

# Listen to the gospel spoken

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[ 0 : 00 ] Join me again as we pray to ask God to speak. Speak, O Lord, as we come to you to receive the food of your Holy Word.

Take your truth, plant it deep in us, shape and fashion us into your likeness. And indeed, that is our prayer this morning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, over the whole month of January, we've been unpacking the very first of our core convictions to be centred on the Gospel. We've seen that to be Gospel-centred means to live from the Gospel, for the Gospel and through the Gospel.

And if you haven't been around and you've missed any of those sermons, then can I encourage you just to hop onto our website and you can catch up and listen to any of those sermons you missed so that you can see what we're all about.

But of course, while Gospel-centrality is the first of our core convictions, it is not the only core conviction that we have. If you have your bulletin and you open it to the second page and you look right at the top of the second page, you would notice that there are three other convictions.

[ 1 : 19 ] And what you might not realise is that those convictions are also connected to and flow out of the first conviction.

So next week, we'll think a little bit about how those third and fourth convictions, to be focused on growing disciples as part of a community of truth and love, are part of living a Gospel-centred life. But today, what we're going to examine is that second conviction, are to be driven by God's Word. Perhaps today, there's someone who has only recently started coming to our church, and you've noticed already that we are pretty focused on the Bible.

We have sermons that unpack the Bible, classes that teach the Bible, small groups that study the Bible, Sunday school that seeks to get the Bible into our kids. Why do we do that?

Is it just because we're a little bit old school? Or we're just very concerned with head knowledge? Well, no. It's actually because we're convinced that as we are driven by God's Word, we can live from, for, and through the Gospel.

[ 2 : 41 ] For as we are driven by God's Word, we are driven into the arms of love to Jesus Christ himself. And that's all I really want us to understand today.

I want us to see why we have this core conviction. I want us to see that every time we engage with the Bible, we are personally engaging with God himself, who is speaking to us the language of the Gospel, if I may put it that way.

And to get us to see that, I'm going to do something that you might not expect. I'm going to do something that might feel slightly different to our normal sermons.

And I'm not going to expound the whole of Hebrews 1. But instead, I'm going to sketch out to you a doctrine of Scripture, but primarily from Hebrews 1.

Now, I know very well that when people hear the word doctrine, they groan, they think, oh no, here comes the theoretical and irrelevant stuff. But don't groan too quickly just yet.

[ 3 : 49 ] Think of the law of physics, for example, that can seem dull and irrelevant to real life, can't it? But think about it.

The engineer who is building your apartment or the pilot who is flying your plane will say otherwise. It's foundational to making sure that your home is safe to live in and that your plane is safe to fly in. It's actually supremely relevant to your life. So it is with doctrine. And when we get a better grasp of the doctrine of Scripture, when we understand what the Bible actually is, we will see why we need to be driven by God's word to embrace a gospel-centered life.

So do follow along, and I hope you will see the payoff at the end. And this morning, we're going to zoom in on the first two verses of Hebrews 1 in particular.

And we'll draw out three truths from it. And these three truths build on top of each other. So here's our first truth. Firstly, God speaks.

[ 5 : 01 ] God speaks. Now, I want you to imagine that you're back in science class. Of course, some of you are students or teachers, so you don't even have to imagine.

And for those of you with bad memories of science class like me, don't worry, this won't take long. But do you remember some of the experiments you did? Perhaps you did something with rocks or plants or some food item.

And of course, your aim was to try to get to know as much as possible about that object as you put it under a microscope or you did some sort of chemical tests on it.

You tried to figure out what elements it was made out of, its properties and so on. That's how you got to know the thing. But now imagine you wanted to get to know a person.

Maybe you wanted to get to know that handsome boy or that pretty girl who was in the same class as you. What would you do? Of course, you could observe them from afar and stalk their Facebook profile.

[ 6 : 15 ] But ultimately, the best way to get to know them is not so much to do all of that, but eventually to strike up a conversation with them.

But what about God? After all, God is clearly not a thing. You can't stick him under a microscope and you can't search for him through a telescope.

And God isn't quite like your high school crush either. He's personal, but it is not as if he's in the next room and you can just go and knock on the door and ask him some questions.

