

(Hebrews - Part 1): The Purpose of the Book

by A.W. Tozer

The Book of Hebrews is a finely written literary work that presents Christ as being all in all, confirming wavering Hebrew Christians in their faith.

Duration: 33:20

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 1:1-4, Hebrews 4:12, James 2:14-26

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the attributes of God. He emphasizes that everything begins and ends with God, including time, space, matter, and motion. The preacher encourages the congregation to recognize that anything that does not originate from God or lead back to Him is not worthy of their attention. He also discusses the importance of different translations of the Bible, acknowledging that God can communicate His message in various ways. The sermon concludes with a reminder that Jesus is the light of the world and that refusing His light leads to darkness. The preacher urges the congregation to remember and honor Jesus' sacrifice in communion and rejects the idea that God is currently silent.

Transcript

Now, the Book of Hebrews will receive consideration from us for the next while. My method usually is to preach through books of the Bible. I haven't been doing it here, but I'm starting it now, the Book of Hebrews, and let me read the first chapter, the opening verses.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds, who, being in the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. Now, I'll not go further than that this morning. I'll only talk indeed from the first two verses, part of the first two.

Now, the Book of Hebrews presents a few difficulties. There are no difficulties that are insurmountable at all, but there are a few that are mostly historical and external, and I'll deal with them only briefly and give minimum attention to the scaffolding, because it's not too important merely to note it, and then for the rest of the time deal with the truth which the book contains. Now, the purpose of the Book of Hebrews, that is, the reason the Holy Ghost inspired it to be written, was to confirm, that is, the purpose was to confirm

wavering Hebrew Christians in the faith.

Now, let's get this settled now, that there will never be any surrender to the idea that the Book of Hebrews is written to unconverted people. This is a heresy which has sprung up within the last few years as a necessary dodge to take care of another heresy. You see, when one heresy comes, another one has to come to hide it, and then another one bigger than those two has to come to hide them.

Pretty soon you have a whole chain of them. And to make allowance for certain wrong beliefs, the Brethren had to tell us that the Book of Hebrews is not for Christians at all, but for people who just were hanging around the outside and are not saved. I can't go into it now, but I might say that this is an innovation and was never believed by the Fathers and has no standing in Church history or the development of Church doctrine at all.

The Book of Hebrews was written to confirm Hebrew Christians in their faith, and the way that they were confirmed was that Christ, the Eternal Son, is presented as being all in all. And the writer shows the self-sufficiency of Christianity. Here is something that we ought to get a hold of.

These things, each new truth we get a hold of hard, strengthens us. And it is a strengthening thing to know that while Christianity grew out of Judaism, it is not dependent upon Judaism at all. Jesus our Lord said, You don't put new wine into old bottles, and he meant you don't put Christianity into Judaism.

So there is a great gulf fixed between Judaism and Christianity, the Judaism of the Old Testament, the Mosaic order, and Christianity. Just as a man is born of his mother, but he grows up to full manhood, and his mother may die, and yet he continues on. He is independent of her, though he was born of her.

So the Christian faith was born of Judaism, though it is independent of Judaism. And Judaism may cease to be, and Christianity stands on its own solid legs because it rests down upon the same Lord that Judaism rested upon. It was foreshadowed by Judaism, but it was not and is not dependent upon it.

And I might add that the book of Hebrews is a finely written literary work, and its author is unknown. Now there have been a number of guesses about who wrote the book of Hebrews. Most people think Paul wrote it, but they just think so because they want to.

I think so myself, but I admit I think it just because I want to. I don't know there's any reason to think it at all. And as I go along from morning to morning, undoubtedly I'll say, Paul says, meaning the writer of the book of Hebrews says.

And I am not going to circumlocute every time the way the preachers do and say the writer to the book of Hebrews, which is a long phrase, takes up time and puts people to sleep. So that if I say Paul, you'll know that he doesn't know who wrote it, but he's saying Paul. Then some people believe that Apollos wrote it, because it's quite an eloquent book.

