

Why Did Jesus Come?

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Preacher: Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] As we turn to God's word, let's pray. Father, please help us as we turn to your word to see more of you and to know you more closely in every part of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, I'd like us tonight to turn back to the chapter that we read. We're going to focus especially on the first four verses. Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, he spoke unto 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 theirs. It is hard to imagine a more stunning introduction to a letter. This opening to the letter to the Hebrews is one of the big glorious introductions to the books of the Bible. A bit like Genesis 1, John chapter 1, Hebrews chapter 1 is just straight in there with some of the richest and most profound verses that we find in scripture.

We could spend many weeks just looking at these four verses alone. One of the things that I love about these verses is that straight away the writer of this letter is immediately focusing our attention on God the Son. And that's really what the letter to the Hebrews is all about. It is all about Jesus. And from the moment we start reading, the author wants us to be thinking about who Jesus is and what he has done. In particular, the author is wanting to strongly emphasize and to help us to see the superiority of Jesus. If Hebrews is a book that you're maybe not familiar with, the background to it is that in these early days in the New Testament you had many people who had been Jews and had grown up that way and who had heard about Jesus and who had come to faith and had become part of the church.

Really that went fairly smoothly in most places in the very early years because people could still be part of the Jewish community and yet they embraced the Christian faith. But after not many years, maybe even after just 10 or 15 years, that kind of integration began to fade and it began to be harder and harder to stay within the Jewish community if you'd become a Christian. And before long, the two camps were very hostile. So if you were a Christian, you were immediately separated from your Jewish roots in many ways. For the people who are receiving this letter, this kind of exposure that being a Christian brought made life more difficult for them. And the basic gist of their situation was that they were tempted to go back. Because of the hardship they were receiving for being Christians, they were like, well, life would probably be easier if we just went back to kind of conventional mainstream Judaism and if we just stopped following Jesus. The great message of the letter to the Hebrews is don't do it. And in order to reinforce that, the writer wants to emphasize that Jesus is superior. And he goes through various things. He says that Jesus is superior to the angels, superior to Moses, superior to the high priest, superior to the sacrificial system. That's the great emphasis of this remarkable letter. And so from the moment we start, the focus is entirely on Jesus. And I want us to look at these verses and just ask a very simple question, which is, why has Jesus come? We spend a lot of time at this time of year thinking about the incarnation, the fact that Jesus has come into the world, and Christmas brings these things to the forefront of our minds more so than any other time of year. But we are asking the question, why did Jesus come? And what I want us to notice is that we're given three important answers in this passage. But none of them are necessarily the answers we tend to automatically think of. But they're important and I want us to see them. So first of all, what I want us to notice is that the writer begins his letter by drawing a contrast between long ago and these last days. So if you look, you can see that there. First two words, long ago, and then zip along to the end of the second line in these last days. And he's drawing a contrast between a time that's gone and a time that they are in now. That contrast between long ago and these last days is emphasizing two important points. Number one, it's telling us that the birth of Jesus is part of a much bigger story. Long ago, it's referring to God's revelation in the Old Testament era. And the great message of the Old Testament was one of anticipation.

The Old Testament was looking forward, expecting, pointing, prophesying towards something that was going to come. We don't believe that the Old Testament and the New Testament are what we would call discontinuous in the sense that the Old Testament is like scrapped and ditched by the New Testament. Some people think that the New Testament is to kind of like completely undo the Old Testament. We don't believe that. We believe that they're distinct, but their relationship is one of anticipation and then fulfillment. When the writer says long ago, he is talking about all that the Old Testament was pointing us towards. The coming of Jesus is part of a bigger story. But the second key point that relates to that is that the ultimate coming of Jesus is the definitive fulfillment of that story. Because notice, it doesn't say long ago and these days. It says long ago and these last days. And that word last is really important because it's emphasizing the fact that Jesus has come as the fulfillment and culmination of the Old Testament. In the

[7:10] Old Testament it said, days are coming in Jeremiah 31, for example. Now that Jesus has come, these days are here. And that means that we today are living in the last days.

In the sense that this is the final period of God's revelation to humanity. That revelation is complete in the message of Scriptures. Of the Scriptures. We're no longer anticipating.

