

Chapter 2

God's Earlier Spokesmen and the Priority of Jesus Christ

Tom Wells, *The Priority of Jesus Christ*

Quote of the Week:

Six times [in the Sermon on the Mount] Jesus, completely on his own authority, and without any attempt to vindicate his categorical declarations, seems to set his own pronouncements in antithesis to “that which had been spoken,” the deliverances consisting of, or at least, including, in every instance a quotation from the law of Moses...It was the absoluteness with which Jesus spoke, as possessing authority in his own right, and not deriving the authority of his utterances from Scripture or revered traditions like the scribes, that cause the crowds to express amazement at this teaching (Mt. 7:28)...The sovereignty with which Jesus speaks is so absolute that his fulfillment of the law seems to carry with it the invalidation of the law of Moses.¹

Key Scripture:

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2, NASB).

Lesson Outline:

Introduction: “Jesus Christ is the agent of God to reveal the nature, the character, and the program of the messianic new era or New Covenant” (p. 19).

- I. Coming to the Son first doesn't mean that He is superior to the Father.
 - A. “Men will be judged by Jesus' words (Matt. 7:24-27)...*because* they are words that reveal the will of God (Matt. 7:21).” (p. 19; emphasis added).
 - B. We are Jesus's brothers and sisters if we are “His disciples” (Matt. 12:49), *because* being His disciples means that we do “the will of my Father in heaven” (Matt. 12:50).
 - C. Hearing Jesus's word means to believe in the one who sent him (John 5:24).
- II. How does Jesus relate to God's earlier spokesmen, the Old Testament writers and prophets?
 - A. The Holy Spirit was active in giving all revelation that has been given (Heb. 3:7, 1 Tim. 4:1, 2 Pet. 1:21, Rev. 2:17).
 - B. But Hebrews 1:1-2a says that we must hear the Son for two reasons. First, the superiority of the Son—the history of revelation is divided into two periods.
 1. The first was “a time when God spoke through mere men” (p. 20). Hebrews doesn't just address the historical fact that God once spoke through prophets and now through Christ—one of these is better.

¹ Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Guardian, 1944), 198-199, quoted in Tom Wells, *The Priority of Jesus Christ* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2005), 27-28. Unless otherwise specified, all quotes are from *The Priority of Jesus Christ*.

2. The second is “a time when God speaks through nothing less than his Son” (p. 20). The author of Hebrews heard Jesus second hand (Heb. 2:3), but the Father still speaks by His Son through the written Word.
3. The difference between the ages (p. 20):

The Father
↓
the prophets
↓
our forefathers

The Father
↓
The Son
↓
us

C. Second, we must hear the Son because of the superiority of the age in which the Son speaks.

1. “The second period, the time when the Son speaks to ‘us,’ is the climax of history” (p. 21).
2. “In these last days” calls to mind the Old Testament promises of the “latter days.”

D. Hebrews 1 speaks of this revelation in two ages without referring to the Spirit, but only because he is emphasizing “God’s public instruments as the bearers of God’s authority” (p. 22)—the agents who carry the message, rather than the Spirit who gave them the message. “In the past, God called upon men and women to submit themselves to the word of the prophets. Today, he demands that we submit ourselves to the word of Jesus Christ, the Son” (p. 22).

III. The author follows this theme throughout the letter. “Sometimes the emphasis falls on the superiority of the Son and sometimes on the newness of the age, but the two subjects are never far apart” (p. 22).

A. Jesus is better than angels (Heb. 1:4-14) and their message (2:2-3; cf. Deut. 33:2, Acts 7:38, Gal. 3:19).

B. Jesus is better than Moses (Heb. 3:5-6).

C. Jesus is better than Levitical priests (Heb. 5:12-10:22).

1. Like Melchizedek, He is superior to and independent of the Levitical priesthood (7:1-25).
2. The Levitical priesthood was “set aside because it was weak and useless” (7:18).

D. Jesus and His New Covenant are better than the whole Mosaic covenant (Heb. 8-10).

1. A better priest (8:1-6; 10:3-10).
2. A better sacrifice (9:11-14, 23-28; 10:3-10).
3. A better order (9:10), the New Covenant promised in Jer. 31:31-34 (8:7-13; 9:15).
4. And therefore, we have better access to God (10:1-3, 19-22).

E. Jesus offers a better word than Abel’s blood (Heb. 12:24).

IV. Jesus as the final authority on God’s Law (Matt. 5:21-47)

A. Jesus doesn’t abolish, but fulfills the Law (5:17-19).

- B. Even for those who deny that Jesus is modifying the Mosaic law, Jesus claims the authority to declare what God says in a way no other 1st century Jew dared.
- C. Jesus is not destroying the Mosaic law, but demanding priority even over previous revelation—the same priority as we saw in Hebrews 1:1-2a.
- D. And we see the same priority again on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9).
 - 1. The disciples are there to witness what takes place, not to participate. [In other words, they are there to hear God’s word, just as we are called to do.]
 - 2. Moses and Elijah, pinnacles of Old Testament revelation, are the backdrop to display the glory of Jesus Christ.
 - 3. Jesus is the central figure, as God speaks only of Him, ignoring Moses and Elijah.
 - 4. “This is My Son”—Peter won’t be permitted to build three shelters, as if the three were equal.
 - 5. “Listen to Him!” Not just at that moment, but always; as the greater Moses, the true people of God will hear Him and obey (cf. Deut. 18:15).