

“The Son”

Fixing Our Eyes On Jesus Our High Priest

Hebrews 1:1-4

Pastor Jeff Stivason

January 19, 2018

Jeff: Okay. I just wanted you to know that last week I asked a couple guys, “What do you think we ought to go to next?”

Sig said to me, “Why don’t we go to Hebrews? Hebrews sounds good.” Don said, “Why don’t you go to Hebrews?”

So I said to Sig this past week, “Hey Sig, I’m still thinking about where I’m going to go next, so this might get to you a little bit later.”

He emails me back and he says, “You know, you take your time. Why don’t you go to Hebrews?” (*Laughter*) So we’re in Hebrews. (*Laughter*)

Participant: Conspiracy!

Jeff: It is, between these two. All right, Don. Why don’t you lead us into prayer?
(*Music*)

Our heavenly Father, we thank You for the day that You’ve provided. We know that it is a gift from Your hand, as are all things. Father, we thank You indeed for the gift of life in Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom we have been united by faith, and that not of our own doing, but it is indeed a gift from Your hand. Father, as we come before You today, we recognize that we are coming to study Your word, for indeed it is Your word that we study. For You are indeed an infallible God and this is an inerrant Word that we study, authoritative. And we’re thankful to be under it, and ask that You would continue to make us mindful that this is indeed Your word.

Father, as we gather together, we realize as well that Your Spirit is in our midst—teaching us, leading us, shaping us. And Father, we recognize that the form of that life takes upon us a cruciform shape. We recognize that we walk in the humiliation of Christ. And that’s why we pray for things that we pray for.

We pray for Mike and are so thankful that he’s back with us. And yet we recognize that our bodies are failing. And Lord, we are moving toward that eschatological moment when we will leave this body behind and be with You in Your presence. And yet we also are thankful that despite death, our bodies and our souls, though separate, remain united to You. And we look forward to that great resurrection, Father, when You will indeed reunite body and soul and You will bring with You departed saints, and we who are left will be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and Father, all of these things glorious.

Father, we also pray for Frank as he recovers. And we are thankful for the wisdom and the knowledge that You’ve given to doctors so that they can work upon people like Frank. And we pray, Father, that they’re working would be to his blessing.

Father, we are also mindful of Edie and ask that You will be with her. And though we do not know what ails her, we are confident that You do. Having knit her together in the womb, having numbered her days before one of them came to be, we are confident that You know her full well, better than even the doctors know her. And so we pray for her well-being.

“The Son”

Father, as we ready ourselves to depart upon a wonderful adventure through a wonderful book, we pray that You will make our minds attentive to what You have to say, for indeed Your word calls us to it—to listen and to be attentive. And so we pray it and ask it in Christ’s name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: Okay. Let’s turn to Hebrews chapter 1. And I have in mind to get through the first four verses today. It’s an important part of the book, and you’ll see why in just a moment. Let me just take a minute to read the first four verses. This is the word of God, and so give your attention to it.

“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, 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.”

Well let’s look today at the outline that we’re going to consider as we make our way through these four verses this morning. I want us to just take on some introductory matters. And the introductory matters are not inconsequential. They really set up for us what is to come. So I want us to think about some important things that will set us up for where we’re going. I want us to look at *God’s final Word*. I want us to look at *the glory of Christ’s Person, the perfection of Christ’s priesthood, and His absolute rule*. There’s an awful lot here. Hopefully these will hang together a little bit more than they feel like they would in this outline. And I’ll try to weave that together for you as we go along.

But there’s a lot here if you just look at those points. And there is. I’m not just exaggerating that. There is a lot here. So let’s get to it.

Let’s look first of all at *the introduction*. And I want to say a word to you about something that I’m not going to spend a lot of time on. And that is that there has been a lot written about *the recipients of this letter* and *the writer of this letter*. And I’m not going to spend hardly any time at all on that. The reason is because it’s a lot of speculation.

If you want to know where I come down, I personally think that this letter was not written by Paul. I think that this letter is written by an unknown person. I think there are speculations even as to who that is, and I’m not sure that I’m ready to buy into any one of them, Barnabas being among them.

I think that Sig was right. It is a sermon. I think it has a sermonic genre. I think it is a sermon that was meant to be delivered to a congregation. I don’t know who that congregation was.

