

The Superiority of Christ, pt. 2
Hebrews 1, 4-14

Responsive: Proverbs 2:1-9
Isaiah 11:1-9
Galatians 6:6-17

Turn with me this morning as we will be continuing where we left off in Hebrews last week. Today we will be looking at verses 4-14, which is the end of chapter 1. As we read through these verses this morning we will see that the author is continuing throughout this chapter to set forth the main premise and ground work of the rest of the book. Which is the title of our message, The Superiority of Christ. Last week we looked at the first 3 verses which are absolutely just packed with doctrine and theology that is actually central to the Christian faith. These points that the author is making about the centrality, and superiority of Christ are not just some esoteric arguments, but rather full of such importance that a lack of understanding here has brought on many false beliefs and doctrines throughout the generations since the time it was written.

I am sure we can all come up with some examples even within our own church experiences where this is true, where Christ had been put not as the primary of faith, but as the secondary. Elevating either a man, or some tradition and practice above Christ. Now it can be hard to spot sometimes, for it could be subtle, or explained away at times, but a few examples that I can think of first is the Catholic church. Do they appear to hold anything higher than Christ? Now they of course would not claim to, but in practice they elevate Mary at times it seems to a level higher than Christ. Or what about the Pope? Who is believed to be the mediator between God and man now that Christ is in heaven. Scripture says that there is one mediator between God and man, and that is the Son, Jesus. And we could go on and on in the falsehoods and errors practiced by the Catholic church because they do not truly believe, nor practice the superiority of Christ, or the centrality of Christ in all things.

The next example is the Pentecostal faith. Once again they would admit to the superiority of Christ, in words, but in practice put a heavy emphasis on signs and wonders, gifts and miracles, and prophecies. Making such things as a measure of faith, a show of the spirit, a miraculous work of the spirit, an experience is what is sought after, whether it be speaking in tongues, healing, and prophesying it becomes the measure of your faith, it becomes a proof of the spirit working in you. So therefore it becomes the focus of the ministry, seeking after such signs, and miracles to have this experience to make one feel holy and righteous. The focus which should be upon Christ, instead is put upon the so called prophet, or teacher, the focus is upon the one who has seemed to be given special favor from God, a special message, or special gift.

And the last example I have of this will hit home to almost all of us, for most of us here have either grown up in the church, or have been exposed to this doctrine in our lives which is again an misunderstanding of the doctrine of the Superiority of Christ. And that is the doctrine of salvation by choice. Now, I must clarify here that our brothers and sisters who hold to such an understanding largely do so out of ignorance, most of us were there ourselves and that is what makes these distinctions that are laid down here in Hebrews so important. And it is the same as with the Catholic, or the Pentecostal, the claim will be upon Christ, and in comparison to the other 2 they are much closer in their claims. But it is a nuanced issue, for the faith that comes from this doctrine of free will, is a faith of choice, an exercise of man's will in choosing to accept Christ's free offer. It can be summed up in this, God has done his part, Christ has died for your sins, now all you need to do is to choose to accept this free gift.

One of the major dangers in this understanding is just like the Pentecostal's end up putting their focus and energy into the signs of spiritual gifts, those who hold to such doctrines of salvation end up putting their focus on convincing the will of man to make a choice. Out of this we see the churches we see in this country today, one who has lost its salt, one whose light as gone dim, for their focus is upon making themselves to be seeker sensitive, they become doctrinally shallow, very little is taught from the pulpit and more is focused on appealing to the congregation to make a decision for Christ. It becomes about packing out the auditorium and filling the pews, any doctrine or meat of the word is left off in fear that it would drive "seekers" away. The focus and importance is upon man's will, the ministry is less about calling sinful mankind to repentance before a sovereign, holy, and just God, and the focus instead becomes on living a moral and righteous life, by the power of your own will. The sad reality of this belief system is that over the generations it has created a cultural christian faith, that is to say, one that is not bound in the truth of scripture but is found in the identity of those who attend such churches.

They go about convincing themselves, and each other that they have true faith, and while many do, this belief system also creates many who have been deceived, because faith without works is dead, not just in the sense that the author of the book of James meant it, but also in the sense that faith which is by your won choosing is dead unless it is first brought about by God's work. Sadly there are those who chose, but do not have the work. They have been convinced that because they have exercised their free will to accept God's gift that they are saved, despite that if they were to be honest with themselves they have been deceived, and they seek constant reassurance, to be convinced in their faith, and they measure their actions, and outward appearance of righteousness against others to convince themselves that they are saved. While inside, their mind is full of doubt, despair, there has been no true change of the heart, just a reformation of the outward appearance.

So as we can see the importance of a proper understanding of Christ, and his work on the Cross, and the superiority of centrality of him is truly central to a proper understanding to having a living and vibrant faith. So to summarize, if any system of belief takes anything away from the power, or superiority of Christ then it is false, or at the very least gravely mistaken and misunderstood. If our focus of righteousness becomes that of our actions, or those of signs and wonders, or if it is tied to any church traditions or rituals then it is not centered upon Christ and his work on the cross, and in our hearts and minds then it is at the very least an improper understanding which will hinder your Christian walk, and faith, and at the most, in danger of being false, resting upon things which can not, and will not save.

And as we see here in the book of Hebrews it is these things that those who this author has written to are dealing with. It is apparent here in the first chapter that they have elevated things above Christ, the focus has been shifted, and the author is calling them back. In the first 3 verses, he sets forth his basic ground work, showing that Christ is superior to the prophets of old, that God has appointed Christ as the heir of all things, and now today we see one of the apparent struggles of these Hebrews which is brought about by not having a proper understanding of the importance and centrality and superiority of Christ, and that is the worship of angels. So let us read this morning this first chapter and we will be looking at verse's 4-14 this morning which deals with this issue of the worshipping of angels.

