

## Jesus is Better: A Study of Hebrews

*A Better Messenger* (Hebrews 1:1-2:4)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on June 22, 2025

### Introduction

- ❖ This summer, our plan is to preach through the book of Hebrews. We're calling this series: Jesus is Better. Because that's the primary theme of the book. You can sum up the entire book of Hebrews with one word: Better.
  - **The author of Hebrews is introducing his readers to something better.** Better than they hoped for. Better than they expected. Better than they thought possible. It's a word that he uses constantly throughout the letter. There are thirteen instances of this Greek word, which is sometimes translated as "*superior*" but more often as "*better*."
    - In v4, Jesus is superior to (better than) the angels. Keep reading and you'll find promises of "*better things*" (6:9), a "*better hope*" (7:19), a "*better covenant enacted on better promises*" (7:22; 8:6), "*better sacrifices*" (9:23), a "*better possession*" (10:34), a "*better country*" (11:16), a "*better [resurrection] life*" (11:35), and "*blood that speaks a better word*" (12:24).
- ❖ **All this talk about "*something better*" (11:40) boils down to the conviction that Jesus is better.** That the very person of Christ and his finished work on the cross is better than anything that has come before and anything that might follow. Jesus is better.
  - And in our text this morning, **I want to show you how Jesus and his message is so much better than any other messenger – or any other message – that has come before or after.** The Gospel is so much better. That's why we can't neglect it. We can't ignore it. We have to pay much closer attention to it.
    - That's what the author of Hebrews says in chapter 2:1. After arguing for the superiority of Christ over prophets and angels – the messengers through whom God gave us the OT Law – he goes on to say, "*Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*"
- ❖ **The author was writing to Christians in danger of drifting away from Christ and his gospel message.** Many think the author – who, by the way, is anonymous. No one knows who wrote Hebrews. Historically, authorship has been attributed to Paul, Luke, Barnabas, or Apollos. Regardless, it's typically believed the author wrote to the church in Rome (13:24).
  - **Commentators think he was writing to believers who were being persecuted for their newfound Christian faith** (10:32-39). But in cities like Rome, there were laws in place that gave religious freedom to Jews and Jewish synagogues. But that exemption was *not* extended to this new Jewish sect that claims to worship a Messiah named Jesus of Nazareth.
- ❖ So, understandably, there was growing pressure to revert back to Judaism and rejoin the Jewish community. **There was great incentive to neglect the Gospel, to drift away from the Son, and to go back to a religion that was safe and culturally accepted.** That's why the author is so intent on proving that Jesus and his gospel message is so much better than whatever you received from prophets and angels; whatever was mediated by priests, in the temple, with all the sacrifices. Jesus is better. So why would you go back? **Why revert back to the inferior when you've received that which is superior?**

- ❖ Church, the same can be asked of us. **We've been entrusted the greatest message ever proclaimed – the Gospel is the best news in all the world – and yet it's so easy for us to neglect it.** To take it for granted. To drift away from it and give our attention to lesser things.
  - I don't think any of us are at risk of waking up one morning and deciding, that day, to reject the Gospel and deny its truthfulness. **Rarely does anyone abandon the faith so decisively and abruptly. If it happens, it usually happens slowly and subtly.** That's why drifting away is such a fitting image.
    - **Rarely does anyone dash from the Gospel or fly away from the faith. It's usually a slow drift.** And it starts with a neglect, a disregard, a failure to give the gospel message our proper attention.
- ❖ That's why I think the exhortation in Hebrews 2:1 equally applies to us. **We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard in the message of Jesus Christ – lest we drift away from it.** Well, that's what I want to help you do this morning. I want to help you pay much closer attention to the Gospel – by drawing your attention to three *bettters*.
  - Friends, the God revealed to us in Scripture is even better than you imagined. He surpasses all your expectations. We're going to consider a better God, a better messenger, and a better message.

