This is a preaching draft.

Who Is the Messiah? Part 2 | The Work of Christ | Hebrews 1:1-4
To Be a Christian: Nine Questions Every Life Answers
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You can tell a lot about a people by their institutions and officials.

Here in Washington, our executive, judicial and legislative branches dominate the feel of the city.

They would tell a foreign visitor that we are a people who prefer order to anarchy. And even if we don't agree upon belief in God, we are a people who still believe in right and wrong and want justice to reign instead of injustice.

Ancient Israel had three principal offices that ordered society: the office of prophet, priest and king. They, too, tell us a lot about ourselves.

The **prophet's** ministry was about **truth**—because to be ignorant or deceived is no way to live life.

The **priest's** ministry was about **reconciliation and wholeness**—because impurity and estrangement from God is deadly.

The **king's** ministry was about **order and peace**—because people have enemies without and within and need protection and deliverance.

We don't live in ancient Israel. But we need these three things: someone to tell us the truth. Someone to reconcile us to God. And someone to bring us real peace.

The profound thing I want to tell you today is that an institution exists, and an official is at work, bringing these very realities to people.

That institution is the kingdom of God. That official is Jesus Christ.

Last week we began addressing the question, *Who Is the Messiah*? There, we considered Christ's Person—that He is fully God and fully man.

This week, in part 2, we consider his work: Christ is our prophet—he tells us the truth we can't discover on our own; Christ is our priest—he brings us to the God we cannot approach in our sin; and Christ is our King—he frees us from the false gods that enslave us.

We see Jesus exercising these offices across Scripture. We turn this morning to Hebrews 1:1-4, where all this work is set forth in a rich and compact passage.

I. The Prophet

During his ministry, Jesus was often thought of as a prophet (Lk 9:18-19), and at times referred to himself as such: When preaching in his hometown of Nazareth he said,

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> "**no prophet** is acceptable in his hometown" (Luke 4:24).

There was in fact a promise dating from Moses that a great prophet would come:

> Moses says to the people, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a **prophet** like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen (Deut 18.15; see Acts 3:17-26).

Now notice how the writer of Hebrews begins by connecting Jesus' work to the prophets' work:

> 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).

Twice the verb for "**speaking**" is used here, and both with God as the one speaking. So, the work of the prophet is to be a mouthpiece for God's Word: God spoke … by the prophets in former times; God has spoken … by his son in these last days.

The passage is also making some distinctions between Jesus and these former prophets:

There is a distinction in time: "long ago" versus "in these last days." And there is a distinction in the nature of messenger, from "prophets" to "Son."

Two things to notice from these distinctions.

First, Jesus' work of speaking God's Word is happening in the **last days**, or **final days**. This is the culmination, the climax, of God's revelation. Therefore**, Jesus is *God's final word***. And this means we are not looking for a further prophet—like Muhammad—or for more revelation.

Second, in Jesus, God speaks by his Son. And in verse 3 we are told the following about this Son:

> He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature (Hebrews 1:3 ESV).

This sounds a lot like what we heard last Sunday in John 1: to say the Son is "the radiance of the glory of God and exact imprint of his nature" is similar to John saying, "the Word was with God and the word was God." There is distinction between the son and father, but also sameness. Here is another window into the Trinity[1]

The prophets were God's mouthpiece in a secondary sense. **Jesus is God's mouthpiece in a primary sense**. His words are God's words, because Jesus is God in the flesh.

Hence his words have **unimaginable power**:

> he upholds the universe by the word of his power (Heb 1:3).[2]

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[1] There are more similarities between Jn 1 and Heb 1: "The word became flesh and dwelt among us" echoes "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things…. he had to be made like his brothers in every respect" (Heb 2:14, 17). And finally in John 1 we read, "All things were made by him" (Jn 1:3); which echoes, "through whom also he created the world" (Heb 1:2).

[2] And this is why Jesus himself can say, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Lk 21:33).

As the Messiah, Jesus' work therefore involves a *Word-ministry*: He reveals the truth, in a final and completely authoritative way.

Let's pause and ask a few questions.

Why couldn't just another prophet suffice for bringing the message of the Gospels? Why did God have to send the divine Son, the Second Person of the Trinity for this work?