I think that because of the mention of Timothy in the back, I wonder if it is that Timothy was in prison, perhaps in Rome, having gone to Paul, taking the scrolls with him. And this was after Paul’s execution, and so after Timothy’s release. But that is pure speculation. I don’t know. Those are as many thoughts as I think you’re going to get from

“The Son”

me about to whom and from whom. So let’s move on to some things that we know about the letter.

One of the things that I want you to understand when we think about the letter to the Hebrews is that *it has a context*. And that context is *the Christian life* that Paul teaches us about. And that Christian life, as I prayed in the prayer this morning, takes upon itself a cruciform shape, a cross-like shape. In other words, we walk in the humiliation of Christ. And so when Paul says in 2 Timothy 2, “*All who desire to live a life of godliness in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*”, there is no doubt about it.

Philippians 1:29 is another one of those passages.

Transcriber’s Note: Philippians 1:29, ESV. “*For it has been granted to you that, for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in Him, but also suffer for His sake.*”

Jeff: It happens to take shape in the letter of joy. It says, “Not only have you been given faith, but you’ve been given suffering.” And so the idea that we live the cruciformed life, the humiliated life, is throughout the New Testament. And that’s no less here.

In fact,—and he doesn’t say it until later,—in this book of Hebrews we find that this is a group of Christians who have suffered. And I want to show that to you. It’s in Hebrews 10:32-34, which I’ve quoted up there. “*But recall the former days, when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with suffering, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.*”

Now just think about some of the hardships here—public abuse, imprisonment, loss of property. I want you to remember what it says. Do you remember? Look! “*Joyfully accepting your plundering.*” We could spend a lot of time just on this verse.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: And we might. But as we start out I want to just apply for a minute. I want to apply. And the reason why I want to apply is because I think—and I’m not a prophet or the son of a prophet,—but I think that unless things change in our country, things are going to get worse and worse. Unless there’s an acknowledgment of the Lord Jesus Christ, there’s going to be some sort of persecution.

I mean I want you to understand that when marriage became a civil right for gays and lesbians, there were already commentators calling for rescinding tax exempt status for the church. Do you realize what a hardship that would be? Of course you do. That would be like the seizure of our property.

Participant: You mean if they didn’t marry gay or lesbian people that they would lose the tax—

Jeff: No. I mean that those who were saying, “Why are we giving churches tax exempt status if they don’t teach in conformity with what the government has said is right?”

Participant: Not just performing the marriage, but teaching it.

“The Son”

Jeff: Teaching it, absolutely. And there’s precedent for this, and I won’t go into the back story on it.

But let me just ask you a question. I want you to imagine yourself in a particular setting. I want you to imagine yourself in the third century, in the Decian persecution. And I want you to imagine that at that time the Roman emperor was asking everyone to bow down to him in worship, or at least to sacrifice upon the Roman altar. And not just that, but there were other pagan idols that other people were sacrificing to in Rome because it was a pantheon of gods.

And I want you to imagine that the Roman authorities were keeping track, not necessarily as Big Brother might, but because your neighbor was reporting you. Your neighbor had observed that you hadn’t been worshipping the emperor. You’ve just been going about your daily business.

And all of a sudden, one evening there was a solid knock on your door. It was after dark; you were in bed. The kids were tucked away, your wife was in bed. You got out of bed and answered the door. Before you had a chance to see who it was, hands came into the crack, pulled you out, closed the door behind you, took you to an alley, and said to you, “Now look. It’s been told to us that you’re a Christian and that you’re not sacrificing on the altar to the emperor. Now we just happen to be Roman soldiers. And we know that these Christians don’t want to see you do that and you don’t want to have them see you do that. But we can see you do that. And we’ll tell the appropriate people that you did. And it will just be our little secret.

“So we’ll just have this little makeshift altar here. You can offer the incense on it. We’ll go tell our people and you can go back to your people tonight. But if you don’t, you’re never going to see those people in your house again.”

Now what would you do? What would you do? You know, there were people in the early church who were offering and sacrificing and making that exception. And when the church had to deal with them, there were all kinds of levels for *the lapsed*. There were *sacrificati*. There were *therificati*. There were those who sacrificed to the emperor. There were those who sacrificed to pagan idols. And then the church had to decide what to do with them, how to restore them. But people were lapsing.

And I want you to understand something when we study a letter like this. A letter like this has a way of calling us to faithfulness. And that’s one of the things that I hope you’ll see in what we’re going to do this morning.