## No Better God

- ❖ I want to begin by demonstrating that **there is no better God than the God of the Bible.** I think we often take God for granted and don't realize how good we have it. How good it is to have a God like the God of Scripture.
  - Look at v1, *"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke."* Now let's stop right there. Let's not move past that too quickly. **The God of the Bible is a God who speaks.** That's amazing. Do you realize how good that is?
- ❖ Now, I realize, not everyone would agree that's good. **In fact, I'd argue that most people don't want a God who speaks.** Most would prefer a mute god. A speaking god is scary. I remember this one time, when I was traveling in Asia, we visited a temple. And I was surprised by the sight of frightening statues depicting dragons or ghoulish figures. But what surprised me more was the sight of so many worshippers prostrating themselves before these frightening images. Aren't they scared? Why would you be drawn to worship that?
  - I didn't get it back then. But now it makes more sense. **I've come to realize that a silent god is more appealing to people compared to a speaking God.** People can bear with a creepy-looking god as long as it stays silent. Scary gods made of stone can't talk back and confront you. So they're harmless in the end.
- ❖ **But a God who speaks is a God who could challenge you, correct you, command you.** He could disagree with your values or life choices. He could threaten judgement.
  - **A statue, on the other hand, might be creepy but at least it won't say anything to upset you.** It won't judge you. It'll remain perfectly silent. Just the way you like it. A silent god is much more appealing.

- ❖ Now I realize most of our non-Christian friends and family aren't bowing down to statues. **But I do think a subconscious fear of a speaking God still haunts them and likely explains their resistance to embrace Christianity.**
  - Among the non-believers we know, most would fall under one of two categories. They could be secularists or spiritualists. **Secularists** are the one who say there is no God. So without a transcendent God, then there are no moral absolutes defining what's ultimately right or wrong. That's the secular worldview.
    - Then there are **spiritualists**. They're the ones searching – not for God out there – but God in here. Spiritualists argue that we're all gods. In the sense that we're all capable of forming our own absolutes. Developing our own standards of right and wrong.
- ❖ So one view says, "There is no God." The other says, "God is in you." They're different viewpoints, but they both end up in the same place. **Both would say, when you get up in the morning, you have nobody to obey.** There's no one speaking to you, telling you what to do with your life. You get to determine that for yourself. If you think about it, that's the modern-day equivalent of bowing down to a perfectly silent god of stone.
  - **Our challenge, as Christians, is to help our friends to see that – even though a silent god sounds appealing – deep down that's not what you want. You won't be satisfied with that.** Rejecting all absolutes. Throwing off all authority. That's not how you were made. You were created in the image of God, to live under his loving authority, to listen to and obey his good Word. That's what you were made for.
- ❖ The alternative is not all that attractive in the end. **Put yourself in the shoes of Israel's pagan neighbors.** They only worshipped silent gods of wood and stone. Do you think they were satisfied? No, they were jealous of Israel. Israel had a God who actually speaks to his people. Who clearly reveals his will in writing. He tells you what pleases him and what grieves him. And if you do grieve him, he tells you exactly how to be forgiven and restored.
  - Israel's neighbors would've loved that kind of clarity. No one wants to live in the dark. **No one wants to make things up as you go, guessing and groping, wondering and worrying if maybe I pleased God today or maybe I upset him.** I don't know. That's an untenable position. Something's got to give. That's why so many today come to the conclusion that there must not be a God. And they start developing their own version of right and wrong.
- ❖ **The point I'm trying to make is that you're selling yourself short if your god is not a speaking God like the God of the Bible.** There is no better God. I understand a speaking God can be scary. But I don't think it's just because he speaks. I think it's because, deep down, we don't trust this speaking God. **We're not sure if he's good, and so we're not sure if what he speaks is good for us.** We question the goodness of his commands – of the moral absolutes that he intends to hold us to.