Let me suggest two answers for the *necessity of the God-Man* for the final office of prophet.

First, at the center of the message of the prophets is the revelation of *God*. From Moses to Malachi, a prophet helps us *see God*—what God is like, what God's will and plans are.

God sent the divine Son, who is the imprint of his very nature, so that the final revelation of God could be made. Jesus is God's Word in the flesh, and therefore in everything he does—word and deed—he reveals God. Which is why he can say,

> If you have seen me, you have seen the Father (Jn 14:9).

And second, as the perfect human, Jesus reveals us: he is the final revelation about what it means to be human.

No, he doesn't answer every question we may have. But he does reveal the essence and core of what it is to be human: In his perfect obedience, his love for the Father, his compassion for sinners, and his holiness, we see humanity as God intended it. He is not only the revelation of God to us, but the revelation of humanity to us.

Application: Pay Closer Attention

We live in a world awash with words—too many words. And we're suspicious. And we're exhausted. Who can figure out who's telling the truth!?[3]

Into this confusion Jesus is a simple, clear, and profound Word. You don't need to be smart to understand it. You don't need a bunch of degrees.

You just need a humble heart, willing to be taught.

And you need to come back to this word, sit with this word, pray over this word, day after day. The writer of Hebrews admonishes his readers in chapter 2, "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away" (Heb 2:1). How well are we paying attention to the Word, Jesus Christ?

And Christian, what friend will you help hear this word this week? "But exhort one another every day" (Heb 3:13).

[T] There is a second feature to Christ's work we see in our passage, which brings us to this second office he fulfills: priest.

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[3] "We have more information at our fingertips than any generation in history. And yet how many of us are more confused than ever about who we are, what matters, and whom we can trust? We are drowning in words, but starving for a word we can finally rest upon."

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II. The Priest

His work as priest is spelled out in brief but deep words in verse 3:

> After making purification for sins (1:3).

And in more detail in 2:17,

> Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful **high priest** in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb 1:3; 2:17).

Priest work, across the Scriptures, aimed at *reconciling* people with God. This took two forms: *sacrifice* and *prayer*.

Sacrifice

The sacrificial part was bloody and spoke to the cost involved in reconciling sinful people to a Holy God. The ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests was bloody:

> you shall kill the ram and take part of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tips of the right ears of his sons and … sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments (Exodus 29:19-21).

When Jesus raises his cup at the Last Supper and says, this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28), he's speaking of his priestly work he will do on the Cross.

Why was the cost so great for reconciling sinful man with God? Why didn't the bulls and lambs of the Old Testament suffice? Why can't you simply do penance and prayer to atone for your sins today? Why was it necessary for the son of God to become our high priest, and offer his own life as the sacrifice for our sins?

It is hard for us to grasp the type of offence our sin is against a holy God.

So many live in God's world as though he didn't exist. We sin against his holy law, harm that which he has made, and dishonor his name. And we stand, therefore, under his righteous judgment.

No animal sacrifice nor moral effort that can fix this. It took the Son of God dying in our place:

> it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins…. we have been sanctified through **the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all** (Heb 10:1-10).

We all have many problems. But Jesus' work as priest tells us that our greatest problem is sin and estrangement from God.

In the four Gospels, nearly half of each book is taken up with the final events of Jesus' life—his passion. He had to be the substitute for us in bearing the just penalty for sin. As prophesied in Isaiah 53:

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> He was pierced for **our transgression**… the LORD has laid on him **the iniquity of us all** (Isa 53:6).

Apply: Trust his power to purify

Can you sense how important it is that he is your high priest? You may feel your sin is so great, so vile, that you cannot forgive yourself. Friend, look to the work of your merciful High Priest! He forgives you!

Intercession

Priests also pray: Aaron wore a breastplate with the names of the sons of Israel on it when he went before the Lord (Exod 28:29[4]). We read in Hebrews of Jesus' never-ceasing work of prayer for us:

> he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (Heb 7:25).

Merciful and compassionate

This work of sacrifice and prayer reveals our Lord's heart: he is merciful and compassionate. Christ brings to us a priestly work that is uniquely tender and understanding:

> he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a **merciful** and faithful high priest (Heb 2:17); we do not have a high priest who is unable to **sympathize with our weaknesses**; (4:15).