You see, the church is supposed to be *the church militant*. Now what do I mean by that? When I talk about the church militant, I mean that we are supposed to be people in Jesus Christ who struggle against sin and the devil and the flesh and the world. We’re to be militant against those things that would encroach upon our Christianity. However, there is what you might call a psychology of retreat that begins to happen when persecution takes shape.

I’ll never forget. I was in Meadville. I pastored there for ten years. Meadville is a small city, not very large. But in Meadville there is a very liberal college and there is a hospital that is a very influential hospital. And between the two of them, it makes this very small city a very liberal city.

“The Son”

And I remember when I first moved to Meadville that I started writing in the paper, and I started writing in the Op Ed column of the paper. This is going to sound funny, but there was a United Church of Christ man, there was a chaplain from the college, and there was a Presbyterian minister. And it sounds like a joke, right? *(Laughter)* But I started writing to oppose some of the things these men were writing in the paper.

And one of the things that I was in the habit of doing, just so you know, I was in the habit of calling them and asking them, “Do you want to go out to lunch?” So I took this UCC minister out to lunch and we got to talking. And he confessed to me at that point in time that he didn’t even believe in God. He didn’t even believe in God! I said, “What are you doing in the ministry?”

He said, “My therapist thinks it’s good for me to remain.” *(Laughter)*

I said, “Oh, well that clears things up for me.” But I got myself into a brouhaha. *(Laughter)* Let’s just put it that way. I got myself into a brouhaha.

And it was just in the paper, you know, writing back and forth. And one night I had to go to the church for something. It was a Saturday night. I’d forgotten something and I needed it before Sunday. I decided to drive up and get it. It was about 10:30 at night. And our double window doors had been smashed in. I pulled up and I couldn’t believe it,

Now I had just had not an altercation, but sort of an argument with somebody that previous day. It was the chaplain. And I think what happened was that I think he went and told some of the kids at the college. And I think some of the kids came to the college and threw rocks through the window. And I think they were thinking, “Well, they’re going to find it on Sunday morning.”

But anyway, all of this is to say that I got to church the next day. And this woman said to me, “Wow! This is getting serious!”

And I didn’t say anything to her at the time, but I thought,--and it stayed with me for years,--I thought, “When was it not serious?”

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Right? When is it not? And yet we see the same thing happening in the book of Hebrews.

I want you to just turn ahead with me for a minute. These Hebrews had become sluggish. And one of the things that you’re going to find is that you’re going to find that there are inclusioes. The book of Hebrews is built on inclusioes, which are basically book ends. It’s a word, a phrase or an idea that comes at the beginning and at the end of a section and ropes that section off. And here we find an inclusio at 5:11. It says, “*since you have become dull of hearing.*” And then if you go to 6:12, “*so that you may not be sluggish.*”

Now what’s not apparent in the English is in the Greek. Those are the same words. And so the idea then is that “you have become sluggish. You’re a church that has lost its zeal.” And I think that when that happens, the psychology of retreat sets in.

And you know how preachers use chapter 10, where it says that some of you have forsaken the assembly. You know, they say, “Some of you need to be here on Sunday.” And that’s true; you need to be here on Sunday. But that’s not what they’re talking about.

“The Son”

What they’re talking about is that some of you have this psychology of retreat. You’ve stepped back, you’ve become sluggish.

You know how it is. You’re full of conviction. And all of a sudden, there’s somebody in authority with influence who challenges you on it. And you start to realize the implications of what you just said, and you go, “Oh!” And you take that step back, at least mentally. And when you take that step back mentally, something begins to happen to your thinking about the truth and the faith that you confess. It’s retreat, and you’re stepping away from it. You’re shrinking back, as the writer of the Hebrews talks about. And there’s a temptation to leave, to not show up.

And I’ll tell you where they were tempted to show up. They were tempted to show up where it was familiar. They were tempted to show up at the synagogue or at the Jewish temple again, depending on where they lived. And so the idea is that here you have a group of people who have encountered persecution, who have become sluggish as a result. And they’re tempted to leave and go back to Judaism. That’s the idea.

Now the importance of the prologue comes in at just this point. Why? Because what we have here in the prologue is a call to face Jesus. Once we get past the introduction, we’re going to see that we are going to come face to face with Jesus Christ.

