

**God's Final Word**                      **Daniel Cote**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Congregational Church**    **12/1/24**  
**Scripture Reading:**    **Isaiah 49:5-7**  
**Sermon Text:**                      **Hebrews 1:1-9**

Retired four-star Admiral William H. McRaven writes about what he learned during Navy SEAL training that has helped him and could help anyone live a better life. McRaven says: Hope is the most powerful force in the universe. With hope you can inspire nations to greatness. With hope you can raise up the downtrodden. With hope you can ease the pain of unbearable loss. Sometimes all it takes is one person to make a difference. We will all find ourselves neck deep in mud someday. That is the time to sing loudly, to smile broadly, to lift up those around you and give them hope that tomorrow will be a better day.<sup>1</sup>

Hope is essential in life and is often what keeps us going in dark days and difficult times. That is the kind of hope that McRaven is referring to. But in Christ, our hope extends for all eternity. Today, we lit the Hope candle on the advent wreath. It is also sometimes called the Prophecy Candle because it is in the Messianic prophecies that God revealed the Savior who brought hope into the world.

Our hope can only be found in Jesus, but who is Jesus? That is a very important and relevant question at Christmas. You might think the answer is obvious because even a cursory read of the New Testament reveals that Jesus is the Divine Son of God who existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit before the universe was created. Since Jesus existed before creation, He is an eternal being like the Father. Yet there is much confusion on this topic in the church, and many Americans hold false, unbiblical, and heretical views on the matter. According to a recent Lifeway Research Poll, 80% of Americans say that Jesus Christ is God's Son, which is good news, that so many Americans still believe that. However, only 41% believe that the Son of God existed before His birth in Bethlehem, and 55% view Jesus as the greatest being created by God, putting Him maybe slightly above the angels.<sup>2</sup> The correct biblical view is that Jesus was begotten by God, not created—there is a tremendous difference, as I will explain later—and He existed with God before the creation of the universe. In theological terms, He is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

Unless Jesus is the eternal righteous God, who left His position in glory at the Father's right hand to descend into our present darkness, He is not qualified to save. Fortunately for us, Jesus is qualified to save. As John writes at the beginning of his Gospel:

John 1:1–3

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

John refers to Jesus as the Word, but John 1:14 plainly reveals that the Word is Jesus, the only begotten of the Father, and that He is God. We read the Nicene Creed earlier, which was crafted at the church Council of Nicaea in AD 325 specifically to counter the heretic Arius, who taught that Jesus was a created being and not the divine Son of God, as affirmed by the great apostle John and others. Arius's teaching is known as Arianism. It is unbiblical and heretical, and from time to time, it rears its head in the church and needs to be re-defeated.

### **Introduction**

Christmas is a direct result of the fall of Adam and Eve. Have you ever thought about it that way? The worst event in the history of humanity necessitated the best event in human history, the birth of a Savior. The salvation story traces back to and begins in the Garden of Eden, where we read in Genesis 3:13-15:

### **Genesis 3:13–15**

**13** Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

**14** The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life;

**15** And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.”

Earlier in Genesis 3:6, Eve saw that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was good for food and was a delight to the eyes. Sin is often very appealing and alluring. Eve was deceived by Satan and ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil even though God commanded that they not eat from that tree. She gave some fruit to her husband, who ate it. As I mentioned last week, in the Garden of Eden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil served as a test of obedience to God for humanity. God allowed Adam and Eve to freely choose to obey or disobey because He did not want His heaven populated by robots who had been forced to obey Him. So, He gave them a choice. They failed the test, but out of His mercy, compassion, and love, God enacted a plan to redeem all fallen humans who would place their faith in His Son.

In the text I just read to you from Genesis 3, Satan, who tempted Adam and Eve into disobedience, was cursed by God. As a consequence, the seed or descendant of the woman, who is Jesus, and the seed or offspring of Satan would be enemies. Genesis 3:15 foreshadows that Satan would inflict a minor wound on Jesus (the offspring of Eve), while Jesus would inflict a mortal wound on Satan, which is precisely what happened. Satan incited a mob to kill Jesus temporarily, but the Divine Son could not die. Jesus’ earthly human body could die, but the eternal Son of God could not be extinguished, and so He rose from the dead. By rising from the dead, Jesus gained victory over death and destroyed the work of Satan. First John 3:8 informs us that “...The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.” Satan has been defeated, and at the end of the Millennium, Satan will be cast into the lake of fire for all eternity, never again to destroy the peace of God’s kingdom.

