

## Hope PCA Sermon, January 11, 2026

### *“The Son Is Speaking: Listen to Him” (Hebrews 1:1-2a)*

Rev. Martin Hedman

Again, I'd ask you to stand in honor of the reading of God's Word. This is a short reading this morning, as many of them I think will be as we go through the book of Hebrews, which is verse 1 and the first part of verse 2. Coming to this sermon series where I've said, you know, we went through the Old Covenant in Deuteronomy. Hebrews is really very much a New Covenant book, and I think and hope it will be a profitable study for us.

So Hebrews chapter 1 verse 1 and the first part of verse 2. God's very Word to his people.

*<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 ...*

The grass withers, the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. May it do so for us as we come before it this morning. Please be seated and let me pray for us.

God, indeed, You have spoken many times and in many ways. Help us, O Lord, as we come before your Word this morning and in the coming weeks and months to indeed hear the voice of your Son speaking to us through this Word. Bless it to our hearts, to our minds, and to our behavior, to our life lived before you as his people. We thank you and praise you in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Maybe this has happened to you. I haven't heard any stories, so I don't know. But what would you do? How would you react if, out of the blue, you get a phone call from some vastly important, famous person? Someone like the President of the United States. Dialed you up just to say hello. I venture to say that whatever you think of that person, it's a story for you for the rest of your life.

About ten years ago there was a story in the Washington Times. They were writing about then Vice President Joe Biden. Apparently, one of the things he liked to do was, as he met people, he would ask to borrow their phone and call one of their friends, their husband, their wife, their child, something like that, to surprise them, to kind of play a little trick on them, so to speak. And the story goes that at one event at the White House, he borrowed a woman's phone and said, "Hey, let me call your husband. This will be fun". And sure enough, he called the husband, the husband picked up the phone, and what do you think he said? "Hi, beautiful!" That's a story you'll take to your grave — speaking that way to the Vice President of the United States.

You hear these stories from time to time. Apparently it's a thing that presidents, government officials, prominent people like to do — just call people up and talk to them about some issue or some idea. Again, whether you like that person or not, it's got to be a story that you tell from that day forward.

There is someone in church history. He lived in the mid-200s to the mid-300s, about a hundred years, known as St. Anthony. Many think him to be the first monk or the guy who at least established the idea of monasticism. He lived in Egypt and he lived as a very severe ascetic, celebrated as a wise and holy man, considered so wise that emperors of Rome would

write to him and ask for his advice. That's pretty incredible. About this he is said to have remarked that, "Yes, a letter from the emperor is a great honor, but that honor pales in comparison to God himself writing to us, which he does in His Word, in Holy Scripture".

This idea of God's Word and God speaking to us is a key theme right here from the beginning in the book of Hebrews. Martin Luther commented on this, that these opening verses of Hebrews, and the verses that follow as well, he celebrated as well God himself writing personally to us, to his people. "What a privilege," Luther said, "to have God communicating directly to us and not through angels or through prophets or through some other servant".

There's another idea that's reflected here in the opening verse and a half of Hebrews. We have this story (it's in Matthew 17, it's elsewhere) where Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a mountain. They go up with him, and there Jesus is transfigured. His face shines like the sun. His clothes are as white as light. And there they see Moses and Elijah walking and speaking with Jesus. And then a bright cloud comes and overshadows them all. And a voice out of that cloud speaks. And this is a direct echo of Mount Sinai — God speaking out of the cloud to his people. And the voice speaks very clearly, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. Listen to him. My Son, I'm pleased with him, I'm well pleased with him. Listen to him".

We think that's where we get the phrase "mountaintop experience" — an encounter with God. Moses had that mountaintop experience with God on Mount Sinai. Now Jesus with his disciples gives them that mountaintop experience, that extraordinary special kind of encounter with God and his Word. And as we come to the book of Hebrews, I'd like to suggest and encourage us to think about this book as a kind of mountaintop experience for us, an encounter with God, God's Word given to us.

So here in this opening, we have an echo of the transfiguration of Jesus. "God," it says, "has now spoken through his Son". He doesn't say it explicitly, but you get the idea: "listen to him". Listen to him. This idea is repeated later in the book of Hebrews — chapter 2 verse 1: "Pay closer attention". We need to pay closer attention to what we have heard. Chapter 3 verse 1, which I use as kind of the theme, the title of this sermon series: "Consider Jesus". Come, consider Jesus, who he is, what he's done. Later the author calls upon his readers, his audience, chapter 13 verse 22, to "bear with his word of exhortation". Hear me, hear what I'm saying. This is my beloved Son, listen to him. Or as we sang: more about Jesus would I know. May that be our desire.