## No Better Messenger

- ❖ So we've got to dig deeper in our text to discover the goodness of this God. A goodness that he manifested in his Son. In other words, the goodness of God is made visible and concrete through the goodness of Jesus the Son. If you're questioning if God is good, then consider the goodness revealed in the words and deeds of his Son who took on flesh.
  - This leads to our second better – **there is no better messenger who can reveal God and his goodness than his own Son.** That's how the Son is presented in v2. As a messenger better than the prophets and angels that God spoke through in OT times. Let's read vv1-2, *"<sup>1</sup>Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."*
- ❖ When the author says "*long ago*," he's referring to the entire span of OT history. **Before Christ, God spoke primarily through human messengers and angelic messengers.** The human ones were called prophets. The prophets of old spoke on God's behalf to God's people. And then there were angels sent from above to communicate messages from God.
  - And the point being made is that, throughout the span of the OT, God spoke through prophets and angels. **But now he's doing something different.** Look back at v2. God is doing something different in "*in these last days*."
    - **Now that's not referring narrowly to the end times – to the days right before Jesus's return.** No, these "last days" refer to an indefinite age that began with the coming of Christ, extends into our day, and will one day culminate in a second coming of Christ and a renewal of all things. **So that means the last days refers to these days – our days.**
- ❖ So if we're living in the last days, then v2 implies that God is still speaking through his Son. And if he's God's chosen messenger for these *last* days, then that would mean he's the last. There's no one else coming after Jesus. He's the final messenger. He has the final Word.
  - That's why the author is surprised anyone would be tempted to drift away from the Gospel and revert back to the Law. **If you now have a superior message from a superior messenger, why would you return to something inferior?**
- ❖ **Think about how the Son of God is superior to prophets and angels.** Imagine walking through River Oaks and stumbling upon a huge, beautiful mansion. You ring the doorbell because you're curious to meet the owner and to learn more about his story and the story of this beautiful house. Imagine the butler answers the door. You ask for the owner, but he tells you that unfortunately the master of the house is unavailable. He's out of town. But, if you're interested, you can go out to the courtyard and look for his eldest son, the heir to the entire estate, and ask him all your questions about his father.
  - Imagine if you were to tell that butler, "Nah, I'm good. That's too much trouble. I'll just talk to you. You can just tell me about your master." Would that be sensible? **If you really want to know the master of the house, then who in that house would resemble him the most and know him the best?** His butler? His maid? His gardener? Or his son?

- ❖ **In the same way, who better to speak for God and reveal him to us than his only begotten Son – than his Heir?** V2 says the Son is the one “*whom [God] appointed the heir of all things.*” Look at v7 and notice how angels are described as God’s ministers (servants). They’re like his butlers and maids. Vv5-6 stress that no angel has ever been called God’s begotten Son or his firstborn. Only Jesus has those titles. **So if you want to know God, you have a far better messenger in the Son than in anyone else – whether human or angelic.**
- ❖ Now I realize this emphasis on Jesus being the Son of God could lead to a dangerous error if we start to think of Jesus and God as two separate beings. **That’s why, in v2, the author is quick to affirm the Son’s oneness with God by attributing to him the work of creation.** “*Through whom also he created the world.*” If the Son is Creator, then he is God.
  - **V3 says the Son is “the radiance of the glory of God.”** Again, that stresses their oneness. The Son radiates the glory of God like sunbeams radiate the glory of the sun. **Do you realize, when you look at a sunrise, you’re not actually seeing the sun?** What you’re seeing are sunbeams that have radiated from the sun, traveling at the speed of light. It takes 8 minutes and 31 seconds for those beams to travel to Earth. **So you’re not looking at the sun itself but at sunbeams that left the sun 8 minutes and 31 seconds ago.** The sunbeam and the sun are distinct but not different things.
    - And if it weren’t for the sunbeam, you’d never be able to see the sun. **In the same way, God the Son is the radiance of God the Father.** When you look to God, you don’t see the Father himself but you see the Son – sent from above to show us the Father. God the Son radiates God the Father.
- ❖ If you keep reading v3, it continues to emphasize their unity. **It says the Son is the exact imprint of God’s nature.** The metaphor is of a stamp embossing its image, an exact imprint, onto a coin. So the image on the coin is a perfect picture of the image on the stamp. That’s a way to say that everything in God is perfectly found in the Son. They’re the same in essence.
  - **V3 goes on to say that the Son is the powerful upholder of everything.** He upholds the universe by the word of his power. But he’s not like the mighty Atlas holding up the universe like it was dead weight. The word “*uphold*” conveys the sense of carrying something along. The Son of God is carrying us along towards a goal.
- ❖ And that goal is hinted at in the end of v3. “*After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*” The Son of God *upholds* the universe. **That is, everything that takes place in the universe is carried along by the Son to accomplish one overarching goal. That being his exaltation at the right hand of God for having made purification for sins.** Our sins! It says later on in Hebrews 9:26 that Jesus “*appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*”
- ❖ Friends, all the brokenness you experience; all the pain you suffer; all the guilt and shame you feel – is a result of sin in this world and sin in our hearts. **Sin, at its root, is the rejection of God’s good rule. It’s a throwing off of his loving authority.** Sin is closing your ears to a speaking God, treating him like he’s silent, and living as if you were your own authority.

