

“In These Last Days, God Has Spoken in His Son”
(Hebrews 1:1-4)

Introduction: This morning, I would like for us to embark in one of the richest books of the New Testament, the book of Hebrews. This book has long held a fascination for many Christians as it focuses on one of the major questions in our fully understanding the Bible, the question of the relationship between the Old and the New Covenants, between the Mosaic economy and the current administration of the Covenant of Grace in the New Covenant.

In order to understand the argument of the book of Hebrews, it might help us to understand the context. The book of Hebrews gets its name from its audience. Although there is no address at the beginning to tell us precisely where the letter was directed, we can tell from its many allusions to the Old Covenant system of worship, and from its many warnings to the people not to lapse back into that system, that it was addressed to a Jewish audience. You don't see this kind of concentration on the Old Covenant in any of the letters which Paul wrote to the churches of the Gentiles, because they wouldn't have this kind of familiarity with it. The time of its writing has been debated, but it may perhaps best be placed around 68 AD just prior to the destruction of the Temple. The author to the Hebrews warns them several times throughout the book not to return to the shadows of the Old Covenant which seems to assume that those shadows of worship still exist. They have not yet been destroyed. But the intensity of these statements may indicate that this is a last warning from God to these Jews, who were so tempted, not to lapse back into that system which is about to be removed. The author writes, “When He said, ‘A new *covenant*,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear” (Heb. 8:13). The persecution of the Christian community by Rome, after it began to become apparent that they were not of the Jewish faith may have been what was tempting them to return. Judaism was a legal religion, it was tolerated by the Romans. Christianity was not. To return to the Temple might keep them safe temporarily, but it would certainly expose them to God's wrath, as He was about to return in wrath, as Jesus had promised the High Priest, and destroy the Temple in one of the most terrible and devastating wars ever recorded in the history of mankind.

We should not find it surprising, then, that the author to the Hebrews is offering to them compelling arguments why they should press forward unto Christ, and not return to the Old Covenant Shadows. Christ is the reality. The Temple and its worship were only the types which prefigured Christ. Christ is superior to all of the Old Covenant Mediators. He is superior to the angels, as He has inherited a better name than they. He is superior to Moses, who was a servant in God's house, but Christ is the builder of the house. He is superior to Joshua, for Joshua brought the children of Israel into the land of promise which was only a picture of heaven, while Christ is able to bring His people into heaven itself. His priesthood is superior to the Aaronic priesthood, for His is based on the power of an indestructible life and continues forever, while the Aaronic priests needed to exist in greater number, for they were prevented by death from continuing their ministry. The place of Christ's ministry is greater than that of the earthly priests, for they serve in a copy of the heavenly Temple, while Christ serves in the heavenly Temple

itself. Christ's sacrifice is superior to the animal sacrifices of the Aaronic priesthood, for they cannot cleanse away sin and therefore need to be repeated, but Christ's cleansed all the sins of all of His people once and for all when He offered Himself on Calvary's cross. Therefore, the author to the Hebrews exhorts them to move on in faith, and not to return to the Old Covenant system which was but a picture pointing to Christ. The reality has come. The pictures are fading and are ready to disappear. Therefore, they must press forward into the kingdom and not backslide into Judaism.

One last introductory note: We don't really know who the author to the Hebrews was. Some believe it was written by Paul. Others believe that it was Apollos. Still others believe it was Timothy. We really don't know who wrote it. But it doesn't really matter. God inspired the letter, and it has been received by the church as the Word of God, because they recognized the voice of God speaking in it. Remember that a book may be written by an apostle, such as Paul, or by a close associate of an apostle, such as Mark, who was the companion of Peter, or Luke, who was Paul's companion.

Our passage this morning introduces the beginning section in which the author to the Hebrews deals with Christ's superiority over the angels. And what it teaches us is,

Christ is God's highest and greatest revelation of Himself.

I. First the author to the Hebrews tells us *that* Christ is the greatest revelation of God.

A. He begins by saying, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways."

1. The unique thing about Christianity is that we have a God who speaks, who really speaks.
 - a. It is not a hope against hope that this is the Word of a superior Being. It is the Word of the living God.
 - b. Other religions may lay claim to having a revelation from an exalted being, but they don't really possess one. They have only deceived themselves, or their leaders have deceived them, into believing that it is true. Ultimately, it is a deception of the devil.
 - c. God has given to us a rule by which we may know His voice. It is the Scripture. And it is by this that we may know that which is from Him and that which isn't. Satan will never bring the truth. He will always seek to distort it. But the value in God's revelation is that it is the truth, and it will never deceive us.
2. God has spoken to us, but this revelation of God did not come all at once.
 - a. The author to the Hebrews tells us that He gave it in many portions.
 - (i) That is, it came in many parts. It came bit by bit.
 - (ii) He revealed different parts to different of his prophets who in turn revealed them to different of the fathers of the Jewish nation.
 - (iii) It was revealed to Noah that Messiah would come through his family, for after the flood his family was all that remained from which the seed of the woman would come forth.
 - (iv) It was revealed to Abraham that the Messiah would be of his seed, to Jacob that He would be of his tribe, to David that he would be of his

family, to Micah which town He would be born in, to Daniel the time of His birth, to Malachi who His forerunner would be, through Jonah the time that He would be under the power of death, and through Isaiah and Hosea His glorious resurrection.