Also Hebrews is one of the most profound books certainly in the New Testament, if not the whole of the Bible, profound in its teaching. It's recognized as probably the best written book in the Bible, again, at least in the New Testament, from a purely literary standpoint. The Greek is beautiful, say those who are experts with Greek. This is a literary *pièce de résistance*. But this idea that God has spoken now through Jesus and that we're to listen to him is as much as anything else one of the key themes, if not the key theme, of Hebrews: God has spoken by his Son. Listen to him. Believe in him. Do what he tells you to do. We have a new and better revelation that has come through the Son, the very Son of God himself. And we're going to see as we go through this book that this Son, because he is the Son of God, is therefore a better prophet, a better king, a better priest, a better sacrifice, a better mediator of a better covenant.

This morning I want to do a little bit of an introduction to the book and revisit a little bit again at the end the theme of this book that's introduced to us in this opening verse and a half. So let's get right to it.

The kind of questions that we ask about books of the Bible. Who wrote Hebrews? Why was it written? To whom was it written? When was it written? With Hebrews, those are hard questions to answer. There's a lot of opinions, and many of those opinions have a good foundation. They're reasonable. They have a good basis. But unlike other books, Hebrews doesn't answer those questions in the book itself. Many do. "Hello, this is Paul. I'm writing to you in Corinth, and I'm writing for this reason". Or he figured it out as he deals with it in the book itself, the letter. Hebrews is silent about who wrote it, to whom it's written, why it was written, those kinds of things. And that makes figuring out these things, answers to these things, quite a bit of a challenge.

Start with *who wrote it*. Here's the answer: we do not know. We do not know. Even the early church fathers didn't know. Even they had various opinions about who wrote the book. Tradition came to be associated with Paul as the author, The theology certainly agrees with Paul, but there are reasons to conclude that it wasn't Paul. Paul always identifies himself in his letters. His letters have a certain style, a certain logic that they follow that's not in Hebrews. His letters tend to have: here's a section of teaching about who we are in Christ, here's how to live as a result of that. The indicative, the imperative, we call it. Hebrews isn't like that. There's this repeated cycle of teaching, of doctrine, and application of that doctrine, interspersed with one another. (There's an insert in your bulletin. You see that on the bottom half of that insert. This is from Dennis Johnson. Doctrine, application of the doctrine. There's other technical reasons related to grammar and vocabulary.)

So, is Paul the author? Maybe. Very likely that he's not. Another more important reason in regard to Paul is in Hebrews 2 verse 3, the author writes this: "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard". Note what the author is saying here. He's including him in the "us" who heard it from those who had heard it directly from the Lord. Paul never says this. Paul goes to great lengths to make sure people understand: "I received my gospel. I received it directly from the Lord Jesus".

Still, the author, if it's not Paul, is likely someone in Paul's circle. Timothy is mentioned at the end in the part of this book that actually reads more like a typical letter. Could it be Barnabas? That's been offered as a solution. Could it be Luke? Luke wrote pretty good Greek. Maybe it was him, but this Greek in Hebrews is different. Luther was the first one to propose Apollos as the author of Hebrews. Apollos is known and even acknowledged in scripture as a very eloquent man. The eloquence of Hebrews would fit with that description of Apollos.

In the end, there are strengths and weaknesses to any opinion. I used to say, years ago when I first started teaching on Hebrews, that if you forced me to choose, I'd pick Barnabas. Some years later now, I just don't think we can know for sure. I wouldn't completely rule out Paul. I think some of the arguments against him can be answered, but some of the arguments as well are pretty important to recognize.

I will say this: those who say they do know and affirm that with such conviction that they rule out any other option, I would say they need to do their homework. There is this famous quote from the early Father Origen — quote: "Who wrote this epistle is known to God alone".

If God wanted us to know, he would have revealed it to us and he hasn't made it known, so it's not important for us to know.

*Who is Hebrews written to?* The traditional title in Greek on the early manuscripts should say, to the Hebrews. There is good evidence that this is written to Jewish Christians. Language like "God spoke to our fathers", the regular, repeated use of the Old Testament in quotes and in various examples, an argument against Old Testament ceremonies and so forth. The writer seems to be exegeting several Old Testament texts.

Again, in your insert, that top part of the page from Scholar R.T. France, showing how there seems to be an exegesis of certain Hebrew Old Testament texts by the author of Hebrews. They weren't just Jews, they were fellow believers. This is clear from the use of the term "brothers" and the regular warnings in Hebrews not to fall away from faith in Christ Jesus. It could be a general letter written to Hebrews everywhere. That's a possibility but not likely. There's other reasons to believe that this was sent to a particular group of Jewish believers in a particular place. It could have been meant to be circulated widely. Once it had been read by those folks there. But there's themes related to persecution and other topics that make us think this is an actual group of people. They know the writer, the writer knows them. That's a clue that it's a particular group of people, probably either in Rome or in Jerusalem. And here again, whichever one you pick depends on certain technical things that you interpret and how you interpret them.