We're not waiting for the Messiah to come for the first time. We're not waiting for these promises to be fulfilled as in the days of the Old Testament. We now live in the days when God's message is complete and the promises have been fulfilled. That's an extraordinary privilege. What you know, even if your knowledge of the Bible is maybe not as good as you would like it to be, what you know is way more than what many, many people living in the Old Testament just wished they knew. And we can look back and see how things fitted together in a way that went beyond anything that they were able to grasp. It's a massive privilege to have God's completed revelation in our hands. But with that privilege comes enormous responsibility.

Because if these are the last days, it means that these are the days of reckoning. And these are the days when we need to respond to what God is saying.

So we're asking the question, why is Jesus come? The first thing that we're saying, we're asking the question, why is Jesus come? Our first answer is that he's come as the fulfillment of all that was said in the Old Testament long ago. It's interesting, even if you look at these first four verses, there is tons of Old Testament stuff being hinted at in these verses. So you read through there on the third line, it's a fourth line rather, it speaks about creating, taking us right back to Genesis chapter one. Just before that, it talks about Jesus as an heir of all things. That word heir is echoing the language of the family. And the theme of family runs through the whole Bible from Abraham through the nation of Israel all the way down to Jesus. When it speaks about the glory of God there in the one, two, three, four, five, sixth line down, that's immediately pointing us back to the temple where God's glorious presence had come in a special way. When it talks about purification for sins near the bottom, that's pointing us to God's law and the fact that sin is all the ways in which that law has been broken. The phrase majesty on high speaks of God's kingdom, the fact that Jesus now reigns. And all of it is pointing us back to the fact that Jesus has come as the fulfillment of the new covenant, bringing together all that the Old Testament was pointing towards. And that raises a really important point for us.

[10:29] A simple but really important point. This focus on Jesus is telling us that we need Jesus. But we don't need more than Jesus. And that's a crucial point to remember because the devil has caused havoc throughout history by telling two desperate lies. First lie is that you don't need Jesus. And many people have listened to that lie. But the second lie is to say that you need more than Jesus. And there have been countless manifestations of different beliefs and religions and cults and sects where people have said, oh yeah, we can have Jesus and we can believe in Jesus, but you need to do something more. You need this extra book. You need this extra way of life. You need to follow these extra commandments.

You need to have these extra experiences. You need to form and you need to conform to these extra habits. Do not be tricked by either of these lies. Never think that you don't need Jesus. And never think that you need more than Jesus. The great emphasis of Hebrews is that he's the one we need and he has come. The second thing I want us to see arises from the fact that in these verses there's a lot of rich language and in many ways there's a lot of big theological words. But in those four verses there is one main phrase. And that's always a good question to ask whenever you read a passage of the Bible, a verse or a chunk like this, always ask yourself the question, what is the main phrase that's being written here? And if you look at this passage, there is one main phrase because we have some bits that are kind of background information. We have some bits that are kind of explanatory information. But these are both to complement the main phrase. What is the main phrase in this passage? Have a look at it. The main phrase is where it says he has spoken to us by his son. If you look at it you can see that. First part is background information.

Long ago that's background information. Many times in many ways God spoke to us by the prophets. In these last days he has spoken to us by his son. And then the rest of it is further explanatory information about who that son is. But the main phrase, the main point is that God has spoken to us by his son. So if we return to our question, why has Jesus come? The answer that verse two is giving us is Jesus has come to speak to us. Now isn't that interesting? You think of Christmas and you think of Jesus being born. You think of say somebody had come to our carol service last week or came up to you this week and asked the question, let's always talk about Jesus at Christmas. Why was Jesus born? Why did He come? What would you say? Well, we would probably say something like, well, He came to save us from our sins. He came to die on the cross. He came to give us eternal life. These would all be absolutely true. And these are the answers that would come to my mind. But Hebrews chapter one verse two is telling us that if you had asked the question, why has Jesus come, your response should be, He came to speak to us. And I think that's absolutely fascinating. Now at one level, that sounds so simple. And in many ways,

Jesus did speak like every other person speaks. But there's something incredibly profound. If we think about that a wee bit more, in fact, what's been conveyed to us here is one of the most important theological truths that we can ever consider. Because just think about it. Where would we be if God refused to speak to us? Where would we be if God just cut off all contact with humanity? We would be lost. We would be blindly wandering our way through a life that seems meaningless with no origin and no destination. We'd have no idea what was right or wrong. We would just please ourselves. We would do what was right in our own eyes.