God’s salvation plan known to the Trinity in eternity past was enacted at the fall of Adam and Eve, and the details continued to be revealed through God’s interaction with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David and through the prophets of Israel. We understand God’s means of salvation through the Old Testament, which records God’s interaction with Israel and the words of the prophets foretelling the coming Savior, who is Christ the Lord. God used Israel to bring the Messiah into the world. We see this very thing in our Scripture reading from Isaiah 49:6, where God speaks through the prophet Isaiah, saying,

It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

When I first read this verse in seminary, my heart filled with joy. I always knew that Jesus came to offer salvation to the Jews, but this verse confirms that He came for you and me. It was too small a thing for the exalted Servant of God to leave His heavenly throne merely to save the faithful of Israel, a nation the size of New Jersey. No, God did not send Jesus just as a Savior for the Jews, He sent Him as a Savior for the world. As we read in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

### **Exposition of Sermon Text**

Now, we turn to our sermon text. We do not know who wrote the Book of Hebrews, but it was likely added to the NT because of the power of the argument it makes to the early Jewish

Christians for the superiority of Christ to the OT sacrificial system. The writer of the Book of Hebrews starts his book with the awe-inspiring verses found in our sermon text tracing God's movement in human history. God revealed many things about Himself and His plans for humanity through the prophets, but in these last days, the writer of Hebrews says, He has spoken to us through His Son, through whom He made the world and who is the heir of all things. Bible scholar and seminary professor Dr. Zane Hodges writes of the opening verses of the Book of Hebrews,

In a majestically constructed opening paragraph, the writer introduced his readers at once to the surpassing greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son, he declared, is the par excellence vehicle for divine revelation. In asserting this, he implicitly contrasted Him with the prophets of old and explicitly contrasted Him with the angels.<sup>3</sup> Unquote.

The writer of Hebrews conveys the "surpassing greatness" of Jesus Christ and His superiority in revealing God's plans and purposes. Hodges says the Son of God is the par excellence vehicle for God's revelation, meaning that because Jesus is God, He is the perfect means to reveal God's divine plans to humanity. What better means could there be for God to communicate about Himself and His plans for humanity than to do it Himself? There is no better way, so God the Father sent us His Son, who was with Him before creation. He is far above the angels and even farther above the human prophets because He is God, through whom the world was created. In sending His Son, God removed the middle man and spoke directly to us. This is precisely what Jesus says about His message in John 12:49–50:

<sup>49</sup> "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment *as to* what to say and what to speak. <sup>50</sup> "I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in perfect agreement, and they are perfectly synchronized in their thoughts; therefore, when God the Son speaks, He speaks perfectly for God the Father. Thus, God's final Word for humanity is found in the teaching of Jesus Christ. We need not look for or expect more revelation because the most perfect revelation of God has already been made in Christ.

God's revelations in the OT through prophets and angels were of great importance because they led us to understand that the Messiah is our Savior. Now that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, has come, we must listen to Him. This was a very important point for the writer of Hebrews to make because he was writing to Jews who were hung up on the fact that the OT sacrificial system had now been made obsolete by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The early Jewish Christians revered the Law of Moses and the Prophets, and now they needed to revere Christ and recognize the sufficiency of His singular sacrifice on the cross for all human sin. The blood of bulls and goats was no longer needed to cover sin.

Jesus did not come to bring some heretical subversive message contrary to the Law of Moses and the Prophets; He came to fulfill the Law and Prophets. Jesus says in Matthew 5:17–18

<sup>17</sup> "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup> "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

In verse 3 of our Sermon text, the writer of Hebrews continues to extol the divine virtues of Christ and His greatness. He is building the case that the Jews must embrace all that Jesus taught and said and that they must listen to Him. The writer has already explained that Jesus is the heir of all things, meaning that He is the owner of all things, and furthermore, the universe was made through Him. Now, we learn that Jesus radiates with the glory of God. I

spoke about the transfiguration a couple of months ago, and you will recall, for a brief moment, Jesus' disciples witnessed His true divinity as He spoke to Moses and Elijah, and His face shone like the Sun, and His garments became white as light (Matt 17:1-3). So, too, our text tells us that Jesus is the exact representation of God, so whatever Jesus does or says is what God the Father would do or say if He engaged with these same people.

Jesus' ministry was filled with mercy and compassion, and He sought the lost, so we know God is the same way. We knew that beforehand from the OT, but now, through Jesus' ministry, we see it playing out in human experience as He interacts with all types of people. Jesus shows us the nature of the Father and reveals Him to us.

There is so much in verse 3 of our text. The writer says that Jesus upholds all things by the word of His power. Not only was the universe made through Jesus, but it is sustained by Him. Paul says something very similar in Colossians 1:17 "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." Last week, I spoke about the vastness of the creation, the nature of which is beyond our understanding. Not only was all that made through the Son but it is also being held together and sustained by Him at this very moment. Four fundamental forces of nature hold together the universe and all that is in it: gravitational force, electromagnetic force, and the strong and weak nuclear forces. Without these four forces, nothing would hold together. I'll spare you an explanation of those, but I believe it can be rightly said that Jesus is the source of these forces and holds the universe together by them, which requires great power.