- (v) God's revelation of His Son came stage by stage and not all at once. Little by little the Lord was unveiling the grand scheme of salvation. We should also focus at this point on the fact that this revelation is centered on God's Son.

b. And God also did so in many ways.

- (i) He revealed these things through dreams, visions, the Urim and Thummim, and audible voices.
- (ii) He instituted types and pictures which portrayed the person and work of Son.
- (iii) He appeared in one form to Abraham, in another to Moses, and in another to Elijah, Micah, Isaiah, Daniel and Ezekiel.
- (iv) He even instituted the entire sacrificial system, the priesthood, the tabernacle and Temple, in order to instruct His people as to who Messiah is and what He would do.
- (v) Piece by piece, and in a great variety of ways, the Lord gave this precious revelation of the coming of His Son, our Lord, and the infinitely precious work that He would perform in the putting away of our sins and bringing us to God.

c. Even to have this revelation was a tremendous blessing.

- (i) To a people who would dwell in absolute darkness without the shining rays of God's revelation, any revelation of God's mercy and goodness would be infinitely valuable.
- (ii) It is true that beside this speaking of God through the prophets, God also reveals Himself through nature. But there is nothing in nature which tells us that God has done or ever would do anything to remedy the situation that we know exists within the world and within our own consciences: the sin problem and the wrath that we lie under because of it. If this was all we had, we would still stand in need of the Special Revelation of God.

B. But the author to the Hebrews tells us that in the last of the times, God gave a much greater revelation in His Son.

1. Remember, the last days signal the final stage of history before the coming of the Lord to set up His eternal kingdom.
 - a. Jesus, when He was speaking about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, said that such a sin would not be forgiven in the age in which He was, nor in the coming age. This age He was referring to was the last days.
 - b. And it is the coming of Christ the first time which signals the beginning of the last days. Christ, in essence, stood at the cross-roads.
2. But it is also in this coming of Christ that we have the greatest revelation of God.
 - a. If the shadows and the visionary sayings revealed the Son, how much more

His presence!

- b. Christ is what the whole Old Testament was pointing toward. It is all about Him. Remember what Luke recorded about Christ on the road to Emmaus, “And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (24:27).
- c. God had a plan to reveal Himself, to make Himself known. All of the things which He has made and all of the events which He has ordained are for this one purpose, which is to reveal His glory.
- d. In order to make a full revelation of that glory, He needed to ordain the Fall that man might fall into sin and that He might reveal His glorious grace, mercy, justice and wrath. Without sin, we would know nothing of these things.
- e. But it is in Christ that this revelation is made. In Christ we see the glory of God’s mercy and grace, and His justice and wrath. We see Christ teaching the people the truth about God, His plan for man’s redemption. We see Christ laying down His life to save His people. And we see Him pronouncing a declaration of judgment against those who refuse Him. Jesus is the greatest prophet who has ever arisen who reveals to us the glory of God.

II. But there is more about Christ that reveals God. The author to the Hebrews goes on now to extol the Son of the Father, seeking to elevate his audiences estimation of this One.

- A. Christ is, first of all, the One whom the Father appointed heir of all things.
 1. To be the heir, means that Christ has the right of the first-born.
 - a. Paul writes in Colossians 1:15, “And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.”
 - b. Christ’s being the first-born does not mean as the Jehovah’s Witnesses say, that He is the first creation of God. Christ is not a creation, but is the eternal Son of the eternal God.
 - c. Rather, it means that He has the preeminence in the Creation. He is the One who will possess all of it.
 - d. This same thing is seen in Psalm 89:20, 26-27, of King David. The Lord says, “I have found David My servant; with My holy oil I have anointed him, with whom My hand will be established . . . He will cry to Me, ‘Thou art my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.’ I also shall make him *My* first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth.” This, undoubtedly, also has reference to Christ.
 - e. But David, as you know, was not the oldest, but the youngest son of Jesse. The place of preeminence is usually called the right of the first-born because it belongs to the first-born. But it is this position of authority that is meant.
 2. The author to the Hebrews tells us that Christ is the One whom He has appointed heir of all things.
 - a. In Hebrews 2:8, he writes, “Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet.”
 - b. In Psalm 2:6-8, the Lord says, “But as for Me, I have installed My King

Upon Zion, My holy mountain. I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, and the *very* ends of the earth as Thy possession.’”

- c. Remember what we saw not too long ago, that Christ is the One who brings in the kingdom and sets it up. It is a kingdom which will destroy and put an end to all earthly kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. And Christ is the King of that kingdom. That is why He is called the King of kings and the Lord of Lords, for He reigns over the kings of the earth.

B. Second, Christ is the One through whom God made the world.

1. How great is this One who reveals the Father? He is God Himself, the God of all creation.
2. John writes of Him, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:1-3).
3. This is why all creation bows to the Son and obeys His commands.
4. But one other thing we should note about this Creation: It is not only the creation of the physical world, but of all the ages. It includes not only all people and things, but also all space, time and events. It also includes the invisible realm. Again Paul writes, “For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him” (Col. 1:16).
5. Christ is the sovereign Creator and the ordainer of the events of human history.