After all, God is creator. We are created, which means God isn't intrinsically a part of the created realm that we're part of.

It's not as if there's a piece of God in the trees or in the river or in the statues. No, he's in a room that we can't access in heaven.

[ 7 : 20 ] And so that means, left to ourselves, there is no way for us to know God. We remain totally in the dark.

But it's a different story, isn't it, if God took the initiative? On our own, we can't know him. But what if God took the time to get to know us?

What if God took the time not just to stop us from afar, like us stalking our Facebook crushes, but took the time to enter our room and speak to us?

Well, here's the good news of Christianity. We believe that God has always spoken. Look at the beginning of Hebrews 1 verse 1. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors.

In the time even before Jesus came, God was not silent. From the very beginning of creation, God has spoken. He entered our room and pursued a relationship with us.

[ 8 : 34 ] He has always wanted to know you and be known by you. And that's because that is just who God is.

He is a God who is supremely interested in communicating. On my bookshelf, there is a pretty famous book written by a well-known psychologist specialising in marriage called John Gottman. The book is called *Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. Perhaps you've heard of it. It's not a Christian book or written from a Christian perspective, but it does contain some very useful insights which I often pass along whenever I do premarital counselling.

And he's got a famous illustration where he talks about the four horsemen that wreak havoc on a marriage. And one of these horsemen is stonewalling.

It's that moment when one partner tunes out. The stonewaller is the person who has effectively given up on communicating.

[ 9 : 45 ] He or she doesn't speak when the other person in the marriage tries to engage them in conversation, but just keeps looking down on his phone or looking away at the wall.

The appearance of stonewalling is a bad sign that the marriage is breaking down. But God has never been a stonewaller.

He always communicates. Even before he spoke to us, he was speaking. Did you know that? Look at John 8 verse 26 for example.

Now here is Jesus speaking. But he, that is God the Father, who sent me, that is God the Son, is trustworthy.

And what I have heard from him, I tell the world. And so notice, even before God is speaking to the world, the person of the Father and the Son are already communicating communicating with each

other.

[10:58] Jesus says what I have heard from him. And that is just who God is. Not a stonewaller, but a speaker. Someone who is eminently relational.

And so that is the first thing we want to establish. We must never think of God as an isolated hermit up in the sky, keen to keep everyone away from him.

only grunting when he has to come across other people. No, he speaks. He speaks with the intention to have a relationship with you.

And because he is the God who created this universe, his is the voice that ultimately matters. So God speaks.

But now we want to ask, how does God speak? this brings us to our second truth. God speaks through his people to his people.

[11:58] God speaks through his people to his people. Now that is not the only way God speaks. In Psalm 19 verse 1 to 2, for instance, we discover God speaks through creation.

Creation reveals who God is in the way a piece of artwork reveals the skill and the worldview of its artists. But Romans 1 tells us that we were not receptive to God speaking through creation, but instead we behave like little children who shut their eyes and shout, oh, I can't see you, I can't see you.

We look at his artwork and refuse to believe he was the artist behind it. That's the impact of sin. But that doesn't stop God from communicating.

Now think of a wife who is stonewalling and yet the husband doesn't stop trying to persuade her and encourage her and convince her to drop the act.

Well, that is God. And so Hebrews 1 verse 1 tells us, in the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways.

[13:23] So notice, how did God speak? Did he speak to each and every individual in a direct and unmediated way? No, not quite.

Instead, God appointed spokesmen, representatives, mouthpieces, people in different situations and in different eras of history, people like Moses and Samuel and Elijah and Amos, he used people.

He spoke to them and they spoke to his people on his behalf. And of course, the way he spoke was diverse.

Sometimes he came in dreams and visions to these prophets, other times in a burning bush or in a pillar of fire, even once through the voice of a donkey.

And of course, the nature of his speech was varied as well. There were laws, there were oracles, there was poetry. And the Bible describes this process of communication in an especially vivid way.

[14:42] When God speaks through his prophets, he is said to be putting his words in human mouths. Now, come with me for a moment to Exodus chapter 4.

