

“JESUS IS SUPERIOR TO...” SERIES

JESUS IS SUPERIOR TO THE ANGELS

HEBREWS 1:1-4

¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but 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. ³He 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, ⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (ESV)

Introduction of the Epistle

As we begin the new year, we will also begin a sermon series titled, “Jesus is Superior to _____.” We will center our study out of “The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews” or Hebrews for short.

This epistle is written to the “brethren” (13:22), the Hebrew Christians, hence its title. The letter is written in such a style as to appeal to those trained in the rabbinical schools as well as for the realtor or fisherman. Any laymen could read the arguments of the epistle and find peace. The priest in service to the Temple, would find its writing to be delivered in a thoughtful progression and thus it would be compelling. To the Jew who has found Christ, it delivers a convincing argument for belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ.

While it is very easy to identify who the Epistle is written to, it is a much more difficult task to identify the author. Unlike other Epistles, the author of the Epistle is not contained in the opening or closing of the letter. In in most of your Bibles the closing thought will say “Written to the Hebrews from Italy by Timothy” after the closing verse, 13:25.

The early church fathers, attributed the writing to a variety of men: Silas, Paul’s companion, Clement of Rome, the author of the Gospel of Luke, Barnabas, Paul’s companion or Apollos. But the conclusion that is mostly supported is the authorship of the Apostle Paul. This argument has been going on for hundreds of years, but its place among the Canon of Scripture is without argument. Most believe that the Apostle Paul wrote it, or dictated the letter; so shall I.

The time of the writing of the Epistle is considered around 65 to 68 AD, during the height of the persecution of the early church.

It is very clear that the epistle was to be read in the local church (13:22-25).

And it appears that the purpose of writing it is to encourage those that are going through the persecution (2:1; 3:12) and were perhaps drifting away from Christ, back to the religion and practices of their fathers.

The Apostle Paul was deeply interested in the attempts by the Jewish Christians to impose some of the Mosaic Law onto the Gentile believers. His efforts to stop that practice are well documented in the Acts of the Apostles. It is much of the same style of his address to the Jewish believers as in this Epistle.

The theme of this epistle is the “superiority of Christ”. A simple outline of the letter is:

Chapters 1-4 demonstrate that Christ is Superior in His Person

Chapters 5-10 demonstrate that Christ is Superior as our Priest

Chapters 11-13 demonstrate that Christ is Superior for Life

Introduction

People going through persecution are sometimes driven to hold onto something during the dark times. In this case the epistle opens with a dialog concerning the superiority of Jesus as the Christ to angels. Somehow in the early Hebrew churches, angelology was becoming a common practice along with Christology. The first chapter and part of the second chapter considers this issue.

Angels have made a comeback into the Christian church today. I have been in two local Christian book stores recently and angels are everywhere. To the uninitiated, I wonder if they would take that those who purchase in those stores are into angel worship rather than Jesus worship. I don't think Linda or I have one likeness of an angel in our house. We don't have any illustrations of the likeness of Christ either. We had decided many years ago that we didn't want anything to come between our Saviour and us. We have lots of Scripture on our walls to remind us of who we are followers of.

THE ALMIGHTY GOD SPOKE THROUGH THE PROPHETS

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

The writer gets right down to business in verse number one. As you can see, there is no greeting, or introduction of the author or the premise for the epistle. No audience is identified. No, this will be an epistle with a direct theme and the writer is not wasting any time.

The writer (I will identify the writer as Paul through the rest of this sermon series), identifies that God has been speaking to His people all along. In the past, God of the universe, spoke through His prophets. Hand selected for a time and a purpose.

A reading of the Old Testament prophets will show you that their message was in the main part a mystery. Their message was sketchy at times, incomplete at others and was like a big jigsaw puzzle. The pieces were there, but until it was completed, it was difficult to see the “big picture.”

God spoke to His prophets in dreams and visions and their message was not always received well. The message was delivered and at times, God’s people even wanted to stone His messengers.

THE ALMIGHTY GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS SON

2but 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.

With verse 2 our author commences a long listing of the superior characteristics of the Son, and in doing so states the essential equality of the Son with the Father. He lists twelve:

1. Son of God (vv. 2a, 5)
2. Heir of All Things (v. 2b)
3. Creator of the World (vv. 2c, 10)
4. Radiant Light (v. 3a)
5. The Image of God (v. 3b)
6. Sustainer of the Universe (v. 3c)
7. High Priest of Perfection (v. 3d)
8. Superior to the Angels (vv. 4–7, 13–14)
9. Exalted King (vv. 3–4, 8a)
10. Lord of Righteousness (vv. 8b–9)
11. The Eternal (vv. 11–12)
12. Ultimate Conqueror (v. 13)¹

¹ Evans, L. H., Jr, & Ogilvie, L. J. (1985). *Hebrews* (Vol. 33, p. 43). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.

“...in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” – Paul is basically saying, “The Word is speaking the Word of God. (John1:1ff) The Word of Jesus is superior to the word of the prophets as “*Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith.*” (12:2).