The writer of Hebrews explains that when Jesus made purification for sin, He was seated at the right hand of God. No mere human could save humanity because, as Paul affirms in Romans 3:10, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE. In contrast, the Son of God is sinless and righteous. When it came to the salvation of humanity, God had to do it Himself; it was an inside job because, apart from Jesus, there has never been a human born to a woman who qualified to do the job because none are righteous.

The Jews would have been familiar with Psalm 8:5, where David says that God made humans a little lower than the angels. Jesus is not lower than the angels because, even though He took on human form, He possesses all the divine attributes of God, as the writer of Hebrews emphasizes in our text so far. The writer of Hebrews goes out of his way to show that Jesus is God and not a mere created being like an angel. In verse 5 and the remainder of our text, the writer moves to conclusively establish the divinity of Jesus and his superiority to the angels. He quotes Psalm 2:7, where God says to the Son, "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." Jesus is the begotten of God. When humans beget, they beget humans. When God begets, He begets God. Therefore, Jesus is of the same divine eternal substance as we read in the Nicene Creed. Moreover, He necessarily existed before creation since He was present at creation.

Verses 7-9 of our text contrast the servanthood of the angels and the eternal power and dominion of the Son of God. God's angels serve Him, manifesting physical phenomena in the world, sometimes wind and fire. But of the Son God has said, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom." In contrast to the angels, Christ possesses an eternal throne, which means that His kingdom is eternal.

So, let's review the divine attributes of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, described and implied by our Sermon text. First, as the Son of God, Jesus is of the same substance or essence as the Father because He is the begotten of the Father. The Son is the co-creator of the universe with the Father because the world was made through Him and, to this very day, is sustained and upheld by Him. Since Jesus is the co-creator of the universe with God the Father, He existed in eternity with God before creation. Furthermore, the Son is the exact representation of the Father, possessing God's radiance, glory, and power; as such, Jesus is God's final word to us. Finally, the Son is the heir and owner of all things, and His throne and

kingdom are eternal. It seems that Arius didn't spend enough time reading the Bible, for Jesus' divine nature is plain from our passage and many other passages in the Bible. The bottom line is that our hope in Christ is secure because of who He is, the one and only Son of God.

### Closing

A number of years ago, the Calgary Herald reported this tragic true story.

On June 5, 1978, seven-year-old Martin Turgeon slipped off the wharf and fell into the Prairie River. The dozen or more adults standing on the same pier did nothing except watch him struggle for a few moments in the water and then drown. Why didn't anyone help? Well, just a short distance upstream, untreated sewage is dumped into the river. The water is highly polluted and very smelly. One witness quoted an onlooker as later saying, "We weren't going to jump in there; the water was much too dirty." A policeman who came on the scene shortly thereafter remarked bitterly, "It makes you wonder about how human people really are. The boy probably could have been saved."

That poor young boy had no hope of being saved because no one was willing to descend into the dirty, sewage-contaminated river to save him. The problem with humans is that they are all too human; they are human through and through and often have difficulty putting others first.

Our Savior was willing to leave His throne at the right hand of the Father to descend into the murky, polluted, sin-corrupted, treacherous world to save those who hated Him so much that they crucified Him. He gave up His life so that you would have life. Before we came to faith in Christ, our sins were counted against us, and in that state, Paul says in Romans 5:10 that we were enemies of God. And unlike that poor seven-year-old boy, Martin Turgeon, we have hope because our Savior did not turn His back on us while we were drowning in sin.

Do not think for a moment that going to the cross was easy for Jesus to do because He is God in the flesh. We see Jesus' grief and despair in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of His crucifixion, described in Mathew 26:38-39. At that time, Jesus said to His disciples: "My soul is deeply grieved..." Matthew tells us, He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." The agony that Jesus suffered results in eternal hope for all who trust in Him and it is only made possible because of His willingness to submit to the will of the Father.

As C.S. Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*, "The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God." As J.I. Packer observes, "The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity—hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory—because at the Father's will, Jesus Christ became poor and was born in a stable so that thirty years later he might hang on a cross"<sup>4</sup>...so, that you could be reconciled to God.

In Christ, God has revealed His final word for humanity, and it is a message of great hope. In this Advent Season, take time to ponder the depth of the love of Christ and the richness and truth that His teaching brings to your life. Think about what your life and eternity would be like if you did not know Christ, and reflect on the hope that you have because of what He has done for you. That will be a good start to the Advent season. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Admiral William H. McRaven, *Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life...and Maybe the World* (Grand Central Publishing, 2017), pp. 93-94

<sup>2</sup> <https://research.lifeway.com/2023/12/18/where-was-jesus-before-bethlehem/>

<sup>3</sup> Zane C. Hodges, "[Hebrews](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 780.

<sup>4</sup> J.I. Packer