His entire ministry is marked by the priestly desire to bring wholeness to people and fully reconcile them to their heavenly Father.[5] When Christ dealt with our sin, therefore, he dealt with the root of all our misery.[6]

Application: Look to the Cross as evidence of His mercy and love for you: Your life may be in a state where you cannot fathom being the recipient of *mercy* and *compassion*. Don't look to your life to prove God's mercy, for you are only now seeing in part. Look to your great high priest to see the evidence of God's mercy. "The Cross," says Augustine, "was a pulpit, in which Christ preached his love to the world."[7]

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[4] Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place to bring them to regular remembrance before the Lord (Exodus 28:29).

[5] "The miracles of Jesus are all miracles of redemption and healing, and as such belong to the exercise of His priestly office" (Herman Bavinck, *Wonderful Works*, 325).

[6] Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, 326, writes, in the various miracles which he performs, in the driving out of demons, in the healing of the blind and deaf, the crippled and the maimed, in resurrecting the dead and in commanding the force of nature, He gives conclusive evidence of the fact that He can perfectly redeem us from all our misery. There is no guilt so great, nor any sin, and there is no misery so deep, but He can remove it by His priestly compassion and His kingly power

[7] Attributed to Augustine of Hippo, quoted in Thomas Watson, A Body of Divinity (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 175, "Christ's Priestly Office."

Look to his prayers for evidence of his present care: You may be in so much pain and confusion, you feel abandoned by Christ. Friend, look to the prayers of your high priest—he is interceding for you, even now.

[T] The God-Man, Jesus Christ is our prophet and priest. He is also, we state thirdly and finally, our king.

III. The King

Our passage culminates in an enthronement:

> After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb 1:3)

Jesus is not sitting down to rest. He is sitting down to reign. Between "purification for sins" and "sat down at the right hand" are the resurrection, ascension and enthronement of the Son of God.

That the Messiah would be a king was prophesied across the Old Testament. He would be the "Son of David," as God promises David,

> I will raise up your offspring after you… and I will establish his … kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to be a son (2 Sam 7: 12-14).

It matters that according to the flesh Jesus descends from the house of David:

> The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matt 1:1).[8]

Let's note some marks of his kingship.

First, his rule is displayed and exercised by his love and grace:

In a conversation about his kingdom, Jesus replies to those who are reaching for glory:

> the Son of Man came bot to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:20-28).

This strange mingling of a high and humble character marks his rule: He will be a righteous king, but riding on a donkey (Zech 9:9). He is lifted up high, on a Cross. His appearing will be in the humblest of settings and his kingdom will advance—not by weapons—but preaching and prayer.[9]

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[8] And at the triumphal entry, as Jesus rides into Jerusalem, the crowds cry, Hosanna to the Son of David! (Matt 21:9).

[9] See Bavinck's words: "he is to come from David's house, yes (2 Sam 7:16), but at a time when the. House of David will have fallen into decay" (Micah 5.1). He will. Be a righteous king and fitted out with the salvation of God, but He will also be humbled, and in token of His humility, will ride upon an ass—in fact, upon a colt the foal of an ass (Zech 9:9)….And just as the Messiah in His appearing will not display an earthly glory and power, so His kingdom, too, will not be established by violence and weapons." (Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, 327).

Even now, his way of calling us is by the gentle prodding of the Holy Spirit on our hearts and conscience; by the steady but unflashy preaching of ministers; by the presence and witness of simple Christians in our lives. His promise to protect the church from the gates of hell is accomplished despite the often-manifest weakness of churches, their regular disagreements, their struggles within and without.

And yet by these humble means, he effects the most radical victory: he wins souls from the clutches of hell; he defeats sin; he subdues the human heart—without external demands but rather inward drawing of the Spirit.

He rules us by love.

This is not to say he is weak. Nor that his future return and ultimate judgement are not severe. Part of the power of irresistible grace is that it makes us aware of the terrors of future judgment—while we have time to repent.

But today, prior to His return, Jesus is ruling by the persuasive power of an irresistible love.

And second, by ruling us, he sets us free.