Some people believe that Barnabas wrote it, and some people believe that Luke wrote it. And the funniest guess that I've ever heard is that of Saint Clement, who believed that Paul wrote it in Hebrew and Luke translated into Greek. I don't know where he got that idea.

Then I read somewhere that somebody attributed it to a woman. I forgot her name, but that's what they say. It doesn't bear any author's name, so it is neither strengthened nor weakened by the fact that we don't know who wrote it.

If John writes a book and names himself, and then it can be proved he didn't write it, you have weakened the book. That never has happened, but I'm using it merely as an illustration. Or if you can prove that Mark didn't write Mark or Luke wrote Luke, you've weakened it somewhat.

But when a book doesn't claim any author's name, then you can attribute it to the Archangel Gabriel and there will be no change in the content of it, because it is what it says that matters and not who wrote it. This book of Hebrews stands in its own grand strength a temple where there is seen standing the Eternal Son, the High Priest of God forever. Now it begins with the word God.

God, who at sundry times, and it begins where everything begins. It begins with God. Genesis is the great book of creation, and it begins by saying, in the beginning, God, or God in the beginning.

And the book of Hebrews is the great book of redemption, and it begins with the word God. And all things begin and end in God. I took three months here, the beginning of the year, to preach on the attributes of God.

And I tried to show you, and I hope that it sunk in a little bit, that in God begins and ends time and space, matter and motion, life and law, form and order, all purpose and all plan, all succession and all procession. All things move out from God and return to him again. I pray that God may open our eyes to see that whatever doesn't begin in God and end in God isn't worthy of the attention of men made in the image of God.

And it's worse than that. It may even be a snare. Any interest that you may have that doesn't have God in it is your enemy at last.

You were made for God and made in the image of God, and your chief end is to serve God, to admire God, to worship him and enjoy him forever. And therefore, anything that you do or plan to do or have any interest in that doesn't begin in God is a snare to you, and it's a result of the fall of man and your fall in Adam. Now, any interest, I say, is your enemy.

Any plan, any project, any activity, any philosophy you may hold, any beliefs you may have, any motivations that are in your life that do not begin in God and end in God, they are your enemy at last. And I ask you to be aware that you don't cast in your lot with mortality. We, the children of the light and the children of eternity, are called of God to live immortal lives, that is, lives in the light of immortality.

And you must be very careful that you don't hear the siren voice of the world sounding and call you and woo you from the contemplations of things immortal to give your time and cast in your lot with mortality. Now, it says that God in the beginning, or God who spake, God spake. And I want you to notice that these words, God spoke, God spake, over a period of four thousand years, God had been speaking to the race when these words were written.

Now, the race had separated itself from God and fled from the garden and held itself incommunicado. The human race, while it had its gods and it had its altars and it mumbled its prayers, the human race, by being alienated from God and not having God in its mind, the human race was separated from God, and so to the race God was only a tradition, and the voice that had sounded in the garden was silent. Not that it was silent, but that they did not hear it, and so it amounts to the same thing.

So the ages might have continued until man or nature or both failed and were no more, but God came and spake, breaking the silence. He spake to Adam in the garden, he spake out after the garden, he spake to

Noah, he spoke to Abraham, he spoke to David. All down the years, one man says, all the prophets since the world began heard the voice of God.

God is speaking, God spake. Now, he spake, says the scripture here, at sundry times. See, God spoke to various persons at various times, but always his words accorded with all his other words.

I was talking with somebody, I don't recall who, I think it was the secretary, the district secretary, and she said, I've looked at the word until I don't know what it means. And I said, that happens to me often. If you give too much attention to a word and force yourself to examine it and analyze it, pretty soon you have a dead bug in your hand and you can't believe the word means what it believes, what it does mean.

It is the same with the scripture. If we press it too hard and bore into it too far and examine it too much, and especially if we don't walk in the light of it, pretty soon it becomes darkness to us. And the idea that the Bible must be divided, we must divide it.

