

GOSPEL CONFIDENCE TO RUN WELL

Hebrews 1:1–4 • Pastor Luke Herche

Our sermon text for this morning is Hebrews 1:1-4 ESV.

Before we read, let's pray together.

Our Father, we need to hear your voice right now. We need to hear your Word. We need to hear about the living Word, our Lord Jesus. We need you to speak to us about your Son. We pray that you would encourage us as we hear about him, as we hear about who he is and what he has done. And, we pray that you would strengthen our hearts and enable us to serve you and live for you in the world. Pour out your spirit on us right now to those ends: give us ears to hear and hearts to receive what you have to say. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Hebrews 1:1-4 ESV

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, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 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, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

I wonder if you face life with confidence. Confidence is a pep talk word used by inspirational speakers. People talk about building your confidence and boosting your confidence and gaining and growing confidence.

The kind of confidence that most people are talking about is self-confidence. Psychology today defines confidence as a belief in oneself; it insists that one has the ability to meet life's challenges and to succeed. But, self-confidence can only get you so far in life. Thankfully, it is not the only kind of confidence there is.

Confidence is a Biblical concept. In fact, it's a recurring theme in the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 3:6 speaks of holding fast our confidence.

Hebrews 4:16 **Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace.**

Hebrews 10:19 ***We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.***

And, Hebrews 10:35- 36 ***Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.***

In all of these passages, the writer of Hebrews is talking fundamentally about confidence in our relationship to God through Christ. He wants us not to shrink back, but to lift our drooping hands and strengthen our weak knees and make straight paths for our feet so we can run the race set before us with confidence. The writer of Hebrews knows that *you cannot run the race of the Christian life without confidence in your relationship to the Father.*

At least, you can't run the race of the Christian life *well* without confidence in your relationship to the Father.

In fact, you can't live well at all apart from this confidence.

Why is that?

Apart from confidence in our relationship to the Father, when we are uncertain about his love, we end up being fearful. We are fearful that God is out to get us. We end up consumed with the opinions of others. We're constantly seeking to promote ourselves or prove ourselves to make a name for ourselves, so that we and everybody else, and even God himself will know how great we really are. All of which tends to leave us insecure rather than confident. We live in fear, swallowed by guilt, wallowing in self-pity... self-conscious, self-critical, and self-obsessed. And, those conditions distract us. They hinder us because we're not free to love others. We are consumed with protecting ourselves.

For the Christian life, your first priority is to gain the confidence needed to run well.

There are various ways that we often try to gain this confidence. The first is always self-reliance. *If only I can gain a little self confidence, then I'll have what it takes.* We're quick to realize we aren't really a very reliable source of help or hope. *I tend to fail myself much less than other people. Life's challenges are too big for me.* We tend to ask the question, *What if I don't have what I need to succeed?* And so, self-confidence goes out the window.

We move on to self-improvement. *Maybe I don't have what it takes now, but if I work hard enough, if I can only gain a few more skills, a few more tricks, a few more life hacks, then I'll have it all figured out.*

I constantly fall into this trap with productivity. *If I can only figure out the right formula, my days, my week, my life will be a little more productive, and therefore, you know, I'll be more happy because I'll get more done.*

It hasn't worked yet.

When all this fails, we can't find confidence in ourselves and self-improvement just doesn't seem to work, we turn to self-deception. We just fake it. We lie to others; we lie to ourselves. *Maybe if I just tell myself, I'm enough, often enough, eventually I'll believe it. And I'll feel better about life.* We want to avoid despair, so we just put our heads down and plow forward. We reject the pep talk of the self-help gurus and plow forward hoping for the best. We talk about steeling ourselves for the troubles of life. In this case, that talk often means we harden our hearts.

The writer of Hebrews wants to take us down a different road. He wants to engender confidence in his hearers. He gives us something, or rather someone in which to be confident.

