



JESUS THE ONE AND ONLY

Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
Autumn Ridge Church, Rochester, MN
January 21-22, 2012

No. 2: Our Glorious Christ
Scripture: Hebrews 1:4-14

When a new sports phenom appears there is a lot of discussion about how good they really are. The pundits compare this new star with the great names of the past.

So when Tiger Woods started winning golf games people speculated if he was as good as Jack Nicklaus or Arnold Palmer.

Of course the proof of whether Tiger is really superior to his predecessors will be seen in whether he breaks their records.



The author of the letter of Hebrews is using a similar approach. He is writing to a group of first century Christians who are in danger of giving up and going back to their old faith. His argument is there is no need to do that because Jesus has arrived and he is phenomenal. There is no one like him. He is in a class of his own. He has broken all the records.

The writer's advice is "You can keep going because **JESUS IS THE ONE AND ONLY.**"

But our wise writer knows it is not enough to just make this claim.

He has to prove it. It is possible that Jesus is just a flash in the pan who won't last a season and so the writer begins to demonstrate just how exceptional Jesus is in a series of contrasts with the former heroes of these Hebrew Christians.

They admire angels and the law and the prophets and the priests and Moses and the Sabbath and the sacrifices in the temple. The writer goes through all these one by one and shows that Jesus is greater.

So in this epistle contrast reigns.
 Everything is presented as better.
 There is a better hope, a better covenant, a better promise, a better country, a better resurrection, a better everything.
 Jesus is presented as the supreme best.

The writer's point is simple. Why would you want to go back to these lesser things when you can have the greater? Why chase the shadow when you can have the substance? It makes no sense to hitch your wagon to a has been when you can be in a living relationship with the greatest person who has ever lived.

It is a compelling argument for the first century but it may not do much for us today.

I doubt that any of us are thinking of going back to worshipping angels or reinstating animal sacrifices.

So we have some work to do to make an application for ourselves. It is important we do this because while our situation is quite different we too are tempted to give up.

We do think of going back to something and we need to identify what this something is and ask ourselves what makes it so attractive?

Then we can compare it with the sheer magnificence of our glorious Christ.

So do strive to make that personal application as we follow the writer's argument in this first chapter. It is rather complex so I encourage you to open your Bible to Hebrews chapter 1 and take out your message outline.

The writer begins, **"Jesus became as much superior to the angels." (v 4)**

Now as most of this chapter involves comparing Jesus with angels it is helpful to know something about them.

So here is a brief primer on angels.

There are 158 references to angels in the Old Testament and 178 references to angels in the New Testament.

So it is clear angels are important to God's purposes.

We learn that angels are spiritual beings. (Matt. 22:30)

They are very numerous (Genesis 32:2)

They are associated with visions of God (Exodus 3:2)

There are different classifications of angels, including cherubim, seraphim and archangels like Michael and Gabriel. (Isaiah 6:1)

Angels rejoice when people come to Christ.

(Luke 15:10, 1 Peter 1:12)

And here is something interesting. Of all the pages of scripture the first two chapters of Hebrews tell us more about angels than any other place in the word of God.

Now for these Hebrews the highpoint of their history was the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

They believed that angels were instrumental in this.

This is Raphael's famous painting of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments and you can see that there are a group of angels in the top left hand corner.



In our own day too there is a fascination with angels.

There are over 300 million websites about angels.

There is a magazine called "Angels On Earth" that reports angelic activity.

These Hebrews would be very comfortable with all this. For their world was filled with angels.

And so the writer makes the bold statement that Jesus is superior to all the angels and he gives four reasons why this is so.

FIRST, BECAUSE JESUS HAS A SUPERIOR NAME

He declares, **"Jesus became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs." (v 4)**

Now what is this superior name that Jesus has?

The writer goes on to tell us by quoting from the Old Testament. This makes a lot of sense because his readers are Hebrews. They are Jews.

They love the Old Testament. This is God's law that was given to them with the help of angels.

Now the writer's use of the Old Testament tells us something startling. He shows us that the Old Testament is a Christ-centered book.

That all of it is pointing to Jesus.

Perhaps we had never realized this.

We thought the Old Testament was just about the history of the Jewish people and that things don't get interesting until Matthew's gospel and the story of the birth of Jesus.

