

## The Doctrine of the Son

### *Credo: Truths that Shape a Christian Life* Sermon 2

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Hebrews 1:1-14

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Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, **2** 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. **3** He is the radiance of the glory of God and 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, **4** having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. **5** For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”? **6** And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God's angels worship him.” **7** Of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.” **8** But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. **9** You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” **10** And, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; **11** they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, **12** like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years have no end.” **13** And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? **14** Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:1-14, ESV)

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We continue with our sermon series, *Credo: Truths That Shape a Christian Life*, where we consider the truest trust of Christianity, as captured in the ancient Christian Creeds.

We all live by a creed. Some assortment of deep beliefs shapes the contours of our lives. Like a wisteria vine clinging to a latticework, we reach out to things sturdier than ourselves in order to give our lives stability and strength. This latticework we hold to—be they people, institutions, or ideologies— then influences the quality and direction of our lives. Last week we saw that the ancient Christian Creeds—the Apostles’ and Nicene—tell us that the most important fact about us is what we believe about God. And of the Doctrine of God, the Creeds state that God is and that God is One, Creator, Almighty, and Father.

This week, we move to another and related rung on the Christian Lattice: The Doctrine of the Son. The Nicene Creed reads:

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.**

The Doctrine of the Son is all about grasping who Jesus Christ is. In AD 325, as many Christian leaders arrived in the ancient Greek city Nicaea for a council, the key issue debated was whether Jesus was fully human and, at the same time, fully God. Plenty of biblical passages pointed to Jesus' humanity, especially the stories of His birth, as the Creed affirms when it says: "by the power of the Holy Spirit He was born of the Virgin Mary and became man." But what about His divinity?

An important Scripture showing that Jesus was also fully divine is Hebrews 1:1–5, a passage we'll consider in this sermon. The writer says of Jesus: "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Hebrews 1:3). Language such as "radiance of God's glory" and "exact imprint of his nature" make a lofty point: put most simply, when you see Jesus, you see God. And this the Creed emphasizes, when it says of Jesus' nature, "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God."

At the foundation of Christianity is this belief: **Jesus of Nazareth was a human being, and Jesus of Nazareth was fully divine.**

This also draws us into the mystery of the Trinity: God is one being, as three persons: The Father, Son and Holy Spirit (we will return to this in a few weeks in a sermon touching on the Holy Spirit). That Jesus is God is a massive claim, and I want to draw out attention to one implication of it, that is of tremendous benefit to us.

Believing and trusting in God is made difficult because we cannot see God. To our human eyes and human minds, God is invisible and incomprehensible. Because of this, we may either totally disbelieve in Him, or believe in a terribly distorted idea of God. One friend thinks of God as a "spy in the sky" simply waiting to punish you when you mess up. We cannot see God, and this makes knowing God difficult.

But the Doctrine of the Son of God tells us this: in Jesus, God is revealing Himself in the theatre of human life. Do you wonder what God is like? Study Jesus, and you will see him. Jesus makes Himself visible to our eyes, and knowable to our hearts, the nature and ways of God. Therefore, we should look at Jesus eagerly and carefully.

The writer of Hebrews helps us do this. Not only does he tell us that Jesus is the exact imprint of God's nature, but he shows us three ways Jesus demonstrates what this nature is like. To see this, we need only to follow the writer as he points to the three great offices that Jesus takes up and fulfills: the office of Prophet, Priest and King. If we understand how Jesus functions as a prophet, priest and king, we will better see not only who God is, but who God is for us.

## **I. Jesus the Prophet & the Power of Words**

### 1. Jesus as Prophet

The writer of Hebrews opens in vv. 1–2 speaking of prophets: “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” (Hebrews 1:1–2). In the Bible, a prophet is someone who speaks the word of God on behalf of God. A prophet is God's mouthpiece. We see this in the story of Moses, the great prophet of Israel.

When Israel was in slavery in Egypt, God came to Moses and said, “I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people ... out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10). But Moses replies, “Oh my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue” (4:10). Then the Lord says..., “I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak” (4:11–12). A prophet speaks the words of God on behalf of God.

As the role of the prophet continues to develop in the story of God's people, we can also see that by speaking the Words of God on behalf of God, a prophet is sent to deal with false truths, or lies. A prophet speaks truth to men, because they are entangled in lies.