So right away we see the author building upon his previous assertions in the first 3 verses. Christ is the Son, in whom all things were created, and he has been appointed the heir of all things and it is on this basis alone that he continues saying that the worshiping of angels is unjustified, and in fact wrong.

For in verse 5 he says, Did God ever say to the angels, You are my Son? Today I have become your father, nor does God ever claim that he is the father of the angels and that any of them are his children. The promise of Sonship whether by birth, or by adoption is never applied to the angels. This passage in Psalm's that the author quotes says, Today, I have begotten you, which arrises the question, when was today? Well to that end there has been a variety of opinions, Augustine explained It has a reference to "the day of unchangable eternity" which in doing so sets forth to prove that the man Jesus was the only begotten son of God, from eternity past. Aquinas agrees with Augustine when he said, that the begetting was not temporal but eternal. Later we see others such as FF Bruce apply this to the occasion of Christ's exaltation and enthronement, as he says "it is the day he was vested with his royal dignity as Son of God." As we see in the book of Colossians, chapter 1 verse 15 says, "He is the invisible God, the first born over all creation, for by him all things were created that are in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers. All things were created through him and for him, and he is before all things and in him all things consist. He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in all things he may have the preeminence. It is the distinction of being the first born of the dead, pointing to the resurrection.

As Phillip Hughes sums it up in his comentary, he says, "we may say that at every moment of Jesus' earthly mission, the incarnate Messiah is the Son beloved and accepted by the father, but that the day spoken of here, on which he is said to have been begotten by God, is the dady of his glorious victory and vindication, that day also which for the purpose of the argument of this author establishes all to see Christs absolute superiority to all angels. For us this all seems fairly obvious, and can be hard to see why someone might fall into worshiping angels, or rather elevated them to the place of, or even above Christ. We must remember that we have the writings of the apostles, and the books of the new testament. And we must also remember that at the time of the writing of many of the books of the new testament there was many and various factions which were infiltrating these new churches full of those who were new I the faith. They were coming in and decieving and leading them away from that which they were first taught.

Drawing them back to the law, enticing them to take up the practices and traditions of Judiasm, and as we see here apparently also the worship of angels. But we today have clear, and consise passages such as this one in Hebrews that points to the purpose and ministry of Angels, and shows that they are not such beings to be elevated in worship to being equal with Christ, but are in fact messangers, and helpers of Christ. Which is stated rather plainly here in verse 7, when the author of this book applies Psalm 104 to the angels, saying, "of the angels he says, Who makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire. It simply shows that Christ is superior, and even the angels, these heavenly beings are subject to him.

The last verses that we are looking at this morning is just a further contrast and justification for the idea of Christ being over all, and continuing this contrast against the angels. You have the angels which are classified as servants and messangers, and you have the Son of God who is classified as the heir of the eternal, holy kingdom of God.

Verse 8. "But to the Son he says, "Your throne, oh God, is forever and ever. It has been established, and it will never fade, nor will it ever fail. He shall rule and reign for all eternity and his rule shall be one of righteousness and truth, A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom. Verse 9, You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness, therefore, God, your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions.

This statement in verse 9, that he has loved righteousness and hated lawlessness applies not only to the eternal holiness of the Son, but also to the life and ministry of the Son in the flesh who came to earth. His love of righteousness, and hatred of sin and lawlessness was the essential core purpose and reason for his atoning death on the cross, were he came, and died for the sins once and for all. The cross is the culmination, and the full measure of his love for righteousness and hatred of sin, and at the same time the witness of his love, compassion and grace toward a fallen mankind. Jesus is the one whom God anointed, it is through him that God has established his kingdom making him the heir and preeminent over all.

There really isn't much more that I can say here, The author of Hebrews I think is quite convincing in his line of argumentation, and quite focused on his purpose of establishing Christ as central to salvation and faith. And while his focus here has been upon the worshiping of angels the same can be said for anything that we would give glory to which should be given only to the Son. Anything that would limit, or lessen our worship should be cast aside and our focus should be upon the one whose throne is established for ever and ever, and whose reign is righteous, and merciful. It may seem sort of silly to us this idea of angel worship, but the principles still apply, as I had previously mentioned this morning. That if anything becomes more important than Christ, or becomes our focus of worship then in reality it is this same error that these Hebrews were experiencing.

We need to be wary, and guard ourselves, and be constantly in check to make sure that what we believe is aligned with scripture so that we do not fall into such traps as having our focus be shifted upon anything other than Christ. We as humans living in this world seem to so quickly be caught up in our own lives, struggles, and challenges that we allow things to sort of take over our hearts and minds and if we are not careful replace the spot that should be occupied to Christ. We tend to get caught up into so many things, or become distracted by things of lesser importance. Not just in our daily lives, but in our faith and worship as well. We must remember to keep the main things, the main things, the centrality and superiority of Christ, the one in whom all things were made, and to whom all things were given. We must also not lose sight of the sovereignty of God in all things, It is he who has established his kingdom through his son in such away that we may become recipients of the free gift of grace.

We must not allow such things as our traditions and practices to be elevated to becoming the purpose of what we do, we must remember that our purpose is in Christ, and all that we do is in worship of him. It would seem that so many have lost this focus, so many no longer seem to keep the main things the main things and have instead replaced them with ritualistic practices. Let us be determined to continue as we have, and stive as we always have to remain a church, a body of believers whose heart, and focus is upon Christ, and that all that we do, even our gathering together to worship remains focused on this point, that we have gathered to praise and exalt the Son of God. To grow in our faith and understanding, to be a ministry to each other and to others all in the name and love of Jesus Christ.