But the truth is that all the Old Testament writers are pointing their finger towards Christ.

When we grasp this it makes reading the Old Testament a lot more compelling.

This was certainly Jesus' own understanding of the Hebrews scriptures.



When he walked with those two despondent travelers on the road to Emmaus on Easter evening, Jesus pointed out how slow they had been to grasp what the Old Testament writers had been saying about the coming Messiah.

"Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:27)

Now you might notice that these seven quotations in this chapter are slightly different from the wording we find in our Old Testament. The reason is that by the time this letter was written many Jews used a Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. It is from the Septuagint that the quotations in Hebrews are taken.

Now let's go back to the writer's point that Jesus has a superior name. Quoting from Psalms and Second Samuel the author asks, **"For to which of the angels did God say, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father? Or again, 'I will be his Father, and he will be my Son.'" (v 5)**

Here is the argument.
The name "angel" means messenger.
Angels are servants.
But Jesus has a superior name. For he is the Son.

Now when did Jesus receive the superior name of "My Son" from his Father? There are two passages that provide the answer. In Acts, Paul tells the Jews in Antioch, **"We tell you the good news. What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm you are my Son, today I become your Father." (Acts 13:32-33)** The "today" was when God raised up Jesus.

Then Paul writes to the Romans, **"Through the Spirit of holiness Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead." (Romans 1:4)** Again we see that Jesus received his superior name of "Son of God" at his resurrection.

Now there is a sense that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. However, he was called Son when he rose from the dead. He had obeyed his father. He died for our sins. He had undone the curse. In recognition of this God raises him from the dead and calls him, "My Son."

The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus Christ is nothing more than an angel. They identify him with Michael, the archangel. But this passage tells us that Christ is the Son and not an angel. God never said to any angel, "you are my Son" but he did say that to Jesus.

This is the reason why Jesus has a name above every name. This is why at the name of Jesus every knee will bow. This is why we pray in the name of Jesus.

If you are afraid, if you are anxious, if you are seeking guidance. If you don't know what to do, if you are considering giving up, then call on the name of Jesus.

It is because Jesus has a superior name that the angels worship him rather than the other way around.

The writer points out, **"When God brings his firstborn into the world," he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." (v 6)**

That is exactly what happened in the fields outside Bethlehem when the Son came into the world.

The angels worshipped him.

Now some people point to this sixth verse to say that Jesus is a created being as it describes Jesus as God's **firstborn**. They also point to Colossians which describes Jesus as, **"The image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." (Colossians 1:15)**

They claim this proves that Jesus is not God.

But the word "firstborn" there has nothing to do with time. Rather it refers to position.

Firstborn is not a description but a title meaning "the chief".

This is clear a few verses later in Colossians where Paul tells us, **"Christ is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." (Colossians 1:18)**

In case there is any doubt about this the writer next demonstrates that **JESUS HAS A SUPERIOR EXISTENCE**

"In speaking of the angels God says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire."

But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever." (v 7-8)

Here is the point.

Angels are created beings but the Son is eternal.

C. S. Lewis points out that what we make with our hands is always something different from us.

But what we create with our bodies is always the dearest thing in the world to us because it is part of us.

The angels were made but the son was begotten.

Jesus is of the same nature as God for he is God and because he is God he is good.

Not all angels are good for some fell from heaven.

Satan was once an angel called Lucifer but he was banished from heaven because of his sin.

But Jesus is the altogether righteous one.

He hates wickedness and that is why God has anointed him as King.

So the writer is able to say of Jesus, **“Righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” (v 8-9)**

The writer continues to build his case for why we should follow Christ as he tells us that **JESUS HAS A SUPERIOR WORK.**

Now quoting from Psalms, Zechariah and Isaiah the writer declares, **“In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment.” (10-11)**

Jesus created the heavens and the earth. No angel could do that. They themselves are created. They were there at the creation. They witnessed it. And they marvel at this work of Jesus. For God not only creates the world he cares for it. He is deeply involved in. He sustains it. He governs it by his providence.

This beautiful earth will one day perish but Jesus is eternal. So the writer can say, **“They will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.” (v 11-12)**

This world is constantly changing until one day it will die then to be remade by Christ into the new heavens and the new earth. But Jesus never changes. He always keeps his word. His promises are guaranteed.