At this point, Moses is arguing with God. God wants him to be his spokesman to Pharaoh, but Moses is saying he is not eloquent enough.

God then says, chapter 4, verse 11 on the screen, who gave human beings their mouths? In other words, God says, I'm your maker, I know how your speech patterns work, but I'm choosing you anyway I plan to use your mouth.

But since Moses feels weak, God says, alright, Aaron, you're your brother. will be your spokesman. Instead, 4, verse 15 to 16, you shall speak to him, that's Aaron, and put words in his mouth.

I will help both of you speak, and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth, and as if you were God to him.

[16:02] So, notice, the words that comes from the mouth of Aaron are said to be Moses' words, but Moses' words are said to be the words of God himself.

They are not mere human words, but the word of God. And we see this pattern reinforced elsewhere. For example, in Jeremiah 1 verse 9, Jeremiah tells us how his ministry began.

Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, I have put my words into your mouth. Again, the Lord speaks to his people through his prophet.

He puts his word in the prophet's mouth. And that's what the widow at Zarephath acknowledges when in 1 Kings 17 verse 24, she tells the prophet Elijah, Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.

So that's what we know. God speaks through his people, namely his prophets. They are human words, and yet at the same time they are God's word.

[17:27] And in fact, you can see this straight from Hebrews chapter 1 itself. Here's an example. Come down with me for a moment to Hebrews chapter 1 verse 5.

You would notice that in Hebrews chapter 1 verse 5 to 14, the writer begins quoting a selection of Old Testament passages. And in Hebrews chapter 1 verse 5, he quotes Psalm 2 verse 7.

Now, these words are written down by the psalmist, a human being.

But how does the writer to the Hebrews introduce this quotation? Does he say, for which of the angels did the psalmist ever say?

Nope. Instead, he writes, for which of the angels did God ever say? So here we have the words of a human, an Old Testament writer being quoted.

[18:35] But it is God who is said to be speaking. So God speaks through his people to his people. He's not afraid to use human language to communicate.

And so we should never despise the medium of human words. God is willing to work through words. And more than that, he has ordained it so that these words, spoken originally to the prophets of old, are now preserved in written form for our sake.

We won't look at them now, but I've given you some examples from the book of Jeremiah on your sermon outline, where we find God taking time to preserve his spoken words in written form so that other people might access them.

So that means, whenever we're reading the Old Testament, we're not just reading about some obscure historical event. It's true that we are reading specific words spoken in specific historical circumstances through specific people, all of which need to be taken into account to interpret them correctly.

But we must never forget, ultimately, we are listening to God speak. We are hearing his voice. We are paying attention to him, talking about matters of eternal significance whenever we read these written words.

[20:15] But what has what we said so far got to do with gospel centrality? Well, to see that, we now need to get to our third and most important truth for today.

Thirdly, God speaks definitively in Jesus. God speaks definitively in Jesus. You see, so far, we've established that our God is a speaking God.

All throughout history, he has always spoken. He spoke to the ancestors of all the Israelites and he speaks to us, Christians. But he does not always reveal himself in the same way.

For in Hebrews chapter 1 verse 1 to 2, the writer wants to draw out some contrast. First of all, notice that he thinks of history as split fundamentally into two eras.

There is the era of what he calls the past in verse 1, the one that is populated by prophets like Moses and so on. This is what we call today the Old Testament era.

[21:29] Then, there is the era of what he calls these last days in verse 2. In many Christian circles, people talk about the last days as referring to the very immediate period before Jesus returns, potentially with the rise of the Antichrist and so on.

But that is not what the Bible means when it uses the phrase the last days. Rather, the last days simply refer to the era of fulfillment when God's saving promises have come to pass.

For what has been promised in the Old Testament has now arrived with the coming of Jesus. You will see that this is consistent with its usage elsewhere in 2 Timothy 3 and 2 Peter 3.

So the last days here simply refer to the period between the first and the second coming of Jesus. In other words, we are in the last days and we have been for the last 2,000 years.

But what's so special about this current era? Well, how did God speak in the Old Testament? We've already said it. He speaks in many times and in various ways.

[22:58] And that expression doesn't just point at diversity but also its fragmentary nature. It's piecemeal. Over Chinese New Year, I read a fun mystery novel.