We would have no idea what was really true. So we would be in a mess of everybody making up all their own ideas and nobody able to answer the big questions of life. Without God speaking to us, we would be in a mess. But the desperate truth of humanity is that we are in that mess today, but not because God hasn't spoken. It's because we're not listening. But the glorious truth of the Bible is that God is a God who speaks. That's what we mean by the doctrine of revelation that God reveals Himself to us. He communicates with us, and in doing so, He shows us who He is by talking to us. In fact, the Bible makes it clear that God is a God who accomplishes His purposes by speaking. And these verses emphasize that very powerfully. Verse 2 tells us that it was through God the Son that the world was created. So when you read Genesis chapter 1 way back at the beginning, and you read about the activity of God, you're actually reading about the activity of God the Son.

[16 : 41] And how did He create the world? What did He do? He spoke. He said, let there be light. And Hebrews chapter 11 goes on to say, by faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God. Verse 3 tells us that God upholds the universe how? By the Word of His power. God accomplishes His purposes by speaking. And that of course is why Jesus came as a speaker. He taught and He preached to people. Jesus has come to speak to us.

And boy has He got amazing things to say. And I've picked just three examples which, I don't think random is the right word, but there isn't a particular reason why I chose these other than they just simply stand out to me. But here's three things that Jesus said. He said, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. He said, 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. He said, 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 these words are maybe familiar to us, I might have heard them before, but we really need to stop and think about them. Has anyone ever spoken in that way? Can anyone say that kind of thing? When Jesus speaks, He gives the most profound teaching. He expresses the greatest comfort. He offers the most loving invitation, and He preaches the best news that humanity has ever heard. In the middle of Jesus' ministry, the Pharisees sent some officers to arrest Him. Can you remember what they said when they came back? They didn't come back with Jesus in chains. They came back to the Pharisees and they said, no one ever spoke like this man. Jesus has come to speak, and that is why the enduring foundation of Christianity is what? What is the enduring foundation of Christianity? A collection of words. Many other religions are grounded on a place, or a statue, or practices, or habits. Christianity is founded on words, the word of God, the fact that God has spoken. That's why we regard the Bible as authoritative.

That's why if you abandon the Bible, you abandon Christianity. That's why it's so important to read your Bible, and not just to read it and chuck it down, but to read and listen and think. If you're going into 2020, whether you use the Walk With Me devotional, or whether you're doing your own Bible reading habits, I don't mind which one you do, but one thing I absolutely would ask you to do is not just zap through it as though you've got to just read it and get it done, which I do far too often. When you read the Bible, when you listen to Walk With Me as Billy explains, Versus of Scripture, stop and think. Take it in, and let God shape you through His Word. And if you have questions, always just come and ask anytime. You can email or whatever, or ask at a service. Jesus has come to speak, and that is one of the most profound theological realities of Christianity. But do you want to know what the even more amazing thing is? Did you notice, I said that there was lots of big words in this passage. Big words are great. The only thing that trumps big words are the small words. And there was two incredibly small words in Hebrews 1, 1-4. Jesus has come to speak to us. Jesus has come to speak to you. And this is where we see how incredibly personal Jesus' message is. It's not come to speak to an exclusive elevated realm.

If you imagine that Nicola Sturgeon or Boris Johnson or Donald Trump was to come to Edinburgh, they would speak maybe to the press, they would maybe speak to the crowds, they'd maybe speak to civil servants. They would speak to a very select group. Jesus is nothing like that because he's come to speak to us. And if you look at Jesus' ministry, one of the remarkable things you'll see is that he continually spoke to people that no one else wanted to speak to. So in John chapter 4, you have a woman who's had a disastrous thing of relationships.