When the writer of Hebrews says that in former days God spoke through His prophets, but now through Jesus, he is saying that Jesus is the mouth of God. What is striking, however, is that when you study Jesus, He does not begin his teachings with the phrase, “thus saith the Lord,” as the prophets did. They said this because they were an intermediary. Jesus, however, simply speaks, and

we are to believe it as God's word. Hence after Jesus' baptism a voice comes from heaven, "This is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to him" (Luke 9:35).

Jesus as prophet, speaks the Word of God. But Jesus is greater than the prophets, because He does not speak on behalf of God, but speaks as God. To grasp the significance of Jesus' role as God's Word, we need to pause and consider the power of Words, and our own need to hear a sure word.

## 2. The Power of Words

Words are powerful. God created the world by His Word.<sup>1</sup> Solomon warns his students in Proverbs, "The tongue has the power of life and death" (Proverbs 18:21). Words are potent and can speak things into being. These powerful vehicles called words, can either convey truth or lies. And when they convey lies, they aim at death; when they convey truth, they aim at life. The very fall of the human race, in Genesis 3, turns on a lie, as Satan speaks words of deception, aiming at distortion, and ultimately death.

We live in a world awash with words. We are bombarded hourly with headlines, slogans and soundbites. Which words should you trust? Whose words tell us what's true about the world?

And then there's the lies we believe about ourselves. Austrian doctor Alfred Adler, in his work on human psychology and identity, came up with a concept called the "life lie." This suggests that people can build their entire lives around a lie—whether this be a lie about their own worth, or a lie about what's worthy to live for. A human life can be organized around a lie; a human life can be living for a lie.

So yes, we need a prophet. We need someone whose word we can utterly trust. We need someone whose word is powerful enough to speak through the cacophony of voices around us and break down the lies within us. In Jesus Christ, God comes to us with a word. And this word is the antidote to all lies, and is the only word that in being heard, can create life.

## **II. Jesus as Priest**

A second office Jesus fulfills is the office of Priest. Continuing in Hebrews 1 we read of Jesus “making purification for sins” (Hebrews 1:3). Later in Hebrews, the writer will call Jesus our “great high priest” (Hebrews 4:14).

A priest is someone who stands between hell and heaven, in order to reconcile sinful people back to God and each other. And this is a bloody business.

Even a quick glance at the story of Israel reminds us that priests had to get bloody. In Exodus, when Aaron was instituted as a priest, along with his sons, he was to lay his hands on the head of a ram then kill it. Moses was then to take some of the ram’s blood and put it on the tip of Aaron’s ear, thumbs, and toes, then throw the rest against the side of the altar (see Exodus 29:19–21).

*Why all the blood?* Because God was telling His people that forgiveness required wounding; purification required blood. If God’s holiness and righteousness were to be upheld and also His mercy and grace extended, then some type of sacrificial suffering would be required. A Priest stands between hell and heaven in order to reconcile wayward people back to God. And it’s a painful business.

*Why do we need a priest?* We all need to be reconciled to God, and God is Holy, we are not. The office of priest is meant to deal with our guilt and shame. Guilt and shame are by-products of sin, the way aches and pains are a by-product of the flu, and if we are ever to be whole, healthy, and reunited with God, we need a courageous and sacrificial priest to address this disease in us.

There is a near devastating scene in Tolstoy’s novel, Anna Karenina, that has always struck me as a window into our need for a priest. The countess Anna is married to a man named Alexei, but carried along by disinterest then lust, she falls into an affair with the young cavalry officer, Vronsky. Midway through the novel things come to a head when, after giving birth to her and Vronsky’s child, Anna lies dying in her home. The severity of the moment brings both her husband and lover to her bedside, in the context of an illegitimate child and pending death of both men’s woman.

Dying physically, Anna is tortured spiritually. Gazing at her husband, she says,

[T]here is another woman in me, I'm afraid of her—she fell in love with that man.... I'm dying now, I know I'll die.... There's one thing I need: forgive me, forgive me completely! I'm terrible! No you can't forgive me! I know this can't be forgiven!