Now then what’s going to happen is that throughout the rest of the letter, as he explains Jesus to us, what we’re going to find is that there are warnings that take shape. We’re being warned to listen and not drift, not fall back, not shrink back. And we’ll take a look at some of those warnings as we go. But the idea is that we are being called to face Jesus and then warned to listen and do what it is that we hear. So with that in mind, that’s the introduction.

Let’s look at *God’s final Word*. I want you to notice that there’s—Yes?

Participant: When you talk about—

Jeff: Actually, let me just say this. Any time you have a question, feel free to interject. I’m happy to pause. I like to talk, but I’m happy to pause.

Participant: When you talk about the persecution of the Christians, if they had gone back to the temple, would they have worshiped Caesar, even though they worshiped the one true God?

Jeff: Well, depending on who you were during the history of Judaism, there was a pass that the Jews were given, right? So if you could capitalize on the pass, then you’d go back to where it was comfortable and where you got a pass.

Participant: So that Caesar’s soldiers wouldn’t harass Jews who would not worship Caesar.

Jeff: Right. Think about the time of Christ Himself, right? The Jewish people had some freedom within their own community, right? And you know, what you’d do is, you’d go back and say, “You know, I’m going back physically, but I’m not going back mentally, right?”

Participant: Justification!

Second Participant: There was a special exemption for the Jews because they were an ancient established religion. It was almost like the burning of incense was more like

“The Son”

saying, “Are you loyal to the Roman state, the Roman traditions and the Roman gods?” It wasn’t so much worship of Caesar as it was a loyalty oath.

Jeff: Unless Caesar declared himself to be God, as some of them did.

Participant: Who they were burning incense to was not Caesar as God but to the genius of the emperor. But in talking about this, I’m wondering, because today we see slippage and sliding.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: And we’re tempted to act politically.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: To act politically to remedy it. I just wonder if the church in 200-something acted politically against the Roman Empire. I don’t think they did.

Jeff: Right.

Participant: So you can become sluggish, but it’s more sluggish in terms of your commitment to the solution offered by the church versus what is offered by the political solution. And I’m afraid that many of us have become soft in our religion and strong on our politics as the solution.

Jeff: Yes. You make an excellent point. I think you’re 100% right.

Participant: Because indeed, within fifty years of that, Constantine had taken power and he declared Christianity a legal religion. So things flipped. And then you could argue whether the Constantinian solution was a good solution because the church got into bed with the state.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: Just some of my profound thoughts.

Jeff: Yes. Oh, that’s good. *(Laughter)* That’s really good. And you don’t get away from it with democracy, because democracy has a way of becoming a messiah complex producing that, right? You’re absolutely right.

Okay, I’m going to say some things that not everybody is going to agree with me about, and that’s okay. You can just chalk it up to the fact that I don’t know what I’m talking about. *(Laughter)* I want you to understand that there’s an urgency here. The urgency is seen in the contrast between *long ago* and *in these last days*.

Now it’s not going to be absolutely important, but I think it’s at least important for what I’m going to say. When I talk about *these last days*, I’m referring to that time period that is between the ascension of Christ and the second coming of Christ.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: The last days are that time period. So we’ve entered the last days already. And “*in these last days He has spoken to us through His Son.*” God has spoken to us through His Son. In the past He spoke bit by bit. In the past He spoke piece by piece. But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.

And you see, the question then is a very practical one, right? *Are you listening?*

But let’s move on beyond the practical question, and let’s ask another question. The question is this. What’s different between Christ and the prophets who spoke long ago in ages past? And when I say that, I have in mind to say to you that the bit by bit that they uttered was revelation. I mean God was speaking. It was His word no less than what we

“The Son”

find Christ having spoken. So what’s the difference? I mean, in one sense you have to justify that. What’s the difference between Christ and the prophets?

There are two things to notice at this point. And he’s building a case as to why you ought to hear. And it’s here. Christ was “*appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*”

Now I want you to catch this. One of the things that you are to realize is this. You are to realize that *He’s the Alpha Creator and the Omega Heir.*

Now what do I mean by that? Think about it like this. If the prophets spoke a word of God in ages past, and yet Jesus is the final Word of God in these last days, think about who Jesus is. He’s the Creator and the Heir. In other words, He’s the One who created the prophets who spoke of Him. And He is the heir or the fulfillment of their message.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: It’s kind of a mind-blowing thing when you think about it. You are to listen to Him because He’s the One who created all that is said about Him in the past and fulfills that word in the present. So there’s just a wonderful kind of immediacy to the practical question. Have you heard Him who organized the thoughts of the prophets, created the prophets of old, and then fulfilled those words in the present in these last days? Have you heard Him?