She's now living with a man to whom she's not married. What does Jesus do? He speaks to her. In Mark chapter 1, Jesus comes across a leper, the kind of person that everybody else would literally want to run away from. Jesus speaks to him. Luke 23, you have a convicted criminal hanging on a cross in the process of being executed. Jesus speaks to him. And imagine all the people in our society whose lives are wrecked by all the sin and immorality in our nation. What would Jesus do with them? He would speak to them. And of course we must do the same. 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. So when he says,

[23 : 45] I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me shall not hunger, whoever believes in me shall never thirst, he is saying that so that your hunger will be taken away and that your thirst will be quenched. When he 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 will be lifted, so that what you have to carry at work or at home or in your personal life or whatever it may be that's weighing you down, he is saying that so that your burden can be lifted, so that your soul can be at rest. When he says, my sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me, I give them eternal life, they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. He is saying that so that you would know that you're secure in Jesus, so that your worrying mind will be comforted, so that your bruised heart will be at peace. Jesus has come to speak to you. Every time you hear Jesus speaking, I want you to imagine him walking right up to you and saying this message is for you. I've come because I want to speak to you. I want to tell you something, this gospel message comes in an envelope with your name on it.

And that's one of the most astounding truths of Christianity because never forget that God doesn't need to speak to you. He's under no obligation to do so. We haven't asked him, we haven't earned it. In fact, all we have done is provoke God into turning away from us. Hebrews 1 to 2, chapter 1 verses 1 to 2 that we have there could so easily say, long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days, he has run out of patience, so he doesn't speak anymore. But thank God it says in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. Why did Jesus come?

Because God wants to speak to you. He wants to give you the words of eternal life. And I really hope you can see what an utterly astounding truth that is. That raises an immediate question though and this is the third and final thing we're going to look at. Jesus has come to fulfill all that the Old Testament was pointing to. It's now the last days. Jesus has come to speak to us and through him, God the Father is communicating with each one of us. But the big question that all that raises is, what does God the Father want his sons' message to be? What does God actually want to say to us through Jesus? Well, that brings us into verse three, four, three and four. What it says, he is the radiance of the glory of

God, the exact imprint of his nature. 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 theirs.

[27 : 18] Now we could spend weeks in these verses alone. I just want to say a little bit about what it says at the very start of verse three. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. Now that can sound a bit complicated. You can think, what does that mean? Radiance of the glory of God, exact imprint of his nature. And you can sort of quickly tie yourself in knots thinking, oh, I don't really quite understand what that means. Whenever you come to a Bible, a big Bible phrase like that, it's really easy to kind of try to look for the complicated. What you should really try to do is look for the simple. And the simple thing that that is saying is that Jesus Christ shows us what God is really like. So if you want to know what God is like, you look at Jesus. And this is where we see all the great truths about the incarnation coming together. Back in Matthew, we read it this morning, we read it last week about the fact that Jesus is Emmanuel. He is God with us. The Virgin shall conceive and bear a son. They shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. Now this is where it's absolutely incredible. It's incredible because if you think about it, way back in the Old Testament, you had the Garden of Eden where God and humanity were together and it was brilliant. But sin broke that. As you go through the rest of the Old Testament narrative, there are certain times when God reveals himself.

The next big moment after Eden is on Mount Sinai. When the people have come out of Israel and they're gathered at the base of this mountain, Moses is called up to the top and God appears.

And it's in a cloud and fire and smoke and the whole thing is shaking and all the people are being told whatever you do, keep back. And so if you want to see God, then it's kind of really tough because you can't go near the mountain and it's all in clouds and smoke and it's all restricted. The next big moment where God's presence comes into the earth is at the Tabernacle and the Temple. This place of worship that they were instructed to build right in the middle of which was this very special room called the Holy of Holies, the most holy place where the Ark of the Covenant which was the special box which held the Ten Commandments was stored and there God's presence came. But nobody was allowed into it apart from the High Priest and him only once a year. Access again was totally restricted. So you could, if somebody walked into the Israelite camp or into Jerusalem and said, where's your God? They would say, well, he's in the temple. Oh, can I go and see him? No. You can't go near him. Access is restricted. So you have God's presence coming into earth at these various moments but constantly the emphasis is on keep back, keep away. You can't actually see what's going on here. And then in a dark cattle cave in Bethlehem, a baby is born and if you look at him, you see God himself. And you see Jesus grow as the man who perfectly reflects God's image as we humans were supposed to do but fail to do because of our sin. And the incredible thing is what do you see Jesus do? You see Jesus being incredibly kind to people, patient, forgiving, loving, thoughtful, interested, kind of gentle. All sorts of people have got different views of God. I think Boole is like a warrior or a big thunderbolt or a big statue or whatever. You look at Jesus and you see somebody who is gentle and lowly of heart and the Bible is saying, that's what God is like.

