commentary*, Vol. 10, p.53.
4. *Ibid*, p.53
5. *Ibid*, p.54
6. *Ibid*, p.54