But he’s not done yet. Remember, he’s building his argument as to why we ought to hear Jesus Christ. We’re confronted with Him face to face. He’s not only the Creator and the Heir. What more can be said of Him?

Well, verse 3. Check this out. “*He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature.*”

Now I want you to think about this for a minute. When you look at this verse, there are two things that you need to keep in mind, two things. First of all, you need to understand that something important is being communicated to us when it talks about *the radiance of His glory.* And it’s the word *homoousios.*

Now what is that? Well, you have to go all the way back to the 300s in order to understand the importance of this word. There was a man by the name of Arius at that time. Is anybody familiar with the name Arius?

Participant: The Arian heresy?

Jeff: The Arian heresy. And the Arian heresy taught—

Participant: Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Jeff: That’s right. I was just going to say that these were—

Participant: A preacher.

Jeff: Yes, he was a preacher. And we can be anachronistic in a way that’s kind of fitting. He predates the Jehovah’s Witnesses. He said that Jesus was a *similar substance* to the Father.

Did you ever hear the phrase “it doesn’t make an iota of difference?” Well I don’t know if it comes from this, but it fits. Right in between these two o’s, there is an *iota.*

Transcriber’s Note: Between the last o of *homo* and the first o of *ousios.*

Participant: an i.

Jeff: An i. And that *iota* makes all the difference in the world. It’s *homoousios.*

“The Son”

Participant: You mean in the Greek.

Jeff: In the Greek. Yes, this is a transliteration of the Greek. In the Greek it would be an *iota*, or an *i*. And that would mean that Jesus was of a similar substance to the Father. But *homoousios* means that He was the same substance as the Father.

And I think that what we find here, the first thing that the author is communicating to us, is that *the radiance of His glory is found in the Son*. Now we’re going to say something more about that in just a minute.

Let’s get to the second thing. The second thing is that “*He is the exact representation of His nature.*” He is *Monogenes*. He is the unique and only-begotten of God, the Son of God.

Now what this tells us is that He is a different Person than the Father. Now I want you to think about this for just a minute. When we think about what’s called *the Trinity ad intra*, the internal workings of the Trinity prior to creation, we understand there to be what theologians call *the personal properties*. And the personal property of the Father is unbegotten, the personal property of the Son is begotten, and the personal property of the Spirit is procession or spiration.

Now when we talk about those personal properties, we need to understand that those personal properties are incommunicable. In other words, the Father is the Father, the Son is the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit. In other words, in eternity the three Persons of the Trinity don’t sit around and say, “Hey, who wants to play the Father in this whole deal?” You know what I mean? “And who wants to play the Son, and then the Holy Spirit? Darn! I drew the small straw! Now everybody is going to forget Me!” No, there’s nothing of the kind. There are personal properties that we believe that we find in Scripture.

Now to go behind those personal properties and to explore the *Trinity ad intra*, the inner working of the Trinity, is fairly difficult. It’s really difficult because that steps into a whole other world. And I might add—and I realize that this is getting a little bit heady,—but let me just say this. When you think about what knowledge God has in and of Himself, theologians have talked about there being an *arche* knowledge. When God reveals Himself to us, that knowledge is called an *echetype knowledge*. It’s a knowledge from the Archetype.

But it’s an accommodated knowledge. And it’s accommodated because you remember that phrase that Reformed people talk about all the time. *The Finite cannot contain the infinite*. And so God has to accommodate His knowledge, the knowledge that He has of Himself, so that we human beings can truly understand what God has to say about Himself, but in an accommodated way. Calvin talks about God lisping. And that’s what he means.

So one of the things that we understand in all this conversation is that *Jesus is the radiance of God*. And yet *He is not the same Person as the Father*. And when you begin to understand that, you begin to say to yourself, “Wow!” All of a sudden, the writer to the Hebrews is not simply talking to us about the glorious stature of the Son as Creator and Heir of what’s being said about Him through the prophets of long ago. But now we’re

“The Son”

being introduced to the fact, early on, that *He is God*—not God the Father but God the Son, but nonetheless God. And you begin to think to yourself, “Wow!”