There is a terrible lie going around that to be free you need to follow your own path. This, in effect, sets yourself up—your feelings, your views—as king in your life. This is a recipe for bondage of the sickest sort—bondage to your sinful nature.

Freedom is not found in autonomy, but proper lordship. When our lives are brought under the authority of Jesus—when we are won by his love, and surrender to his will—we are free to become who God designed us to be.

I think this is what is meant by the phrase in Hebrews 2:10, "bringing many sons to glory." This 'glory' isn't merely heaven. It is the glory of being restored to what we were originally created to be.[10]

> E.g., When I first started to seriously follow Christ, I was near the end of college. All those big questions were swirling—what will I do with my life, where will I live, who am I going to be. In some ways, life felt like chaos—I just wasn't sure about anything.
>
> But looking back now, I see a profound order that was beginning to take shape: I was now turning away from sin, the fight was on. I was attending church regularly—which gave me new friends and a new rhythm. At church I was under the preaching of the Lord's Word weekly and was beginning to learn the songs of His kingdom. I was learning to be in my Lord's Word daily, and to pray to him. I was beginning to process decisions by listening to Him, talking with Christian friends, praying and waiting.

Here is what my King was doing for me in those years: He was setting me free from the chaos and disorder of following my own feelings, my own sin, and my culture's vision of a good life. I was free—because I'd come under the yoke of a good king.

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[10] "In the context of Hebrews 2, the word 'glory' is not a reference to heaven; rather, it is a term from Psalm 8 referring to God's intention to restore us to what he originally created us to be." Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Incarnate Son* (Wheaton, Il: Crossway, 2016), 220.

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And gently, slowly, he was leading me *exactly* where He wanted me to go.

Have you come to Jesus as Lord?

You know, so many people are ready for Jesus to be Lord over the world: they want him to end injustice, do away with bad leaders, and bring about flourishing for all. But they still haven't made him Lord over their own lives.

Have you surrender to Jesus—not only as the one who speaks truth and atones for sin, but who is your king?

Robert Murray McCheyne ministered in Scotland before his untimely death during a typhus epidemic in 1843, when he was just 29. In a letter he wrote to a person having inward struggles in their soul, he offered the following advice:

> For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely. Such infinite majesty, and yet such meekness and grace, and all for sinners, even the chief! Live much in the smiles of God. Bask in his beams. Feel his all-seeing eye settled on you in love, and repose in his almighty arms.[11]

When you look into your own life, and see confusion, misery, and disorder—for every one such look, take ten looks at Christ. He is here as your prophet, to dispel confusion; as your priest, to pronounce pardon for the worst of your sins and offer balm for your deepest of wounds; He is your king, here to bring order to your life—not by cold-might, but by the warmth of an all-powerful love.

Such is the work of Jesus Christ, the Messiah: our true prophet, our true priest, our true king.

Small Group Questions.

1. Jesus Our Prophet — Hearing His Voice (Hebrews 1:1–3; 2:1)
Hebrews tells us that God has spoken definitively through His Son. In a world filled with competing voices and opinions, what makes it difficult for you to listen to Christ? What would it look like to "pay much closer attention" to Him in your daily life?

2. Jesus Our Priest — Resting in His Mercy (Hebrews 1:3; 2:17–18; 4:14–16)
Jesus made purification for our sins and is also our merciful High Priest who understands our weaknesses. Why do we sometimes struggle to believe that Christ is truly merciful toward us? How might His priestly work change the way we respond to our guilt, failures, or suffering?

3. Jesus Our King — Finding Freedom in His Rule (Hebrews 1:3–4; 2:8–10)
True freedom is found not in autonomy but in coming under Christ's loving rule. How does this challenge our culture's understanding of freedom? Where in your own life are you tempted to resist Christ's authority, and what might surrender to Him look like?

4. Looking to Christ — Living in Light of His Work

[11] Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, ed. Andrew A. Bonar (Edinburgh, 1894), 293.

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Robert Murray McCheyne wrote to a troubled friend, “For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ.” Which aspect of Christ's work—as Prophet who reveals truth, Priest who reconciles us to God, or King who rules and frees us—do you most need to remember right now? How can we help one another look more consistently to Christ in the coming week?

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