Let's divide, rightly dividing the word of truth. Oh, how it fulfills that scripture which says, Our beloved brother Paul, after the wisdom given him by God, has written some things which are hard to be understood, which the unlearned and the unstable rest to their own destruction. Because Paul said, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The Bible teachers have gotten out their scalpels and their butcher knives and their meat cleavers, and they have been at it now for a generation, cleaving the holy word of God into bits and slicing it apart and laying it out, quivering and bleeding on the blocks. My brother, the Moody Bible Institute, has a saying that all the Bible is for me. It may not all be about me, but it's all for me.

I believe that. And I say that when God speaks to various persons at various times, his words are always accorded with others of his words. There are even persons who try to bring differences of opinion between Paul and James, and they say, James believed in works and Paul believed in faith.

Well, what they don't know is that Paul believed in faith and works, and James believed in works and faith. And they both believed in both faith and works, only they stated it a little differently. One man saw that they were trying to believe without obeying, and the other man saw they were trying to obey without believing, and both rebuked the embryonic Christians for their failure.

So God always says the same things to people wherever he says it, God being one and God always speaking out of his own unitary nature, always has to say the same thing to everybody, the same grace and the same love and the same justice and the same holiness and the righteousness and the same goodness, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, always out of their one nature, they say the same thing wherever they are saying it. Now, I notice a widening and increasing revelation during the centuries. The Lord spoke cryptically to the serpent.

He told of a warfare between the serpent and the seed of the woman. He told of a bruised head and a bruised heel and a victorious champion who was to come. To Eve he told of sorrow and childbearing and of her social status, her place in the family.

To Adam he told of a cursed ground and of the necessity for toil and finally the coming of death. To Cain he told of forgiveness through sacrifice, and to Abel and to Noah he told of grace and of the order of nature and of government. To Abraham he told of the coming of the seed, the Redeemer who was to come to make atonement for the race.

To Moses he gave the law and the Levitical order and told of the coming prophet who was like unto Moses, but oh, so unlike him and so superior to him. So at sunny times God spake and in divers manners God spake. God always said about the same thing, but he didn't always say it in the same manner.

Just as you might have somebody shout across the back fence to you, or you might have someone call you on the telephone, or you might have them send you a telegram or write you a letter or whisper to you or yell at you, it's the same person trying to get through to you and getting through to you in a different way depending upon the circumstances. So God spake, and he spoke in different manners. That word divers, as you know, is the old word for different.

He spoke in different manners to different persons at different times. He spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden by a voice, the soft, gentle voice of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. I don't know how you feel or what you've ever thought of it, but I'll never be a totally happy man until I hear that voice sounding again and know that I'll never, never be away from its presence.

That gentle voice of God sounding out in the garden in the cool of the day will someday sound throughout all the universe and bring into one all of his ransomed children. Then Abraham, God spoke to him once in a deep sleep, and don't ask me, I just happen to be writing something now. I haven't finished it.

I'm writing on the bus. I write most of my editorial on buses or airplanes, and this one is on God speaking to man and how they are heard, how he spoke to them. I don't know how he spoke to them.

The matter of the technique of inspiration has always escaped me. I wish that I could do as some of my learned brethren do, decide how you want to believe about a thing, and then quietly rule out all the other evidence. It would be such a comfortable thing to know everything and never to be bothered and never sit in the middle and say, don't ask me, Lord, thou knowest.

I don't. But when it comes to how God spoke to a man in a deep sleep, I don't know how he did it at all. And furthermore, there isn't anybody living that does.

There are just some people living or partly living who think they do. Abraham heard a voice of God, and it was recorded what he heard. But how it got through to him, I haven't a faintest notion.

And then there was Moses. God spoke out of the bush, and he spoke on the mount, and he spoke by writing with his finger on the stone. And there were prophets who heard God speak in dreams and saw visions, and God talked to them by signs and symbols.

But always the God whom the world thinks is silent was not silent at all. It is a great error to believe in the silence of God. God is only silent where men can't hear.

The voice of God is sounding throughout his world continually. And the man who hears it may become a prophet or an apostle or a missionary or a reformer or a soul winner or a Bible teacher. If he hears that voice sounding, but you say, isn't the word spoken, isn't it here, isn't it down in print? Yes, it's down in print.