*When was it written?* We know, I think we can say this was some confidence: sometime later in the New Testament era. Again, we have that verse I read from chapter 2. The author refers to how he and his audience have heard about Jesus directly from those who were there with Jesus. Most date it to sometime in the 60s before the temple was destroyed in AD 70. There's no mention of that in the book. That makes sense, kind of a reasonable conclusion, but you could also make the argument that even though it doesn't mention the destruction of the temple explicitly, maybe the book is being written in response to the destruction of the temple and the dispersal of the Jews and the suffering and trials they've endured as a result of that event. Again, we don't know, the book doesn't tell us. I'm giving you a lot of "I don't know," but on purpose — if God doesn't tell us, we need to be content with that.

*Why was the letter written?* Here we have some good reason internally in the letter itself to see that this was a letter written to encourage these believers not to fall away from faith in Christ because of the persecution that they're suffering. That's why Rome and Jerusalem are likely candidates for where these people are. There's a strong encouragement there.

Again, it's called later in chapter 13 "a word of exhortation". And again, as a work of literature itself, it's absolutely brilliant. All sorts of literary techniques used that enhance the readers or the hearers, if they're hearing it orally, to enhance their enjoyment of the text. It's a word of exhortation. So it doesn't follow the typical letter style, whether in the New Testament or in Greek society in general. It reads, in all honesty, more like a sermon that's been written down and made into a sort of letter. There is a part at the end that is very much like the ending of a typical letter. But there are pointers along the way that this is a sermon, regular references to "what I'm speaking about," as the author puts it.

Chapter 2, chapter 5, chapter 6, chapter 8, chapter 9, chapter 11. This sermon structure is why Paul is still a very viable possibility as the author. Paul the preacher could have been very different than Paul the letter-writer. In any case, What we're about to engage in as we

go through Hebrews is a long examination of what appears to be an early church sermon. And the basic message of that sermon is simple, and as it should be: Jesus, the Son of God, has spoken — listen to him. Again: believe in him, obey him. Not only is he the Son of God, but he is superior to every other messenger that God has sent.

This basic exhortation is accompanied by a longer explanation. The writer gives plenty of evidence, all sorts of reasons for why we should be listening to Jesus and what he says, why we should continue to have faith in him and in him alone, and why we should obey what He tells us to do. So again, there's this kind of teeter-tottering back and forth between doctrine and exhortation and commands and so forth. It's very hard book to outline.

So let's look again at these opening verses. Verse and a half. It's kind of an abrupt opening. Letters always start with "Grace, peace to you," so on and so forth. That's, again, why this seems to be maybe more of a sermon written down. It's abrupt as an opening, but it's very eloquent. There's a lot of alliteration in the Greek. Alliteration, that repetition of similar kinds of sounds in what's being written or said.

"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." There's some interesting themes there in that short little passage. God is speaking (number one). To whom God is speaking (number two). When God spoke (thirdly). How God spoke. Through whom God speaks. Look at each of these briefly as we begin to get into this book.

*God is speaking.* Here we have some continuity between the old and the new. There's going to be a lot of discontinuity, a lot of disconnect, but here's continuity: the same God who spoke before is speaking now. The same God who does not change, in whom there is no shadow of turning, who does not change his mind. The God who is the same today, yesterday, and forever. That God speaks to us as well is one of the most profound things that we can think about. Again, think about getting a call from the President. This isn't the President, this is God. This is God speaking to his people — to you, to me. And we know God speaks. We know the ways that God speaks. He speaks in his creation, what we call natural revelation — sufficient by itself, as we saw in Romans on Tuesday nights: to know that there is a God and to have reason to seek him out and to worship him.

But what's so amazing is that God speaks directly to us in his Word. John Calvin describes this as God using "baby talk" — he's so high above us that he has to speak in language that we can understand. He does this to tell us about himself, to show us and describe to us the things that he's done for his people, and to call us to himself in faith and in obedience. And if God speaks, then we have an obligation to listen. Again, God's command from the cloud, "This is my Son. Listen to him". And we should listen with understanding. with the intent to learn what he wants us to learn, to do what he wants us to do. God speaking means that God is the standard for truth. His Word is the standard for truth and for belief and for life.

Remember the root of sin that we saw in the garden: "Did God say?" The flip side of that is, "What did God say?" And pursuing that, with diligence, with intent. If we're going to do anything about the wrongs that are going on in the world, we have to look to God's Word for the solution. It's not going to come from human institutions. It's not going to come from political action or social action or marches or speeches or retaliation (which we talked about this morning, earlier). It's not even going to come through the legal system. If anything is going to happen to make this world a better place, it has to come from God's Word, through

faith in him, looking to Jesus who brings peace by grace through faith. God speaks. God is speaking to us through his whole Word, but it's a particular theme here in Hebrews.

