

***How Can Jesus Be the Only Way to God?***  
***Be Ready to Share*** Summer Sermon Series 2016  
Hebrews 1:1-4  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
Pastor David Palmer  
July 17, 2016

**TEXT:** Hebrews 1:1-4



We continue this morning in our series on Being Ready to Share, and this morning we look at this important question: “How can Jesus be the only way to God?” The exclusivity of Christianity remains a question for many. The absolute uniqueness of Jesus Christ will help us answer this question. Whenever I am asked how Christians can claim that Jesus is the only way to God, my answer, and the answer I submit to you this morning, is that the absolute uniqueness of Christ is the best answer to that. You can talk philosophically; you can discuss various ideas that people have, but the best answer to the exclusivity of Christianity is the absolute uniqueness of Christ. To answer this question from Scripture, we want to turn to a unique portion of God's Word, the Letter to the Hebrews.

All of the other New Testament letters identify their author in the very first word, but the author of Hebrews is anonymous. Many manuscripts place Hebrews within Paul's letters, but the vast majority separate it as though from a different author. The rhetorical style of Hebrews is very different from Paul's, the method of argumentation, and the structure. Throughout history, people have proposed candidates for the authorship of Hebrews such as Barnabas, Silas, or Apollos, but Origen, the Christian scholar in the second century, said only God knows who wrote Hebrews. Not only is Hebrews unique in terms of being anonymous, the location to which it was sent is uncertain. Scholars suggest Rome, Jerusalem, or Alexandria as possible locations. Although the author and location of this letter are uncertain, what is absolutely certain is that the author holds a breathtaking view of Jesus Christ, His absolute uniqueness. There are almost 170 words in Hebrews that don't occur in the rest of the New Testament. The style of Hebrews is the most sophisticated and elevated in all of Scripture, and the letter, or word of exhortation as he describes it, proceeds with a set of scriptural themes. The central idea of this unique letter is that Jesus Christ is God's climactic Word. That is a thesis of this

document. We want to look together that at the opening sentence in Hebrews. Hebrews 1:1-4 is actually a single sentence in the original text, and we want to follow this majestic opening sentence. How is it not arrogant for Christians to affirm that Jesus is the only way to God? It is not arrogant, because Jesus Christ is utterly unique. Let's look at Hebrews 1:1-4, and then we will apply this for today with a set of implications in the end.

This whole passage is really just one long, elegant sentence in the original. It is beautiful. The English language just can't handle a sentence this long, so the ESV has kindly broken it up for us into three sentences. Hebrews 1:1 begins by saying:

*"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,"*

The God of the Bible is the One who answers. He answers in word and in deed. The God of Scripture is a speaking God, unlike the idols of the nations which have mouths, but they do not work because they are human-made. God is the speaker in the first sentence of the Bible. He is the subject of the opening words. His speech makes things happen. He speaks and the universe is made. He speaks and directs angels. He speaks and guides His people. He speaks throughout the Scriptures. Four hundred times in the Old Testament alone we hear the phrase: "Thus says the Lord." This opening phrase says that God spoke of ancient times. He spoke at many different moments. He spoke in many different ways. Sometimes He speaks to the heavenly court. Sometimes He speaks through a prophet, sometimes through a prophetess. Sometimes He speaks through a vision or a dream. Sometimes He even speaks through a donkey to communicate His will. Sometimes He speaks in heavenly glory descended on the mountain, in flames of fire. Other times He speaks in a still small voice as He did to Elijah in the wilderness. The God of Scripture is a speaking God, and the writer of Hebrews wants you to know, wants me to know, that the God who has spoken many different times, many different ways, that this God has now spoken again. He has spoken in a climactic way. Hebrews 1:2a says:

*". . . but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son,"*

In the culmination of days, God has spoken to us by His Son. The God of the Bible who speaks has now spoken again, and He has spoken at the climax of time, and He has spoken to us by His One and only Son.

The mention of the Son in Hebrews introduces a set of descriptions about Jesus Christ, and there are seven of these. I want us to notice these as we go through the rest of this passage. There are seven things said about Christ that make Him utterly unique, and this is why it is not arrogant for Christians to claim that He is the only way. There is none like Him. What is said of this Son in Hebrews 1:2b is staggering. It says:

*". . . whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world."*

Can you imagine that? He is the heir of everything! This Son of God is designated as the heir of the cosmos. He will rightfully inherit, if you will, the new heavens and the new earth. He rightly receives the tribute of all nations. Not only is He the heir as the first great declaration of the Son, but tucked in this small relative clause is: "Oh, by the way, He is the one through whom God created the world." Jesus Christ does not only inherit everything, He is the Agent of

creating everything. John 1:1-3 says:

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.”*

In other words, Jesus is the Agent with God the Father of creating everything. That means that Jesus Himself is not created, and that's the reason our neighbors are deeply mistaken on this point. A hundred feet to the north of us, the Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus is a created being, and that is not the case. Jesus is the eternal, reigning Son of God. He is the One who created all things.

We see these things about Jesus in this passage.

Number one: He is heir of everything.