Now here’s something I want to say to you about this glory. I said that it’s “*the exact representation of His glory.*” Think about it like this. And I think this is one of the reasons why this is here. He wants us to remember to make all these contrasts between angels and Moses, and so on. I think that one of the reasons we’re going to encounter Moses later is because he’s already contrasting Him with Moses here.

Why do I say that? Because all you have to do is think back to the Old Testament in Exodus 34. Remember that moment when Moses sees the glory of God pass before him. And then, having witnessed the glory of God, he kind of goes down the mountain with his two tablets. And when he gets down to the bottom of the hill, everybody is going, “Hey! Hey, what’s going on here?”, right? And they’re going, “Cover your face!”, and his face shone. And I think that what the author of Hebrews is telling us as we try to make this contrast is that the difference between Jesus and Moses is that Moses’ glory was a derived glory, and Jesus’ glory is an original glory.

It’s an original glory because not only is He *Monogenes*, the unique Son of God, but He is the exact representation of the Father’s glory, because He is God.

There’s one more thing in terms of the way you understand the Father and the Son. You understand Them to be different Persons. But how is it that They are the same God? Well, They are the same God because each Person is what theologians call *auto Theos*—God of Himself—but the same God. And that’s how you differentiate the Persons in the one God, or at least that’s how it’s described.

Participant: Jeff?

Jeff: Yes?

Participant: Can you explain something again for me? Here we have this letter. And this letter obviously is written from a time period, or relatively close to the time of Arius. And the language is the same. So I understand how heresy comes about when you’re two thousand years removed, and you go through translation upon translation.

Jeff: Right.

Participant: But you have Arius who actually has this letter relatively close and fully understands the language. How does one get to where he gets to? (*Unclear*)

Jeff: Okay, I’ll tell you how I think that one gets there. And this is not always applicable, but I think that relative to this particular question about proximity and where we are at in our thinking with regard to Jesus. So I personally think in what’s called a *progressive orthodoxy*. And that term is not my own. It comes from B. B. Warfield.

B. B. Warfield believed that everything that we need to know is contained in Scripture. However, we didn’t know it immediately. In other words, we had to search the Scriptures and build a theology of Jesus Christ as it arose from Scripture, so that by the time we get to 451 and the Council of Chalcedon, we have not a perfect statement of who Jesus is, but a nice functioning statement. And some theologians even talk about a wall that we can’t go beyond when we get to Chalcedon. Can we go further than this statement? And obviously I think that we could, because we have the Scriptures. But Chalcedon is in the fifth century. Keep that in mind.

“The Son”

So controversy becomes the catalyst by which men search the Scriptures on particular points and begin to develop a theology, in this case a Christology. So for instance, I think that when you look at some of the Christological heresies in the ancient days, I think that if we knew the lives of some of these men, we would say, “That guy’s a godly guy.” But the problem is that they’re not standing on two thousand years of theologians having looked at the Scripture and exegetes who have exegeted Scripture.

So, for instance, I think that one of the problems that Origen encounters as we read him and sometimes call him a heretic, is that here’s a guy who wasn’t standing on the shoulders of all of this exegesis and all of this theology. So I think that we can sometimes look back on the past and make some pretty hard-line judgments. And in the sense that we want to judge Arianism harshly, I think we should. I think Arianism is wrong. It’s a heresy.

But I also think that we’re in the developmental stage of working out of the Scriptures what was there. And I don’t think it was—For instance, I think somebody could have read the Scriptures the moment they got Paul’s letter and came to the conclusion that Jesus is God. And I have the tendency to look upon Arius a little more cynically than I do, say, Nestorius, who was trying to parse out how it was that two natures reside in one, or Apollinarius, who was trying to do the same. You know, how is it that He’s human and divine?

With Arius I have a tendency to go, “Why didn’t you just see what the Scripture says? Jesus is God.” How that works itself out,— Now he had some concerns. But my point is that in some ways, when we look back into the past, that’s why we get into the situations we get into. I’ve said plenty for you to understand it. *(Laughter)*

Participant: I mean, in terms of the whole idea of progressive theology, even at the Council of Nicea, where Arius was debating the other bishops or the other believers,— when was that? Help me out.

Jeff: 325.

Participant: 325. Even with that vote, from which we get the Nicene Creed—“God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.” those words give me chills just to listen to them! But having said that, even at that point, only 1/3 of the bishops in attendance supported that statement.

Jeff: That’s right.