- ❖ Such an attitude drives a wedge in our relationship with God. Because of our sin, we've been put away from his Presence. **But Jesus appeared, in these last days, to put away sin by sacrificing himself.** To put away your sin, he was willing to be put away – to be forsaken by his Father – as he died on the cross. He did that out of love and compassion for you.
- ❖ **This is why you can trust the Speaking God of Scripture.** You can trust what he says is good and for your good. Because he speaks through Jesus and the message of the cross. Where we hear a word of judgement against our sins, but also a word of mercy and pardon. **He promises to put away our sins if we put ourselves in his hands.**
  - And because Jesus accomplished the purification of our sins, he has inherited a name more excellent than the angels (v4). A name above every name. He is now exalted and seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. His enemies have become a footstool for his feet (v13).
- ❖ We're reminded in v13 that no angel – not even the highest archangel – is seated at God's right hand. That honored position is reserved for the Son of God alone. According to v6, the **job of the angel is to worship. While the job of the Son is to receive that worship.**
  - According to vv7-9, the job of the angel is to minister (to serve) in the royal court of God. While the job of the Son is to rule, sitting on the throne forever holding the scepter of uprightness. According v14, the job of the angel is to minister to the saved. While the job of the Son is to be the Savior himself.
    - If the Son is superior in every way, on every level, compared to the angels of God and the prophets of old, then we've got to pay much closer attention to what he has to say – to the gospel message he has come to bring.

### No Better Message

- ❖ That's the transition to Hebrews chapter 2 and to our final point. **If there is no better messenger than the Son of God, then there is no better message to heed and obey than the one he brings.** Trace this argument with me. Hebrews 1 argues for the superiority of the Son (who speaks the message of the Gospel) over the prophets and angels (who speak the message of the Law). And now *"Therefore"*, in Hebrews 2:1, *"we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard from the Son, lest we drift away from it."*
- ❖ Like I said earlier, I don't think many of us are in danger of suddenly abandoning the faith. **But we are in danger of slowly, subtly, unconsciously drifting away from the Gospel.** Which could happen if you take it for granted. If you assume you already heard it and believed it when you got saved, so you're ready to move on to something more advanced.
  - This is a temptation for those of us who grew up in a Christian home or church environment. **It's easy for us to tune out when the preacher starts talking about Jesus taking on our flesh, dying for our sins, rising again to give us eternal life.** We've heard all of that before. That part of the sermon is not for us. That's for the seeker, the non-Christian in the audience.