I should say two brief things about the book of Hebrews in general. The first is this: we don't know who wrote the book of Hebrews. There is a lot of speculation, and all of it is interesting, but none of it is determinative. I could spend the next half-hour talking about who wrote the book of Hebrews, and in the end, we would come to the same conclusion. We don't know who wrote the book of Hebrews. Some think it was the Apostle Paul. Others say it was Barnabas or Apollos. The writer might have been Luke the doctor who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. All of those are interesting suggestions and people have lots of good reasons why it's this person or that. In the end, it doesn't really matter.

It doesn't matter because God in His providence has given us this anonymous book, and it is a treasure for the church. Hebrews is full of deep theology. The writer of Hebrews himself says solid food is for the mature so let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity. This book is solid food. It is meat and not milk. It is deep and not shallow. It is weighty and not light. And, it's going somewhere. Hebrews is not a book of theology. It's an exhortation. It is a sustained exhortation over the first twelve chapters. The writer of Hebrews wants us to listen to the message of Jesus and run the race set before us. He wants to give us a message that will enable us to live well, even in the midst of the challenges and trials of life.

Our outline this morning focuses on the climactic message of the gospel about the completed work of Christ. This message gives us the confidence to run well.

Who do you listen to in life? We listen to our own feelings. We listen to the messages of pop culture around us. We listen to the criticism of those around us. We listen to the advice of family and friends. Or, we're so busy we don't have time to listen to anyone at all.

The writer of Hebrews wants us to listen. And yet, he doesn't begin by telling us not to follow our heart or follow the crowd. He doesn't even begin by telling us to listen at all. He begins by telling us that God himself has spoken. Sometimes people deny that God has spoken or even that God can speak clearly. Atheists say that there is no god. Agnostics say that we

cannot know him, and thereby deny the speech of God. The writer of Hebrews says God has spoken.

There are others who say God speaks all the time through everything. God or the universe or the higher power of your choosing is speaking at every moment if you will only listen. The writer of Hebrews doesn't go there, either.

Let's look at Hebrew 1:1-2.

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.

Notice right away the writer of Hebrews is drawing out a series of contrasts between two different ways in which God has spoken. The first contrast is a contrast in time. God spoke long ago, on the one hand, in the days of Abraham and Moses and David, and God has spoken in these last days. The word "last" in Greek is the word "eschatos". We get the word eschatology, which is the doctrine of the last things, from this Greek word. According to the book of Hebrews, the last days have begun, and we are living in them. The writer of Hebrews has what theologians call a realized eschatology. It will become clear as we read through the book of Hebrews that there's still more to come. But, the period of time that Scripture refers to as the last days has already begun because God has spoken in the past tense regarding the last days.

Next, there's a contrast of God's speech in manner.

Long ago, God spoke at many times, and in many ways by the prophets. But in these last days, God has spoken by His Son.

This contrast is one between variety and singularity: between the various times in various ways and the various prophets and the singular son. This contrast highlights the uniqueness and the finality of God's speech in his Son. The writer will later contrast the many Levitical priests with the climactic priesthood of Christ, and he will contrast the many sacrifices offered in the temple with the climactic sacrifice of Christ.

What is repeated, because it's incomplete, comes to an end, because what is perfect and final has come.

And thirdly, there's a contrast in the hearers.

Long ago at many times, and in many ways God spoke to our fathers. But in these last days, He has spoken to us.

Now, don't miss what just happened. The writer of Hebrews says God has spoken to us by His Son. Those who originally read his letter never heard the incarnate Jesus. We know this because in Hebrews 2:3, we are told it was attested to us again. So, there were those who heard Jesus. And then, there's the "us" of Hebrews. If they've never heard the incarnate Jesus, how can the writer say in these last days God has spoken to "us" by His son?

Here's the answer: the message of Christ was spoken by God for all people in all times. Henceforth, this message was for those who saw the risen Jesus and for the next generation after that, and for every generation, since God's message in Christ was and is, and ever will be to us, whoever that "us" might be.

Why is that? Well, because God's word is living and active, according to Hebrews 4, right now. It addresses us right now. As I proclaim to you the gospel, God is speaking to you, right now.

We're not simply discussing a message from the past, but we are hearing God speak in the present. Reading Scripture is not an archeological dig, but a present addressed by the living God to those who hear. Hence, Hebrews 3:7-8 "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..." Right now, as you hear the word of Christ, do not harden your heart.