Participant: And it took some strong-arming by Constantine’s representatives to get the other bishops in line where they all subscribed to that creed, where they said that Jesus is indeed of the same substance as the Father.

Jeff: And part of that was not because the other 2/3 were Arians.

Participant: That’s right.

Jeff: There was a soft middle there, right?

Participant: There was a big soft middle, and they just said, “Gosh! We don’t know!”

Jeff: And if you’ve hung around the church courts for any length of time, you know that oftentimes there’s a soft middle that you have to persuade, right? Yes?

Participant: One thing is that we have to realize what a radical thing it is to say that Jesus is God.

“The Son”

Jeff: Yes. So true.

Participant: I mean this is not common language.

Jeff: Yes, right.

Participant: This is astonishing language. This is astonishing! It should still astonish us. It should compel us to further study.

Jeff: Yes, right. And you’re putting Him in the context of Judaism, a monotheistic religion.

Participant: It’s an exiled group.

Jeff: Yes, that’s right.

Participant: Judaism said that you’re either always God or you’re never God. But what are you going to do with Jesus?

Jeff: Yes, right. That’s right.

Participant: So *homoousios* is already moving in the right direction. But it’s not up to what Scripture says.

Jeff: Yes, that’s correct. That’s right; it is moving in the right direction.

Participant: It just doesn’t get there.

Jeff: It just doesn’t get there, right. Anybody else? So there’s more for me to say. Let me talk to you just really quickly about this and finish this out.

So this is about *listening*. But it’s not about listening for information. I mean it is about that. But it’s about listening for transformation. And the need for transformation is just mentioned at the outset. It’s our sin, right? And so there are two lessons here that we need to take on board.

The first one is *a lesson in time*. In the Greek tense it speaks about time. If you’re in an introductory Greek course, oftentimes they use the idea of a snapshot with lasting effects to summarize the aorist tense in the Greek. He makes purification. And the idea of *making* is that snapshot. This is a one-time event. And we’re going to hear about this one-time event later on in the letter. This one-time event makes purification.

But not only that, it’s a relationship. When you think about *voice* in the Greek language, the subject is related to the verb. And in this case, notice what we’re told. We are told that the Son accomplished purification in Himself. And so it is the Son who accomplishes this on our behalf. And he’s going to talk more about that, too.

Let me just speed over this and get to *Christ’s absolute rule*, because here it is. He sits down. Atonement is accomplished. And now the nations are His. Remember, in His mediatorial state He asks the Father for the nations. Then on the cross He fulfills His obedience in His death, and we’re justified in Him. And so the final harvest in these last days remains. But that final harvest comes when men listen to Him, not just for information’s sake, but for transformation’s sake, for the forgiveness of their sins and for obedient living, which is enabled by that same work. So that’s basically it. Whew, that was fast! (*Laughter*) Any questions before we go? Yes?

Participant: So the emphasis then is on why you’re doing what you’re doing, not what you’re doing.

Jeff: Who? Jesus?

“The Son”

Participant: Well, no. For us, because if we’re going to read to be informed, or we read to be transformed, those are two different activities.

Jeff: Absolutely. So, for instance, here you’ve been a Christian for a number of years. And the pastor says, “Now everybody get your reading plan for the Scriptures for this year.” And in the back of your mind the worst part of you is going, “I already know what it says. I’ve been over Genesis 1 a billion times in my Christian life.” And that person is thinking about it from an information standpoint and not from a transformation standpoint, because the bottom line is that if this is the living word of God, when I read these very familiar words, God is using them to transform my life. And so I have to get a different mindset, a different attitude, in order to read through the Scriptures, for instance, year by year, because I’m not reading necessarily for transformation.

You know, you can always tell when somebody says, “Hey, I learned the third son in the second generation.” You know, that sort of thing. Oh, great! “I learned who the singers are this time around.” You know, that’s wonderful. But that is indicative of the mindset that says that I have to read to learn something new from the Scriptures.

Now we ought to be reading and learning something new. But transformation is what we’re after when we read the Scriptures. Yes, Don?

Don: At the end of verse 3, Jeff, the writer refers to God as “*the Majesty On High*” at the right hand of God. Is that because there may have been a Jewish audience who would have frowned on using the divine name?

Jeff: Well it could have been. And I think that’s oftentimes the way they do it. So, for instance, it’s not *the kingdom of God* in Matthew, but “*the kingdom of heaven.*”

Don: Right.