Nobody can believe in the inspiration of the scriptures any more certainly than I do. But the scriptures can lie there silent for a thousand years and never be heard. And they can be read by minds that can't hear, and they'll never know what they mean.

The man, the treasurer of the Ethiopian eunuch, was traveling along reading from the book of Isaiah, one of the most self-explanatory chapters in the whole scriptures. And yet he had no idea what he meant. And it took the Holy Ghost to come and reveal to him.

It took Philip to come and tell him what it meant. And so I believe that it's possible to read my Bible and read it regularly and yet not know what it means until I hear a voice in it. And when I hear a voice in it, that voice never says anything contrary to it, but it speaks through it.

The voice is the trumpet through which God Almighty speaks. You can have and retranslate and translate a thousand ways the trumpet, but if you're not able to hear the voice that sounds through the trumpet, you might just as well not have the trumpet. We have so many translations of the scriptures these days, and it's all right, let them come.

I am the chief and I'm the world's greatest sucker for new translations. Just as soon as one's out, I have it. I have old Sheldon.

But I never get any help from particularly, because I realize that God can tell me to do something in 40 different ways. The Lord says, Go and apologize to Brother Jones. Well, there's only one thing for me to do to get out of difficulty, and that's to go apologize to Brother Jones.

Humble myself and go apologize. Now, he can say it in the modern snappy slang of Philip's. He can say it in the noble numbers of the King James.

He can say it in this garbled New English version. He can say it any way he wants to say it, but it doesn't make any difference. If I don't go apologize, I've failed God and myself.

So it doesn't make any difference to me what translation you use, and I don't believe the devil ever translated the Bible, and I don't know if I don't believe and accept any devil's Bibles at all, even in spite of my eager beaver brethren who try to make me think the devil translated the scriptures. I don't think so. And here's what I'm trying to get at now, wandering around the bush, is that God spoke in divers manners, and he spoke to various people various ways, and then God caused some things and not things that he said to be written down in a book.

And that book is the final test of all doctrine, the final test of all morality, all Christian ethics, all beliefs for this world and the world to come. But that book can lie dead as a rock until we hear a voice speak through it, until the Holy Ghost cause it to come alive to our hearts. The scripture must be understood by the same spirit that inspired it.

It says in many fragments, I don't know where I got that idea, it says it here in my notes, many fragments. Well, I think some other translations call it fragments, and I think they're right in that the whole thing is imperfect and incomplete, and they all lead up to something and wait for something. I'm thinking of the Old Testament now.

They're all incomplete. The Old Testament is like a door without a house to put it on, or like a house without a door. It calls for something else.

And in these last days, says the Holy Ghost, he spoke by his Son. And this was it. Remember years ago, some years ago, of a Jewish doctor by the name of Dr. Rose who had become converted to Christianity.

Dr. Rose told me that he was a reader in the Hebrew synagogue before he was converted to Christ. He said, I said, what did you do, doctor? He said, well, I got up on certain Sabbaths, and I would read the Old Testament. But he said, do you know, in all those years of reading the Old Testament, I had a haunting sense that there was something missing.

He said, it was there, and it was good, and it was true, and I believed it, and it explained the history of my people and all. And I read it faithfully, but he said, always there was the uneasy feeling that it was fragmentary, that there was something missing in it. Then I interrupted him and I said, Dr. Rose, when you found Jesus Christ, did you find what you'd been missing? With a big broad Jewish smile he said, oh yes, that's what I'd been looking for.

He said, that's what was missing in that Old Testament. My heart had been haunted because I was reading the frame, the outline, but the content wasn't there. But he said, when I found Jesus Christ the Messiah, I found that which the Old Testament had been writing all the time.

So he has in these last days spoken by his Son. God who in old times spoke in these last times has spoken. God who spoke before has now has spoken.

Before he spoke with many voices, and now he speaks with one voice, the voice of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. He spoke by the prophets, he spoke through the prophets, he spoke by means of the prophets, but now he speaks in the person of his Son. I happen not to like the various wise words that men are using now, tax-wise and profit-wise and weather-wise.