Jesus’ message was to bring in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 4:17). His birth was the beginning of the end. His message is for the last days. All the prophecies concerning the Messiah, are now present in the Son of God. He is the authority and His word is complete. The Son, who has been at the right hand of God is now the one doing the speaking.

Jesus is the Lord of the universe. Look at how the Christ is described:

He is the “*appointed the heir of all things*” – As with any “last will and testament”, the Father is giving everything to His Son. Jesus is the heir!

He “*created the world*” – Jesus can speak with authority as He was the “Creator” of the world.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

3He 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,

Many times in my life, I have represented the company of my employment to others. When I spoke, I spoke with the authority of the company I worked for. My word, was the word of the company. In this case, Paul relates that Jesus, represents the Father. In this verse we have three descriptions of Jesus:

“*He is the radiance of the glory of God*” – The Son is the reflection of the brightness of God’s glory. Jesus is eternal. While on the earth, in his human body, He is God. He is man and He is God at the same time. Everything that Jesus, the Son of God was in heaven, He is the same on earth. He is the “reflected brightness” of the Majesty of God.

“...*the exact imprint of his nature*” – The Greek word “*charakter*” is only used one time in all of the New Testament. We derive the English word, *character* from this Greek word. The word implies an engraved or pressed mark, like on a stamp, coins or seals. Therefore the meaning of the word in this case is that Jesus is the perfect resemblance of God. The Apostle Paul’s letter to the church at Colossi identified Christ as

Colossians 1:15 *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:*

“...*he upholds the universe by the word of his power.*” – This is a Hebrew term which means, “an efficient command.” The Son, upholds or sustains all things in the universe: gravity, the so called “laws of Force”, etc. The Son has efficient command all things concerning the earth and the cosmos.

And how does He do it? By his “word” or command. For example,

The psalmist, speaking of the creation, said of God:

Psalms 33:9 For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.

When a great storm overtook the boat with the disciples and they feared for their lives, came to a sleeping Jesus and said, “*Lord, save us: we perish.*”

Matthew 8:26-27 *And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!*

When Jesus very close friends approached Him to tell him that Lazarus, their brother was dead, Jesus went to his Lazarus’ grave and said:

John 11:43 *And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.*

And just how powerful is the Word of the Lord? The prophet Zechariah was given a message from God, saying:

Zechariah 4:6 *Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.*

“*After making purification for sins*” – The Apostle John writes:

1 John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*

Later in the epistle, the writer defines what is meant in this verse. Chapter 9, verses 1-10 refers to the Old Testament tabernacle, including its furniture (Altar of brass, brass laver, table of Showbread, golden candlestick, golden Altar of incense, and the Ark of the Covenant), coverings and its worship practices. Then in the following verses, 11-28, Jesus is the new covenant, comparing Him to the Mosaic tabernacle worship. Jesus is a far superior sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice that God will allow for the “purification of sins” for all mankind.

This theme holds up throughout the rest of the epistle. The sacrificial system was replaced by the Son:

7:27 He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

9:12-14 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. 13For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

“...he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” – Since God the Father is Spirit, it is difficult for man to assign attributes or describe God without referring to human characteristics. When God dwelt among his people in the Tabernacle, there was no throne for Him to sit on. He is Spirit. God met with man from “...above the mercy seat, between the two cherubims, upon the ark of the testimony” (Exodus 25:22). God does not sit. The reference to a throne is for man’s understanding. The Son sitting down “at the right hand of the Majesty on high” means that he was exalted to a position of honor and power in the heavens. Whoever sits at the right hand of the king was considered a place of great honor. Therefore, in this instance, the Son is exalted above anyone else in heaven.

THE SON IS SUPERIOR TO THE ANGELS

4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Christ is superior to the angels. “How he is better” than the angels? By His name. He has inherited a more excellent name than they.”

Now what does that mean? What name did Christ inherit that shows he is so much greater than angels?

Jesus was born, ministered to the people of the earth and then died. That act was what made purification of sins of mankind to a Holy God. He then was resurrected and triumphed over death and Satan (Hebrews 2:14). When He returned home, to where He belongs, he was enthroned as the king and seated at the right hand of God. Historically, the Old Testament describes that when a king was enthroned, his coronation included decrees, formally observing his title and inheritance which had been his from birth. For the Son, God the Father gave the coronation as recorded in the Psalms:

Psalm 2:7 I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

Psalm 89:27 And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. 28 My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.

In these two psalms, we have the name that is superior to the angels. It is the name "Son."

Conclusion

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrew brethren, comes out of the blocks sprinting, to use a runner's example. He does not waste any time in affirming the fact that Jesus is superior. The remainder of the epistle concerns that truth. Jesus is far superior, to anything or anyone.

As we begin 2015, can you make that statement today? Is Jesus far superior in your life? Is He more important than anything else?

What if today, January 4, 2015, we would decide to make Jesus superior in our life over our actions, words, and thoughts? What if we placed Jesus in the position of "King of our lives" taking His rightful spot in our hearts? Would we be different? If He is not on the throne of your life today, would you take the time to ask Him to take His rightful place today?

Sound the coronation with me: "Jesus is King of My Life!"

Bob Crowder