Jeff: Those accommodations, you know? And I do happen to think that this is a predominantly Jewish audience, and so that’s likely the case. That’s my view. But again, you can see where I’m getting that as I talk about a group of Christians ready to leave and go back to the synagogue. Yes?

Participant: You were referring earlier to when Moses came down from the mountain and his radiation. And you talked about Calvin talking about him. And you referred to Calvin saying it was because he had a lisp. Well he knew Moses had a lisp, but—

Jeff: No, no, no. I was talking in terms of that knowledge, that accommodated knowledge, the difference between the knowledge of God in Himself and that which He reveals to us—*archetype/echetype*. And I think that’s what Calvin is talking about when he talks about God stooping and lisping to us as children. I think what he’s saying is that God is accommodating His knowledge to us and speaking in an accommodated way.

Participant: That’s what the word *lisping* means? I didn’t understand what that word meant.

Jeff: No. He’s just using that analogy of an adult stooping down and going,--

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff speaks gibberish.

Participant: Oh, okay.

Jeff: And so he’s saying that’s what God does to us.

Participant: All right. Thank you.

“The Son”

Jeff: You know. For instance, when you have an eight-year-old and you have a one-year-old, and the one-year-old is going--

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff speaks gibberish.

Jeff: And you’re like, what? And your eight-year-old goes, “Oh, he said that he wants a glass of milk.” *(Laughter)*

Participant: I just wanted to razz Sig because he talked about the radiation of God. *(Laughter)* Like He’s made of lead. *(Laughter)*

Sig: Radiance.

Jeff: Come on, Ted, come on! *(Laughter)*

Participant: Jesus in the Incarnation accommodated knowledge.

Jeff: Yes. But I think He doesn’t fit—He’s like—

Participant: He’s the absolute maximum of that.

Jeff: Yes. Okay, so here’s what I think. I think He is of His own kind, and I don’t think He fits into any other type of revelation.

Participant: Right.

Jeff: But here’s the interesting thing. I think that even though Christ is of His own kind, I think that supplemental special revelation needs to accompany Him, because let’s say that Christ came and didn’t say a word. There would be no explanatory word to accompany Him. And so He has made Himself dependent upon God’s word.

Participant: In His human nature it’s not natural for Him, except by grace. So in one sense God is bending low to us in the Incarnation.

Jeff: That’s exactly right.

Participant: But God was in the Incarnation. That confuses a lot of people. That complicates things.

Jeff: Yes, it sure does. You know, a lot of this theology is descriptive. We think that we explain it with big words. *(Laughter)* But you know, it’s really not—

Participant: The fascinating thing about this is that somebody says, “These are all wrong.”

Jeff: I know. Isn’t that great?

Participant: You can’t go there.

Jeff: Yes. Bill, every time you put up your hand, I think of that song from the ‘80s. *“Are you ready for this?” (Laughter)* Go ahead.

Participant: Are you ready to rumble?

Bill: I’m just curious.

Jeff: Yes.

Bill: Where in Scripture do you find that churches are exempt from paying taxes?

Jeff: Where do I find that they’re exempt from paying taxes?

Bill: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: I think it’s Romans 13 where he says to pay your taxes.

Bill: Then why are churches tax exempt?

Jeff: Oh!

Participant: I’ve got my thoughts on that, and I know you really care. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Go ahead.

“The Son”

Participant: I’m not real good with quoting the Bible. That person who took the money from the church, and the earth opened up and swallowed him? That’s why the government should not be taking money from the church. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Let me just say this, Bill. Whether that’s the case or not, the fact of the matter is that a lot of churches are going to be hurting if the government starts to charge tax.

Participant: Amen.

Bill: Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

Jeff: I think it is good and bad.

Bill: Spoken like a true politician. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Well I think that some of us are going to be trying to find a new building to meet in.

Participant: We’ll survive, though.

Jeff: We’ll survive; that’s for sure. And actually it will probably thin out if that happens.

Participant: But also, where in the Bible does it say that the church is to pay taxes?

Jeff: Yeah, Bill!

Participant: Yeah, Bill! *(Laughter and applause)*

Jeff: All right, let’s pray. *(Laughter)* Father in heaven, thank You so much for this day. Bless it to us. Bless Your Son,. The Lord Jesus Christ to us. And help us to listen to Him, for we need to. We need to listen to Him, for we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Men: Amen. Thank you. *(Applause)*