So we are confronted with the challenge of significance. Do we want our lives to be spent on those things that will pass away or do we want our lives to be based on the one who is eternal?

The finest human institution will finally close its doors.
 The most famous company, like Kodak, will go bankrupt.
 The greatest scientific advance will one day be surpassed. Every nation will come to an end.
 Every political party has its day to be replaced with another.
 Every dream home will one day be torn down.
 Every new car will one day be thrown on the scrap heap.

That doesn't mean we should not enjoy these things or be involved in these enterprises but it does mean we do not regard them as end to themselves. Instead we look to the greater goal of the glory of Christ.
 For then we are part of an eternal enterprise.

The writer concludes on this grand note that **JESUS HAS A SUPERIOR VICTORY.** He asks, **“To which of the angels did God ever say, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” (v 13)**

We saw last week that Jesus was able to sit down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven because of his finished work as our Savior on the cross.

No angel was ever invited to sit at God's right hand but Jesus was. Angels can serve us but they cannot save us.

Angels know this. They understand their place. That is why they love to declare Christ's victory over sin and suffering and death and the devil. The angels did this outside the empty tomb on Easter morning when they announced, "He is Risen!"



At this very moment the angels are gathered around the throne of God shouting, "Worthy is the Lamb" because they see the evidence of Jesus' victory all around them.

Christ's victory is not obvious to all now but it will be. The enemies of our Lord will be reduced to a pile on which Jesus can prop his feet. That is a vivid picture of the total triumph of Christ.

The writer is inviting us to share in that victory. Often we are discouraged because it seems we just face defeat after defeat. We resolve to do better but instead we do worse. So the writer urges us to come to Christ that we can experience the power of his presence.

Then it seems the writer suddenly realizes he may have gone too far in what he said about angels. He doesn't want to depreciate the important spiritual role angels have in our life. So he closes the chapter by asking **"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (v 14)**

This statement will trouble those who do not believe in the supernatural, who think that angels are to be put in the same category with fairies and leprechauns. But for those who understand that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who grasp that there is a spiritual world beyond this physical one that we see, we can give thanks for the ministry of angels.

John Calvin had some wonderful words to say about angels in his Institutes (Volume 1, Chapter 14),



"I hold for certain, that each of us is cared for, not by one angel merely, but that all with one consent, watch for our safety . . . they will hasten to our aid with incredible swiftness, winging their way to us with the speed of lightning. Angels are ministering spirits who serve as God's

employees for the protection of his people and by whose means he distributes his favors among men.”

The job of angels is to confront the enemies of God. Those enemies want to deprive us of our salvation.

They want to bring the work of Christ to nothing and make it fail.

Those enemies want to keep Christians from inheriting salvation. Those enemies may be demons, false ideas or sinful impulses.

So God sends his angels to serve us so that we may persevere in our faith and inherit our salvation.

I believe there are angels in this room now because we are told that angels attend the worship of God.

Angels bring God very near to us.

I met with a friend this week. He told me that he wanted to visit all the great churches in America. So he went out to California to see the great cathedrals there. He noticed that at each church there was a gold telephone right by the pulpit. He asked its purpose and was told. “This is a direct line to God. You pay \$5.00 and you can speak to him.”

He then flew to New York and traveled down the eastern seaboard visiting the famous old churches of our country. Again he noticed the gold telephone by the pulpit.

He asked the same question and received the same reply, “This is a dedicated telephone to heaven.

Pay \$5.00 and you can speak to God.”

Invigorated by his tour he returned to Rochester and went to one of our local churches on the Lord’s Day.

To his surprise here too was a the gold telephone by the pulpit. Again he asked its purpose.

The pastor said, “This is a hotline to God.

Pay 10 cents and you can speak to the Almighty.”

My friend gasped, “10 cents, but everywhere else is \$5.00.”

The pastor replied, “Ah, but from Rochester it is just a local call.”

That is true. It is just a local call because God is here and we can speak to him because of who Jesus is and what he has done.

He is the one and only. He is the altogether lovely one. He is the one who claims “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Today we have seen Jesus superior name, his superior existence, his superior work and his superior victory.

But none of that will do us any good unless we know him. And I want to invite you to do that right now. On this Sanctity of Life weekend discover the life that is found in Christ.