So, we have this series of contrasts: of time, of manner, of the hearer. But, the point is not an absolute contrast between disconnected realities. God's message through the prophet is preparatory. And, God's message in Christ is climactic.

As we move forward in the book of Hebrews, the writer makes clear that what God said in times past points us to what happens in Jesus. It's all leading in that direction.

This is also what Peter said in 1 Peter 1:10.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours, searched and inquired, carefully inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

According to Peter, and according to the writer of Hebrews, the word of the prophets was a prediction of the sufferings of Christ, and the subsequent glories. Jesus is the climax of God's story, the finale of God's masterpiece, the turning point of all history, God's message is now complete, because the Son has come.

One way of seeing the connection between God's speech long ago and his speech in the Son is to go read the Old Testament. Just go read it and see Christ there. Sometimes we read the Old Testament, and we're confused; we miss it; we don't see it. The writer of Hebrews is going to be our guide. The whole book will show us how God's spoken word in the past comes to its climax in God's living Incarnate Word, Jesus.

Are you listening? As we approach this book, are you listening? Are you ready to hear what God has to say?

When you listen to people, why do you believe some people and not others? In our age of disinformation and fake news, you're inclined to believe some news outlets and not others. And, it may be a different outlet for different people in this room. Why is that? Why have

some people earned your trust and others not? And how does that happen? How does someone earn your trust so that you're willing to believe what he has to say?

When we read in Hebrews 1:2, **"in these last days God has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world"**, the writer of Hebrews wants to give us confidence. He wants to give us confidence as we listen to the message of the gospel, but first, he has to give us confidence in the message of the gospel.

Right. So he wants to give us confidence through the message of the gospel, but he first must give us confidence in that message.

Here's how he does it: he points to the person of Jesus.

Christianity, you probably know, stands or falls with Jesus. The writer of Hebrews gives us a mini-theology of who Jesus is. In these first few verses, he gives us a mini-Christology, as theologians say. He only has two points, but they are two important points. The writer of Hebrews tells us about the perfected humanity of Jesus and the eternal divinity of Jesus.

His eternal divinity. In verse three, we are told Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. Jesus is the glory of God, the radiance of the Father's glory, and, He is like His father in every way. The writer says the language of imprint comes from a mold, or a seal, which produces an exact copy when pressed into the wax. As the Father, so the Son. The identity between the Father and Son is complete. Jesus can say to His disciples, "if you have seen me, you have seen the Father."

As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 4:6,

For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

And yet, there's still a distinction between the Father and the Son. The Son is an exact imprint of the Father. Their nature is the same though their personhood, Father and Son, is distinct. Unless we think that somehow, maybe Jesus became the imprint of the Father at some point in time. But, we're told in verse two **"through whom He created the world."** Jesus' divinity is eternal God. The Father created the world through the Son. He's not a latecomer to deity, right? There was no time when the Son was not. In fact, time itself was made through Him.

Some say that Jesus was God. But then He ceased to be God, when in the Incarnation, Jesus became a man; He stopped being God. But that clearly is wrong, according to Hebrews. Verse three adds, **"and He upholds the universe by the word of His power."** The Son upholds the universe.

The Son who shares our flesh and blood, according to Hebrews 2:14.

The Son who was made like His brothers in every respect, according to Hebrews 2:17.

The Son who sympathizes with our weaknesses, and who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin, according to Hebrew 4:15.

Paul says in Colossians 1:16

For by Him, all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him, all things hold together.

Here is the eternal divinity of Jesus, He is the radiance of the glory of the Father. The exact imprint of his nature. Through Him, the Father created the world. And He upholds all things by the word of His power.

Let's just marvel at that for a moment.

Marvel even at the fact that sometimes people say the early Christians kind of developed this idea that Jesus was God generations later. But this book was not written centuries after Jesus. This letter is written within the first century. Within fifty years of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, people were saying, "He is the God who created the world."

What happened to give them such a radical view of who this Jesus was?

The resurrection.