The entire novel is written in an epistolary format. That means you are only reading email exchanges and text messages between different characters for more or less the entire book.

So at first you have no idea what's going on because you're only getting glimpses into the lives and musings of all these different people through all these fragments of text messages and emails and so on.

And you kind of have to piece together the emails to start getting a sense of the big picture. There's a sense of incompleteness to them. So similarly, in the Old Testament era, God spoke but he doesn't give you the whole picture.

If you ever read the Old Testament straight through and you got to the end of the Old Testament, you're actually left somewhat with a cliffhanger. It's like, oh, here is God speaking.

[ 24 : 14 ] Here is God making all these promises about the Messiah, the Christ. But where is he? Where is all this leading to? There is a sense of incompleteness, a sense that we still haven't gotten the entire picture.

here. But now, God says, it's different. What has changed in this era? Well, in verse 2, God now speaks to us by his son.

Here is the idea. Imagine all the little pieces of a jigsaw puzzle scattered across the floor. But now, they are gathered all together, neatly fitting together, to form one big beautiful picture.

That's what has happened with Jesus. He is the one who gathers and puts all the Old Testament pieces together so that we can see this big picture.

And once he puts them all together, the picture is complete. There are no more extra pieces to add. God has said all he needs to say for our salvation and glorification.

[ 25 : 36 ] That's not to say that God can't speak today using dreams or visions or auditory words he gives to people. But it is to say there is no more authoritative revelation, nothing extra that he needs to say which he hasn't said before.

The picture is complete. And what is that big picture? When we put together, we discover the picture is Jesus himself.

That's who God is speaking of. We won't have any time to go into detail today, but in verses 2 to 4, the writer makes up to seven affirmations about Jesus.

That's who he thinks the picture is about. He is the heir of all things, verse 2. In the future, everything will be his. He is the one who created the entire universe, verse 2 again.

We saw this last week as well in Colossians 1. And so he is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, verse 3.

[ 26 : 50 ] As the the the theologian John Owen puts it, all the glorious perfections of the nature of God do belong to and dwell in the person of the Son.

This is Jesus. He sustains all things by his word, verse 3 again. And verse 3, he provides purification for sins. You see, there's one thing that the Old Testament shows us, is that God speaks, but we rarely listen.

We're always grumbling, always speaking against God, always wandering away from him. We're sinners. But as Hebrews will tell us in its later chapters, Jesus is the only high priest who has provided the perfect once for all sacrifice for our cleansing.

Nothing else is needed. And having done this act, end of verse 3, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

Again, it is complete, it's done. You see, how can we know God? How can we really listen to him and have a proper relationship with him? Because of the son, because of Jesus.

[ 28 : 13 ] Jesus is all we need. There is nothing extra. And so notice, what does the word of God ultimately do?

The written word of God points us to the living word of God. It paints a picture of who Jesus is, the one who created us, who sustains us, purifies us.

The Bible doesn't just give us a record of the teachings of Jesus, but more profoundly, it shows us the identity and work of Jesus.

In other words, when God speaks, he is speaking gospel. And it's not just the case where he only speaks of the gospel in the New Testament.

Come back again with me to those string of quotations in Hebrews 1, 5-14. Remember, what is being quoted here is exclusively the Old Testament.

[ 29 : 22 ] But who are these Old Testament words about? Look down with me at 1, 8, for example. The writer says that Psalm 45, 6-7, which he is quoting, is about the Son.

Did you see that? But about the Son, he writes, and then he quotes Psalm 45. It's about Jesus. And so here's what we realise. From Genesis to Revelation, the whole Bible is ultimately pointing to Jesus.

If I can put it this way, the Bible itself is Gospel centred. It is testifying to Jesus from beginning to end, as those in my Bible overview class will soon realise.

And that's why the words of the Old Testament remain valuable today. God still speaks about Jesus through them as well, if we only have ears to hear.

And so if the word in its entirety is always driving us to Jesus, then if we are driven by God's word, we will also be driven to Jesus.

[ 30 : 48 ] You see, the Bible is still how God speaks to us today. Now look again at Hebrews chapter 1 verse 8. Notice how it is worded.