Alexei takes her hand, kneels, places his head on the crook of her arm and begins to cry. She embraces his head and moves closer to him, raising her eyes. Anna then looks the other direction, toward Vronsky, who's at the door. She beckons him to come to the bedside, asking him to give Alexei his hand. Vronsky is overtaken with shame and can only cover his face with his hands as he stands before the husband of his lover. Then, shockingly, we read, "Alexei took Vronsky's hands and drew them away from his face, terrible in the expression of suffering and shame." And Alexei, through tears, forgives him.<sup>2</sup>

The rest of the novel is not without its twists and turns. But I have always seen Alexei's role in this scene as something echoing the work of a priest. To his own hurt, he must enter the space between these persons and God, the space between these persons and life, the space between hell and heaven. And he must enter with mercy to forgive.

We need a priest, who can stand between heaven and hell on our behalf and reconcile us to God. This is what Hebrews tells us about Jesus, when it says, "he made purification for our sins" (we will talk more about how exactly he did this in two weeks, when we treat The Doctrine of the Cross).

### III: Jesus as King

The writer of Hebrews also speaks of Jesus's kingship when he writes: "He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High" (Hebrews 1:3). Long before the life of Jesus, his people, Israel, asked God for a king. God granted them such, and the greatest of these kings was seen as David. However, even with David's so-called greatness, he left much to be desired. Underlying Israel's desire for a king, was the idea that what they really needed was for God to be their king. This is precisely what unfolds in the person of Jesus Christ. The son of David, Jesus, comes as the true King, and in doing so, embodies what true Kingship is.

A true king is marked by two things: (a) the taking of **responsibility** for the well-being of his kingdom and people, and (b) by being a **lawgiver**. The reign of a king, therefore, is marked by responsibility and righteousness.

Jesus did not come to His kingdom to lord it over people and build his ego, but to serve. Asked about the nature of His kingdom, Jesus replies to His disciples in Matthew 20,

**25** You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them... **26** It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, **27** and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, **28** even as the Son of Man has come not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25–28).

### **Why we need a king**

As the good king, Jesus comes to take responsibility for the deepest ills of His kingdom, which begins with the spiritual darkness within us. He does not come to thrust us into the ground under his feet as worthless subjects, but to lift us up before his countenance as friends. We need the true King—someone to take ultimate responsibility and whose ways are truly righteous.

I was recently part of a speaker's panel for a small gathering in Texas. During the Q&A, a woman shared the painful story of a loved one's departure from the faith and embrace of a way of life contrary to God's ways. As only a mother could be, this woman was distraught and at wits end. What should she do? As we spoke, it was clear that she was bearing the entire weight of the situation on her own shoulders. Together, we came to the realization that it was ultimately Jesus who owned responsibility for her loved one's life, not her. She could not nor should not bear the weight of it herself, as though she were the savior. She could do her part to love and speak truth, but there was a rest in allowing Jesus the King to take back the ultimate responsibility for her life and the life of her loved ones.

We need a king, because our shoulders cannot bear the weight of the Kingdom. A king, Jesus takes selfless responsibility for His kingdom, even our own lives, and places His scepter of rule in our hearts, sharing with us the true law of righteousness, showing us how to live rightly.

Jesus is the prophet, priest, and king. *If we believe this, how will it shape our lives?*

1. It means we will be people shaped by the Word of Christ more deeply than any other word. We must be people who hear from God through Christ. This means life in Scripture. Sometimes God will speak to us immediately through His Word; more often, it's a soft and quiet voice that builds over time, as we live immersed in the teachings of Jesus.

2. It means we are people who invite Jesus into the dark places within us, even when it's hard. We allow Him to approach our wounds and warts, and we begin to feel the balm of His mercy.

3. It means we look like people who have a king, and that king is Jesus. His kingship is evident in our lives because we obey Him, trust Him, and honor Him.

God is invisible but has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ. And when we look at Jesus Christ, we are stunned to find that God is a God who speaks to us, who sacrificially heals us, and who takes the ultimate responsibility for our lives. That is a God we can cling to.

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## Endnotes

1. "By the Word of the Lord, the heavens were made" (Psalm 33:6; cf. Genesis 1).
2. Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Richard Pevar and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Penguin, 2006), 412–13.