Which brings us to Jesus' humanity. The writer of Hebrews begins to describe Jesus' humanity in verse two, when we're told that the Father appointed Jesus, the heir of all things, and in his humanity, Jesus underwent a trial, a test of his obedience, and when he passed the test, the Father appointed him the heir of everything. This is the fulfillment of Psalm 2.

The writer of Hebrews will quote Psalm 2.

I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth, your possession.

You see, according to Paul in Acts 13, this declaration of Jesus' Sonship was at the resurrection, meaning that Jesus with respect to his humanity, was declared to be the Son of God in power by His resurrection from the dead. That was not clear to everyone prior to the resurrection. Having been declared Son of God as the God man, God gave Jesus the nations as his heritage. Jesus became the heir of all things as the reward for his obedience.

What was it that Jesus did? In what did his obedience consist? What is it that he did that merited such a reward?

Hebrews tells us again in verse three, **after making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.**

Jesus has done what no other man or woman could do; he has made purification for sins. This is what the book of Hebrews is all about. This is the message of the gospel, we're going to see the completed work of Christ in making purification for sins again and again. Ever since Adam, we have been weighed down by sins, guilt and impurity. We have been enslaved by the fear of death; we have been plagued by an evil conscience. But, Jesus comes to cleanse us once and for all, to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

We're going to talk quite a bit about sacrifice as we work through the book of Hebrews. If that very concept makes you a bit squeamish, which sometimes it does for people, I would say, don't run away, stick around. We'll dig into the question of just why God would use what to us seems like a fairly backward concept of sacrifice, to talk about the high point of His love in Christ.

But for now, let me remind you that the end of all of this is confidence. It is in Hebrews 4:14-16.

Since then we have a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus is seated on that throne of grace. The writer tells us that Jesus sat down multiple times and that sitting may not seem important to you, but it tells us something immensely important. Jesus' work is finished. Grace is found at that throne only because Jesus is seated on it. Having completed the work that the Father gave him to do, he completed the work of our salvation. We can draw near to the throne of grace and find mercy and grace.

Do you feel your need for grace? Do you feel the burden of sin? Do you feel the weight of life in a broken world? Do you feel the fear of guilt and shame? Do you feel uncertain about what comes next?

The goal of Jesus' work is that you might have confidence to draw near and find mercy and grace to help in your time of need. He is the eternal God, who has entered into our humanity, perfected it, completed our mission, made purification for sins by the sacrifice of himself, and is now seated at the Father's right hand in glory ready to offer mercy and grace to us in our time of need. The climactic message of the gospel about the completed work of Christ gives us the confidence to run well.

Where does the power come from, to be faithful to your spouse, to be patient with your kids, to persevere in your work, to bear up under suffering, to maintain your Christian profession, to get out of bed in the morning, to get out of the house every day, to move toward reconciliation in broken friendships, to forgive when you've been wronged, to admit when

you're the one who's done the wrong thing, to care for those in need, to go the extra mile to love the enemy, to do good to those who have talked bad about you? Where does the power come from to keep going in the Christian life?

It comes from confidence grounded in Jesus' confidence that my sins are forgiven, confidence that the Father accepts me, confidence that God's presence is with me, confidence that I can draw near and find grace to help, confidence of my heavenly reward, and that suffering does not mean the Father has abandoned me. Confidence in Christ is confidence to face today and tomorrow and the next day, running the race set before me. That doesn't come from self-improvement. It doesn't come from mind games. Confidence is not a belief in yourself that you have the ability to meet life's challenges. Confidence is a belief in Christ that you can do all things through Him who strengthens you. That is why the writer of Hebrews keeps pointing us to Jesus. He says consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. And he says, look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, and consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. He's saying again and again, on every page, don't forget the message of the gospel; keep listening to the message of the gospel. Don't drift away from the message of the gospel; hold fast to the message of the gospel.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we pray that you would give us a clear sight of who Jesus is in all of his glory. We pray that as you do, that you would grow us in a confidence in him, rooted in the gospel, as we rest in your grace found in the cross and in the resurrection. We pray that you would empower us by your Spirit through the gospel to then run the race that you have set before us. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.