But about the Son, God says. And notice the tense being used. It's not the past tense. It's not God said.

It is God says. Present tense. For God, through His Holy Spirit, not only spoke when these words were first written thousands of years ago.

He speaks every time we read them. This is a pattern that you will find throughout the book of Hebrews. Look, for example, at Hebrews chapter 2 verse 11 to 12.

Here's another example. Both the ones who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family, so Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He says, I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters.

[ 31 : 56 ] In the assembly, I will sing your praises. So that's quoting Psalm 22 verse 22. And notice again that as the Psalm, as the Old Testament is being quoted, what is Jesus said to be doing?

He is said to be speaking. Present tense. He is speaking through the scriptures, not apart from them, notice, to the readers of Hebrews, centuries after they were first written.

Now today, if you are a non-Christian, I want you to know this. Do you want to hear God speak?

Come and read the Bible for yourself.

We should be running Christianity Explored in March. There you will find a low pressure environment to learn what the Bible says about Jesus. Don't miss up.

So my brothers and sisters, God speaks definitively in Jesus. Whenever we open our Bibles, we hear him proclaiming the gospel to us.

[ 33 : 15 ] Maybe it's a word of comfort. reminding us that in Christ, there is now no condemnation, there is now no abandonment. Maybe it's a word of encouragement, reminding us to live for Jesus as Lord.

Maybe it's a word of instruction, showing us how we are to live through the gospel, like we saw from Colossians 3 last week. Maybe it's a word of rebuke, whenever we are tempted to listen to false gospels, or we are not living in light of the true gospel.

Maybe it is a word of wonder as we simply behold and fall down in worship when we recognize the goodness and greatness of Jesus all over again.

But the point is, we hear this word today ultimately through the scriptures. Jesus. And because it is God's word, it is a word of power.

Remember, Hebrews 11 verse 3 tells us that God created the entire universe by speaking it into existence. And so his word has the power to transform us into new creations who reflect Jesus more and more.

[ 34 : 34 ] well, that's why my friends, we are all about the Bible. We are not about the Bible simply because we are bookish. We are all about the Bible because through the Bible, we know Jesus.

Occasionally, you get some Christians who complain that we can become too obsessed with the Bible. And certainly, it is true that some of us can fall into the trap of knowing the Bible simply to increase our store of information.

But the antidote to that is not to abandon the Bible, but to recover the true purpose of the scriptures.

We want to know the Bible more and more because it is where we hear God speak.

And through it, we can know and fall in love with Jesus more and more. on the flip side, we want to know it so that we can remain gospel centered.

As Hebrews chapter 2 verse 1 on the screen wonderfully puts it, we must pay careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard so that we do not drift away.

[ 35 : 54 ] That's what the original readers of Hebrews were facing. They were being pushed and pulled. On the one hand, they were being pushed because they were facing persecution and suffering and so tempted to give up.

On the other hand, they were being pulled because a lot of them were Jewish Christians and their former religion, Judaism, was still calling to them to come back.

So how can they stay on track? Only as they are driven by God's word to see Jesus as he really is. That's how they don't drift away.

Same with us. Whatever is pushing or pulling us, we need God's word to keep us hanging on to Christ. So this morning, what is it that you need to do to stay in God's word?

Have you fallen out of the habit of studying the Bible with others? Have you been given time to meditate on the scriptures? Do you need to grow in learning how to interpret the Bible well?

[ 37 : 08 ] What is it that you need to do to stay in God's word? Well, don't leave this morning without resolving to do what you need to do.

For my friends, this is the path to remaining gospel centered. It is to be driven by the word. So let us pray that God will keep us delighting in what he says.

Let's pray. Father, I pray, Lord, that as we have heard from your word about your word, which points us to the incarnate word of God, we pray that we would pay close attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away.

Thank you that you are a God who has always spoken and that in these last days you have spoken to us by your son, the one who is the heir of all things, the one who is the high priest who has provided glorification for our sins.

So please, Lord, keep our ears unstuck and our hearts soft, ready to hear your word today and always.

[ 38 : 31 ] We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.