Well, *who is God speaking to?* To us: "God spoke to our fathers". That's an "us" kind of statement — we together. God's word is indeed good for the whole world, but it is especially good for his own people. And the reality is that no one can believe it or submit to it properly without the empowering help of the Holy Spirit. And this is the Spirit that is given to, that is poured out upon, we his people. So for God's Word to have maximum effect, it must be heard and believed and applied in the lives of his people. So we especially need to be those who study it and learn it and believe it and live by it.

That means we need to be about the business if we want, again, if we want things to improve, we need to be diligent, eager about the business of making disciples and drawing others, calling others to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus so that peace and reconciliation can come to more and more people. God speaks to us, especially to his people.

*When did he speak?* It's interesting how the author puts it here. Here he begins to draw distinctions, comparison between what happened before and what's happening now. "Long ago," he said, in the past, "and at many times, God spoke through his prophets". The contrast? Now, "in these last days, he's spoken again by his Son". That period of silence, between the last Old Testament prophet and the time of the New Testament (400 years) is gone. That time when people were asking, "Where is God? Where are his promises? When are they going to be fulfilled?" And what the author is saying is, "Here is God, here and now is the fulfillment of those promises. These are the prophetic last days that were promised. These last days God is speaking to us through his very own Son". So now the new era of the New Covenant that was promised, a New Covenant revelation, is now upon us, and it's upon us in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

*How did God speak?* "Long ago, in many times, and in many ways". Saw a little bit of that reading from Isaiah this morning. We saw it in Jeremiah last week. You see it in the prophets as you read them. Over and over and over and over again, God spoke to his people. What was the result? Disaster. Over and over and over again, they didn't listen. They chased after other gods, they rebelled against the LORD their God. So another contrast: God is no longer speaking in many ways, over and over and over again. That's why there's no new revelation in part. He's now speaking clearly, once for all, in his Son. And that's through whom God is speaking. Again, a contrast: he's not speaking through prophets anymore. Not through angels. Not through special messengers, not over many, many centuries. Just one messenger: his very own Son. Now he's spoken to us by his own Son.

And so these contrasts begin to show us what will be another very important key theme in the book of Hebrews: the inadequate nature, the inadequate quality of what came before compared to the superiority of what we now have in Christ Jesus the Son. The many prophets, the many ways God spoke, the long period of time over which he spoke stands in very stark contrast to the immediacy, personally and in many other ways, the immediacy of one prophet speaking one way, one time in these last days.

Before, because of the stubborn, hard hearts of his people who kept wandering like sheep away from God, God had to keep speaking to them over and over and over again through the prophets, patiently, patiently calling them back to himself. But that message through the

prophets did not bring the intended result. It's no fault of the Word, but of the means and times, and especially of the audience.

Now that Word has come in the flesh (what we're talking about in Sunday school). Now that Word is incarnated, and now that Word incarnated speaks. Now when the Word speaks, he sends his Holy Spirit with that Word to make sure it is effective and accomplishes all of his purposes. So this revelation, this Word that God is speaking in these last days by his Son is superior to what has come before.

Many people talk about Hebrews as a book whose theme is "Jesus is better". That's not a bad way to summarize it. But it's more than just "better"; far better. Far, far, far better. Far superior in every imaginable way you can think of. And so we have the "therefore," the conclusion, the exhortation that we're going to hear again over and over and over again in this book: do not be hard-hearted. Do not be hard-headed like those former people of God. Pay attention. Now is the time to pay attention. Now is the time to consider Jesus, this Son of God who is speaking, who is superior, far more excellent, far better than anything that has come before. Listen to him. Believe what he says. Believe in him. Have faith in him. Do not waver. Do not fall away. Do what he tells you to do.

There's a lot of people out there looking for meaning in their life. There's a lot of people looking for a relationship. They're stuck on their computer. They're stuck on their phone having fake relationships with fake people. And they're filled with anxiety. They're filled with stress. They're lonely as lonely can be. Come to Jesus. Come have an encounter with the Son of God in this book through whom the Father is speaking. God is speaking. It's time to pay attention.

Let me pray for us.

Oh Lord our God, our minds wander, our hearts wander, we wander. all we like sheep go astray. We turn each one of us to our own way. And it's not just a figure of people wandering around, it's a description of our sin. Oh, what a glory it is that in your Son you have laid on him the iniquity of us all. And so we are saved. Help us to listen, LORD God. Help us to be attentive. As we ask frequently: open our eyes to see, open our ears to hear, that we may know, that we may believe, that we may live as your people should live, in a manner worthy of our calling in Christ Jesus — in light instead of in darkness, and as joyful ambassadors of good news to those who are perishing. Bless us, Lord, in this study. Bless us as we come before this Word in the weeks and months to come. We thank you for it. We bless you and praise you in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

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