Number two: He is the Agent of creating all things.

Number three: We see in Hebrews 1:3:

*“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature,”*

Jesus Christ is the very radiance of God. If you want to see what God looks like, look to Jesus Christ. John 1:18 says:

*“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.”*

In John 14:9, Jesus says:

*“Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.”*

Colossians 1:15 says:

*“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”*

Having absolute preeminence, Jesus Christ displays God; He reflects the Invisible One.

Number four: It is said about Jesus in Hebrews 1:3b:

*“. . . He upholds the universe by the word of His power.”*

This precious sentence tells us that He upholds or carries the universe by the word of His power. These are just staggering statements, aren't they? Jesus Christ is not only the heir of everything, He is the Creator of everything, He's the radiance of God, and He carries the universe. I don't know what you put on your résumé, but none of these things are on mine. Jesus Christ carries the universe. He bears it with His word of power.

Number five: Jesus Christ is said to be the One who makes purification for sins.

You need this. I need this. The world needs its sin to be purified and cleansed. Isaiah says that all our righteousness is like filthy rags. We have become like those with stained garments. We need forgiveness of sins. In Scripture, we see that God had made provision for the forgiveness of sins through blood atonement. The highest, most holy moment in Israel's liturgical year is the

Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. In Leviticus 16:11, we read:

*“Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover.”*

The ark of the covenant stands at the center of God's sanctuary, covered with gold. Inside are the tablets of God's covenant law, and the High Priest approaches once a year, carrying the sin of the nation, including his own. The ark of the covenant signals the throne of God, overlaid with gold and cherubim veiling their sight from God's holiness. The High Priest of Israel comes once a year, offering an atonement for his own sin and then the sin of the people. He comes with a prayer that this offering might be accepted, lest he be destroyed by the bright, brilliant holiness of Almighty God. When his atoning work is completed, the High Priest then comes out from the Holy of Holies, thankful to be alive, the offering accepted. Jesus Christ, however, not only makes purification for sins, which He accomplishes through His own shed blood, but there is a sixth statement of Christ that is absolutely compelling.



Number six: Unlike the High Priest of Israel who makes purification for sins and then backs out of the sanctuary, the throne room of the living God, Jesus offers His own blood for the sin of the world. Standing in the midst of the sanctuary, Jesus Christ does not leave, but takes His seat upon the throne. When He had made purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Number seven: Jesus Christ is then declared in Hebrews 1:4:

*“...having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”*

The name that is described in the rest of Hebrews 1 is the name *Son*. Jesus Christ is so vastly greater than the angels, heavenly beings, because He bears the name *the Son of the living God*. There is none like Him. Hebrews develops like a great sermon, really an amazing sermon. The writer calls it a word of exhortation, and it is this for sure.

As Hebrews unfolds in the next several chapters, the writer describes Jesus in several more ways which we will not explore today, but I have to tell you what they are. He says this:

- 1) Jesus is superior to the angels, with a list of seven Scripture citations;
- 2) Jesus is the representative of all humanity;
- 3) Jesus gives rest for the people of God, for all who hear His voice;
- 4) Jesus is a High Priest forever, making purification for sins;
- 5) Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant promised to Jeremiah;

- 6) Jesus is the ultimate example of persevering faith;
- 7) Jesus is the example of how to interpret persecution and suffering as evidence of Sonship.

Jesus is God's climactic word to His people, and there is none like Him. This is why it is not arrogant for us to assert the exclusivity of Christianity. It is not arrogant simply because there is none like Jesus Christ. In the book we are reading this summer, *Questions that Christians Hope No One Will Ask*, the author describes that many people propose, some scholars even suggest, that Jesus doesn't become worshiped as divine Son of God until centuries after His death. This is simply not the case. The earliest traditions that we have, the first writings of the New Testament, assert that Jesus is worshiped as divine Son of God. There is not a chapter in the New Testament in which you cannot see the divinity of Christ. Why is it not arrogant to assert His uniqueness? Because there is none like Him. Jesus is the object of worship from the very beginning, and it is impossible for us to remain indifferent to Him.

Yesterday, coming out from the place where I was studying, I saw a group of people coming into the room where I had been. I looked at this group, and as I looked at them closely, I saw that several of them were recent converts to a different religion. They were signaling that in their peculiar dress. They were coming to begin to discuss their newfound faith, and I found myself just burning with desire in my heart to speak a word about the utter uniqueness of Jesus Christ. We need to be gripped anew, now, by the greatness and uniqueness of Christ. I remember a couple of years ago being down at UC. We were hosting an event on campus, and a student came and spoke with me at the break. He had grown up in this country, and he had converted recently and become a Muslim. As we were talking, I said to him: "Only Jesus Christ has provided atonement for sin." He began to tell me the standard lines that the Bible had been corrupted. I said: "There's no textual evidence for that. If we look at the uniqueness of Christ, He is the only one who makes atonement for our sins. He is the only one." Do you believe that? He is the only one who carries the universe. He is the only one who is the resplendent glory of the living God. He is the only one who secures our redemption. We talked back and forth. His name was David, like mine, and at the end of our conversation, with tears in my eyes, I could only say, "David, one of us is profoundly mistaken. These things cannot both be right."

