**Looking to Jesus** **Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12 October 3 2021**

St Athanasias is credited with saying “[Jesus] became what we are that he might make us what he is.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

The beginning of this letter is quite unusual. There is nothing to indicate either who is the author or the recipients. The author launches immediately into a description of who Jesus is, and he expands on this in the following chapter.

Before considering anything in the circumstances of the community being addressed, the author points them to consider Jesus.

It becomes apparent that he was writing to people who were confused, in crisis, facing temptation, and he wants them to know a sense of certainty, we wants them to exercise patience and know peace. So he points them first of all to Jesus.

It highlights Jesus as the base and reason of all that the author has to say, if they remember nothing else, that’s fine, Jesus is all they need. They are encouraged to look up from whatever they are considering, whatever is troubling them and consider Jesus.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The author is concerned about them not progressing in the faith in Jesus and potentially regressing in their faith.[[3]](#footnote-3) He acknowledges this throughout the letter, but he also regularly returns to focus their attention on Jesus.

**God who is present**

This picture of Jesus is a broad encompassing one. It includes Jesus pre-existence with God, creating the universe, his existence on earth, including the reality of Jesus for a time being made a little lower than the angels and then his post- existence being Lord of all the bright company of heaven, him being crowned with glory and honour, reigning eternally, being heir of all things and unchanging.[[4]](#footnote-4) Jesus divinity is affirmed as he is described as being the Son of God, who sustains all things in the cosmos, bearing the exact imprint of God’s very being and reflecting God’s glory.[[5]](#footnote-5) Jesus humanity was affirmed through the way he shared all human traits.[[6]](#footnote-6) Dietrich Bonhoeffer described it in these word, *“The Son of God who dwelt in the form of God the Father, lays aside that form, and comes to man in the form of a slave. …The divine image which had existed from eternity with God, assumes the image of fallen sinful man.”[[7]](#footnote-7)*

The story is told of man who was devastated by the death of his wife, sold his home and moved to the mountains, living the life of a recluse. One day, near Christmas, a young boy and his father visited him with some home-made treats and invited him to join them at church on Christmas Eve. The man thanked them for their kind gifts but politely refused their invitation to church, stating that he hadn’t celebrated Christmas since his wife’s death. He also added that he could not think of any reason God would come to earth as a human. Later that day there was a storm, and a flock of sparrows were caught up in the squalling wind. They kept crashing upon the man’s windows. He tried to get them to come inside his barn so that they would not perish in the storm, but despite his best efforts they were not responding, even when he tried to lure them in with some corn, they kept flying off in every direction. The birds were terrified but would not trust the man. He thought to himself, if only I could become one of them they would not be afraid of me, and they could trust me to keep them safe and protected from the storm. Then the man remembered something his wife had said years before, “God came to earth as a human because there was no other way to tell us how much he loves us.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

**God who speaks**

The audience of the letter appear to have been confused regarding the work of Jesus and the role of angels. So the author brings clarification that Jesus divine status will always surpass the authority of angels but that in coming to earth Jesus put aside that status for a time.

Angels appear frequently in Scripture but they are not often spoken of in our churches. In the Old Testament people were addressed by angels or by the Spirit of God. To hear God speak to them was accepted as reasonable, angels often brought the message of God to people but on other occasions it just says they “heard a voice” speaking to them.

In our developed rationalistic world such comments are likely to trigger raised eyebrows or looks of disbelief or concern. However, God still speaks to us. Often people may sense God speaking through what they are reading, or through the words of other people. Yet there are also experiences of words or phrases coming powerfully into one’s thinking, and sometimes of people hearing something often only audible to themselves. The Christian faith assumes unseen realities and mystery, the concept of God carries these features. The Christian faith assumes communication between this unseen world and the world of human affairs. In Jesus we see the ultimate crossing of this unseen world into our world. God chooses to relate to humankind and to communicate with us. The author not only speaks of the ways God communicates to this world through Jesus but also of Jesus work for all people.

**God who acts**

He describes Jesus as a pioneer, one who goes before us, not just showing the way but creating a path, as a champion over the powers of evil and death and as our High Priest offering himself as a sacrifice for our sins that we may be free.

Day by day he sees Jesus as our representative before God, our advocate, intercessor for all who are being tested. These affirmations would have been encouraging to this community, as they also encourage us today.

**God who imparts God’s image**

This letter provides a stark example of the focus for followers of Jesus. We are called to reflect the image of God in our daily living. “To be conformed to the image of Christ is not an ideal to be striven after.“ We can’t manufacture this it is the work of God in and through us.[[9]](#footnote-9) This is God’s purpose and destiny for followers of Jesus. *Bonhoeffer expresses it this way, “The image of Jesus Christ impresses itself in daily communion on the image of the disciple. No follower of Jesus can contemplate his image in cold detachment. That image has the power to transform our lives, and if we surrender ourselves utterly to him, we cannot help bearing his image ourselves.”[[10]](#footnote-10)*

Our relationship with God, the time we spend with God and our openness to God speaking to us, all form the perfect situation through which God can transform us. The apostle Paul describes this process in this way, *“And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”[[11]](#footnote-11)* There is all manner of advice that we can receive regarding the issues we deal with from day to day, much of it very helpful and some quite ridiculous. However, whatever issues we are dealing with now, and whatever we need to face in the future, as followers of Jesus we have something greater than good advice. We have the opportunity to look at Jesus, to open ourselves to what Jesus may say to us, to recognise that God is always present with us, to be open to God renewing God’s image in our lives. This is the unique reality that we share through our relationship with Jesus. This is the unique good news that we have for our communities.

The transformation that Jesus works in us, heightens our awareness that all people share in the image of God. Therefore anything that diminishes another person is (in the words of Bonhoeffer *“an attack on Christ, who took the form of a man, and in his own person restored the image of God in all that bears a human form.”[[12]](#footnote-12)*

1. St Athanasius of Alexandria, cited in Tony Castle, *Complete Quotes and Anecdotes,* (Suffolk, England: Kevin Mayhew Publishing, 2007) 449 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. H. C. Moule, *Studies in Hebrews,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publishing, 1977) 4-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hebrews 2:1; 3:7-15; 4:1-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Hebrews 1: 6, 8, 11-13 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Hebrews 1:2-3 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hebrews 2:14-17 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1979) 339-340 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Alice Gray, *Stories for the Heart: Th Second Collection,* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2001) 281-282 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 341 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 337 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 2 Corinthians 3:18 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 341 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)