I even had heard one man, God forgive him, say prayer-wise, I don't think it would be. Prayer-wise, I don't like this wise and that wise, but I'm going to use one here now. And I like to make rules and break them, it keeps me young.

But I like to think that the word, if we could use such a grotesque word, the word is son-wise. He spake sonly, he spake through his Son, he spake in his Son to his people. And he is called the Word, you see, the Word.

God spoke and Mary's womb conceived and the Word became a baby and a man. And this was God speaking, this was the eternal Son, the eternal generation of the Son, which was before the world was. God, eternal Son, equal with the Father, less than the Father in his manhood, equal to the Father in his Godhead, co-eternal and co-equal of one substance with the Father.

Now he becomes flesh. And when he became flesh, he did not cease to be what he had been, the Word, the medium through which God speaks to his universe. So he is speaking.

When you read the Gospels, when you read the New Testament, and you know that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is in it and has inspired it, you are hearing not only words, you are hearing the eternal Word. You are seeing not only light, you are seeing the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. You are hearing a voice from another world.

You are hearing not an echo, but a voice from another world. And before he spake, I say, in many voices, now he speaks in the one. And the message of the Hebrews is that Jesus Christ is God speaking, that he no longer speaks in a scattered, tentative, nor imperfect way, but clear and audible and full and final.

And what he is saying, he is saying to all who believe today, wherever there is faith. Now, you have just one problem, my friends, this morning. It is the Eternal Son.

It is the high priest. It is where high in the heavenly temple stands the house of God, not made with hands. For the great high priest, our nature, where is the guardian of mankind, appears.

And instead of hiding as Adam hid behind the trees of the garden, a lot of people are hiding behind the tree of theology, and others are hiding behind the tree of philosophy, and some are hiding behind the tree of reason. But we must come out from behind those trees and let God speak. And God has spoken to us in his Son.

And what he is saying is not a philosophical thing, not a thing of the reasoning mind, but a thing of the heart. The question of the Eternal Son and his relation to us and our relation to him is a moral question, something of conscience and conduct and obedience and loyalty. And Jesus Christ, who appears so big in the book of Hebrews, as we go along we will see how he is greater than angels, greater than Moses, greater than Melchizedek, greater than all high priests.

And all our future is bound up with him. And he is bound up in the future of each one of us. We cannot escape him, and we cannot appeal from him, and we cannot find other help.

There is a doctor in town, and he is a famous surgeon, and I go to him and he says, You have to have an operation. I get mad and leave the office. I can go to another surgeon.

But if I go to Christ and I don't like what he tells me, where else do I go? Peter said, Lord God, I have the word of eternal life. Where can we go to? There is no appeal, no escape, no other help. He is God's last word to us, the last word.

And there isn't any other word that ever will be spoken by God except he speaks it through his Son, heads it up in his Son. He is the light of the world, and to refuse that light is to shut ourselves into darkness while the ages roll. In our communion service we try as best we know how to remember his death, looking forward to his coming.

Let us not believe with some that in the meantime we stand in a vacuum between a speaking God who speaks and a speaking God who will speak, but a God who is now silent. There is no such vacuum. There never has been such a bracket any time in history, and there isn't now, that God who speaks is speaking, and the words I speak unto you they will judge you in the last day.

So the God who spoke is speaking and will speak. So he is saying to us that we are to examine ourselves, that we are to put our confidence in the blood that was shed and the body that was broken, that we are to believe in the high priest who has gone up on high with our names in his breast and his hands and his shoulders, to be our high priest forever at the right hand of God, or to be our high priest at the right hand of God until he has fulfilled his purposes for this dispensation, and then to come back to take us into his presence where we will hear that voice without any intervening medium of any sort. But it will be the voice of God speaking directly to us, and we'll understand it, and we'll know the voice of the shepherd, and we'll look on his face, and his name will be in our foreheads.

So it's to that time we'll look. May God bless us, each one. Amen.

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