- ❖ But that's the problem. **We assume the Gospel is just for lost people to hear or for seekers to learn.** But the author of Hebrews is writing to Christians. And he's telling them to pay much closer attention to the Gospel they already know and believe. **That word for "pay attention" carries the connotation of being obsessed or addicted.** It's used in 1 Timothy 3:8 where it says that deacons must not be *addicted* to much wine. They shouldn't be the kind of person who *pays attention* to too much wine.
  - **So, tell me, what's your attitude towards the Gospel? Are you addicted to it? Are you obsessed with it?** Are you giving it much attention? Or have you taken it for granted? Are you trying to move on to something better?
- ❖ **Christian, you will never graduate from the Gospel.** Every time you go digging into this message of God's grace to us – centered on the life, death, and resurrection of his Son – I promise that you will always find more gems. **You will *never* exhaust the Gospel.**
  - If you feel bored by the gospel message – if your eyes glaze over once we start talking about the need for a Savior to rescue us from our sins – then that reveals more about you than about the Gospel. **You don't need to hear something new. You need a renewed sense of your own need for the Gospel.**
- ❖ **If you stumble upon a man crawling out of the desert, completely parched and dying of thirst, I guarantee he'll have an accurate sense of his need for just plain water.** You can try to offer him something with more flavor – a nice cup of coffee, a tall glass of orange juice? You can give him something far more expensive – a bottle of the finest champagne? And he will reject all of that and ask for a simple bottle of water.
  - **If you're easily bored by the Gospel, that tells me you have a misperception of your own neediness.** You don't see yourself as a man or woman with a parched and dry soul. **In other words, a low view of the Gospel's relevance reveals an excessively high view of yourself.** You don't recognize the deep thirst of your soul and your deep need for the living waters of the Gospel.
- ❖ So how do you recover a more accurate perception of yourself and your need for the Gospel? **It might seem counterintuitive, but one way is to spend more time reading and meditating on the Law.** Spend more intentional time in the OT. We were in Genesis for a while, and we'll get back into it after this series. But, this summer in your devotional times, make it a goal to read the other four books of Moses. You'll be exposed to a lot of Law.
  - The OT is really good at helping you see the contrast between the holiness of God and the depravity of man or between the righteousness of the Law and the wickedness of your sin. **So the more time you spend in the OT – and the more you see that contrast – the more you come to appreciate the Gospel and your deep need for it.** The more you realize how parched and dry your soul is – and how thirsty it is for God's grace – then you'll start to pant for the flowing streams of the Gospel.

- ❖ That's essentially the approach in the book of Hebrews. **It's constantly contrasting the Law and the Gospel.** The Old Covenant and the New Covenant. With the goal of helping you come to appreciate the superior worth of the Gospel. And once you see that it's better, then to neglect the Gospel would make no sense at all. And would put you in grave danger.
  - Look at chapter 2:2-3, *"<sup>2</sup>For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, <sup>3</sup>how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"* Trace his argument. **The message declared by angels – the Law of God – proved to be reliable. Especially in its warnings.** It warns that if you transgress or disobey the Law, there will be just retribution. God will punish sin. That message within the Law has proved reliable.
  
- ❖ So here's the point: **If neglect of the Law reliably resulted in judgment, then how much more is coming your way if you neglect the Gospel?** How much worse will it be for you if you neglect the superior message of the better messenger, God's own Son?
  - Jesus is not just one in a long line of messengers. He is *the* One that all the previous messengers spoke of. **Jesus is the message.** The last message. **If you're going to neglect him, just know that there's no one coming after to offer a better option.** To offer another way of salvation. There's no alternative. Which is why there's no escape if we neglect such a great salvation offered to us by Jesus.
  
- ❖ Let me make an appeal to any of you who have yet to make up your mind about the Gospel. We're not trying to make you do anything or decide anything. That's not our job or responsibility. **The church's job is to simply convey the warnings of Scripture and to do it as faithfully and clearly as we can.** We're just responsible to tell you that there's no escape from the judgment of God if you neglect the salvation of Jesus.
  - But it's also our job to constantly proclaim his great salvation. **To hold out the Gospel every week in our corporate worship, inviting you to freely receive this salvation.** Urging you to see that there's nothing out there worth waiting for. There's no better option. No better Savior. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. Open them instead and simply ask Jesus to save you.