And that's why at the heart of Christianity is God revealing himself not just as Creator, not just as Almighty One, not just as ruler, not just as Lord of hosts, the commander of the army but as Father, a God that we can know and love and who will hold us and keep us safe forever. John said, no one has ever seen God but God the Son, the only God who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. Near the end of his ministry, one of Jesus' disciples says to Jesus, oh will you show us the Father? Jesus said to him, do you not know me Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Why has Jesus come? He's come to fulfill the Old Testament, he's come to speak to us and he's come to reveal God to us. Now there's two amazing truths that arise from that verse. One is that Jesus has come so that we can see the glory of God. As we said in the Sinai and at the temple, at the

[33 : 15] Tabernacle, at the temple, we couldn't actually see it, it was there but we were so restricted. Now in Jesus we can actually see God's glory. Perhaps the greatest manifestation of that was at the transfiguration when Jesus on the mountain showed exactly who he is. In Jesus we see God's glory, we see his wisdom in all the teaching that Jesus taught, we see God's power in Jesus performing miracles, we see God's righteousness in the fact that Jesus, even though he was tempted and pushed and prodded in every way that we are, he never sinned. And above all else we see God's extraordinary love in that Jesus was willing to lay down his life for us. That's why John could say 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. If you want to know what God is like, you look at Jesus. But the second thing is,

I think even more amazing, Jesus has come not just so that you might know the glory of God and see it and be able to understand it better. Jesus has come that you might know the God of glory. In other words, Jesus hasn't just come so that we would know about God, Jesus comes so that we would actually know God. And that's what lies at the heart of eternal life, to know the only through God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. That's at the heart of why Jesus came, it's at 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. You can pick up lots of books and listen to lots of podcasts and learn lots of stuff about God. But that's not what being a Christian is about. Being a Christian is not about knowing about God, it is about knowing God. So you might know that God is strong, that what God really wants is for you to know him as your strength. Your strength when you're weak, when life is too hard, when you feel you've made too many mistakes, when you feel that you're going to just keep on stumbling, God wants you to know him and to know that he will be strong for you. You might know that God is wise, but what God really wants is for you to know him as your teacher and your guide and for his wisdom to transform your life for good. So when we're disillusioned, confused, perplexed, frustrated, worried, uncertain, God wants us to know his words and his wisdom as our comfort and guide.

You might know that God is loving, what God really wants you to know is that he loves you. That he loves you far, far more than you could ever even describe or understand.

That his love for you is eternal. That his love for you has no limits and there is nothing that you can do to muck that up. God's love for you is unconditional, full stop. And he wants you to know that love. And you might know that God is Father, but what God really wants you to know is to know him as your Father. You think of God as Father and you kind of imagine you think, well, yeah, God as Father, he would be full of love and commitment and maybe just have the image in your mind of God with a person on his lap. That's a lovely image I like to have of Fatherhood, God with a person on his lap. You think you see God smiling, God caring, God teaching, God encouraging, God protecting, God delighting with this person on his lap. It's a beautiful image. The person on the lap is you. Ultimately, God the Son, the Son has come so that you can know God the Father as your Father. If you're a Christian, you can say, I know God and there is no higher privilege than that. And that's where true

Christian theology is the most amazing thing that we can learn because if you learn theology, you're going to learn what God is like. You can study the Bible, you can listen to people like me trying to explain it. You can read books and you learn all these astonishing things about God, about his strength, his wisdom, his patience, his love, his purposes, his plans, his promises, all the things that God is. And then God says, I want to be all of those things for you. That's what lies at the heart of Christianity and that's why Jesus came. Let's pray.

[39 : 19] Father, we can't even begin to thank you for what you've done for us. Thank you that long ago in, at many times and in many ways, you have spoken by your prophets. But thank you and in these last days, you've spoken to us by your Son. He is the image of your glory, the imprint of your nature. He is our Savior, our King, our brother, our friend. And how we thank you that Jesus came. Amen.