I remember being a small group Bible study with international students, and we were studying John 14. I remember thinking to myself: "Boy, who organized this? These are international students, and this is a difficult passage." It was so bold and courageous, and it inspired me. If you have only one conversation with someone, make it clear, make it direct. We read through John 14 and came to the place where Jesus says in verse 6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me." One of the Hindu students said right in front of all the group: "Well, it seems that what Jesus is saying is that we must believe in Him to know God." The other Christian leading the small group Bible study and I were stammering and said: "I know the challenge, particularly for Hindus, is that the boundaries of Hinduism are very porous and open, so to add another deity to the mix is often no problem. But the exclusivity of Christ is the barrier." I asked him afterward: "How many gods are there in Hinduism? I've been told that there are six million." This man was an engineering student, and he said: "I've never

counted them, but that sounds about right.” To worship only Jesus is not only true and right, but it is necessary. It is required, because it is only Jesus Christ who sits enthroned above the angels. It is only Jesus Christ who represents all humanity. It is only Jesus Christ who secures our promised rest, and only Jesus Christ who is our great High Priest, the mediator of the Covenant in His very own blood, and it is impossible to be indifferent to Him.

I have shared a bit with you along the way in recent months about the door, one of the doors, that God has opened for our family of trying to reach a group of Chinese workers that work at a restaurant here in our city. The Lord gave us the next step, a canoe trip. I asked Elizabeth to join us as one of our Mandarin speakers. Before we started out for the outing, we prayed that the Lord might give some opening for the gospel. A group of these workers piled into the Kenwood church van with a group of us and we headed out to the Little Miami River. The workers had no idea were going. I found myself thinking it was amazing that they trusted me to get in an unmarked, white van and drive into the countryside! As we left the church parking lot and headed north, I was praying under my breath: “Lord, will there be some opening at all? It wasn't 10 minutes into the drive when I heard them ask Elizabeth: “How did you become Christian?” She shared her own testimony before we even got into the canoes! Are you willing, seriously willing, as a church family to open your lives to the conversations waiting to happen around you? Reggie would have had no testimony this morning without those people along the way, available. You don't have to have all the answers. Don't feel intimidated if you can't just rattle off the seven surpassing excellences of Jesus Christ from Hebrews 1:1-4, although you might want to write them down and keep them on a card. It is sufficient when pressed to say: “Is it arrogant? Is it judgmental? No, it's just honest to say Jesus Christ is utterly unique. Have you ever looked closely at Him?” That's all you have to say. Do you believe that there is truly none like Him? I believe that. He has changed my own life. He is greater than the angels; He is the right recipient of our praise.

When we come to the end of the Bible, we see Jesus quite clearly as He is now. If you could see Him as He is right now, you would be overwhelmed. We get a glimpse of who He is now in Revelation 5. He is enthroned in heavenly glory. He is surrounded by an innumerable multitude of people from every nation, redeemed by His blood. The angels worship Him, and they sing a song: “Worthy are You, for You were slain and by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” When John in Revelation looks to the end of all things, he sees Christ enthroned, unique in glory and power. He hears myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands of voices. These are the highest numbers used in antiquity. We would say billions and trillions, or even something more than trillions, singing and declaring as we read in Revelation 5:12:

*“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”*

What are the implications of the utter uniqueness of Jesus Christ for us this morning? You and I are summoned by His uniqueness to respond in praise. Before you can or will share Christ with anyone, you must first be persuaded in the depths of your own heart that He is worthy of worship, worthy to receive your praise. When you know His worth, His greatness, that He has

died for your sins, it is then and only then that we willingly make ourselves available. We are using this simple acronym, SALT: **S**tart the conversation; **A**sk questions; **L**isten—sometimes we talk so much that we don't know who were talking to; and then, **T**ell the story, the story of Jesus and His love.

The challenge for us this morning is to respond in worship, to give Jesus Christ our praise, our adoration, and to be ready to share that He does not become worshiped as divine Son after centuries of tradition, but He is the object of worship *from the very beginning*. He fulfills God's ancient promise and eternal purpose. It is not arrogant to assert the exclusivity of Christ. There is truly none like Him. No one can remain indifferent to Him. He rightly receives our praise. Would you bow with me, and let's prepare to offer our worship to Him.

Lord Jesus, we glory in You this morning. Lord, this is a question that is in the minds of many. Many avoid the question, pretending it's not real. Others dismiss the question as though it does not have implications for them personally. Lord, we hear the question, "How can Jesus be the only way?" and we hear the answer from Your Word that there is none like Him. Lord Jesus, we honor You this morning. We proclaim Your surpassing excellence. Lord, You are the heir of the world and its Creator. You are the radiance of the invisible God. You carry the world with Your word of power, and Lord, You have exercised that power to make atonement for our sins, and You have taken Your seat, the throne of glory. Lord, You are superior this day to all created things, even the angels, and we want to worship You now, living, exalted, Son of God. Fill us afresh with boldness and willingness and opportunity to share You.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.