C. Third, Christ is the radiance of God’s glory.

1. Literally, He is the outshining or effulgence of God’s glory.
2. This is what is meant where the Nicene Creed states that Christ is, “Light of light.”
 - a. Athanasius wrote against Arius, “Who is so senseless as to doubt concerning the eternal being of the Son? For when has one seen light without effulgence?”
 - b. Theophylact wrote, “The sun is never seen without effulgence, nor the Father without the Son” (Jamieson *Bethany* 2:1278).
 - c. What they are saying is that Jesus is the light which shines from the Father, just as the sun is the source of light which shines from it.
 - d. Christ does not differ in substance with the Father, which is what Arius taught (He is of like substance and not the same), but is of the same substance with the Father, even as the light which shines from the sun is of the same substance with it.
 - e. Christ is the outshining, the radiance of the glory of God, that heavenly light which is the expression of God’s perfections.

D. Fourth, He is the exact representation of God’s nature.

1. He is the precise reproduction of the very essence of God. This is what is meant

by the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. A son shares in the same nature as the father.

2. It is important to note that the word “begotten” is used of the Son, even before His incarnation.
 - a. It is believed by most theologians, and is a article of faith of the earliest Creeds, that Christ is eternally begotten of the Father. He is eternally the Son, while the Father is eternally the Father.
 - b. This does not mean that there was a time when He was not, as Arius taught, but that there was not a time when He was not. He is *eternally* begotten. As the Nicene Creed states it, “Begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.”
 - c. Christ bears the perfect image of His Father from all eternity. He is precisely like the Father. This is what makes Him such a perfect revelation of what God is like, for He is God in human flesh. “For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col. 2:9).
 - d. He who has seen Christ has seen the Father, not because the Father and the Son are one person, as the United Pentecostals teach, but because they share the same nature.

- E. Fifth, He is the One who upholds all things by the word of His power.
 1. Christ not only created all the worlds, but He also sustains them. He brought the world into being, and He continues to uphold it. What He made does not now exist in and of itself. The reason for its existence at every moment depends upon the Him.
 2. But He is also the One who moves everything along according to God’s plan, to its ultimate conclusion. Jesus was right in the absolute sense when He said that apart from Him we could do nothing, as well as in the relative sense that we could do nothing of any good apart from Him (John 15:5). He is the One who gives to everything even the power of action. He moves all along according to God’s plan. This is what we call “Providence.”

- F. Sixth, He is the One who made purification for the sins of His people.
 1. This has to do with Christ’s laying down of His life to atone or satisfy justice for the sins of His people.
 2. Christ once and for all cleansed away all the sins of God’s elect, when He suffered on that cross. Christ has cleansed away your sins, this morning, if you have embraced the Son in faith and repentance. This is the most wonderful truth that has ever been given under heaven.

- G. Seventh, Christ is He who rules over all in the position of highest authority.
 1. Here, we see a truth which the author to the Hebrews will discuss later, and that is that after Christ made His sacrifice, His offering for sin, He ascended up on high and sat down at the right hand of God, the place of greatest honor.
 2. And it is from here that Christ rules and reigns over all of the created realm, over all of His kingdom for His glory and for the good of His church.

- H. And Eighth, Christ is the one who is exalted over the angels.

1. Christ, as to His human nature, was, as the author to the Hebrews tells us, made for a little while lower than the angels (2:7). There was a time, while on earth, that He needed their ministry to Him because of the weakness of His flesh.
2. But now Christ is exalted over the angels as their head and commander in chief. All authority has been given to Him in heaven and in earth. He has been given the name which is above every name, the name of Lord (Phil. 2:11).
3. The author to the Hebrews will go on from here to argue for Christ's superiority over the angels as one of the reasons why they should not go back to angelic mediation, as though that were possible. But even if it were possible, there is one who has come who is greater than the angels.
4. And so here we see Christ, the greatest revelation of God, the first-born and heir of all creation, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the One who is the radiance of God's glory and the exact likeness of His nature, who moves all things along according to His plan, who purged the sins of His people, who is exalted over all creation and who has been given a name better than that of the angels.
5. The point the author to the Hebrews will make is if the people of God were bound to listen to the angelic mediators under pain of death if they refused, how much more should we listen to God's Son?
 - a. We should listen to His call of mercy. We should listen to His warnings of judgment.
 - b. If you have not heard the Son of God calling, hear Him now. Come to Christ in faith, and receive His life this morning. He holds out the promise of salvation to all who will take Him at His word and come to Him in faith.
 - c. But for those of you who have, I would counsel you to listen further to His Words. Do not be content in only knowing what Christ says about salvation, but also learn His will for your life. Christ came that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly. But this abundance of life only comes through a life of obedience to the Lord's commands. God has redeemed us that we might be zealous for good works. Let us therefore stir up His grace within us that we might return to Him an acceptable offering for His infinitely precious gift of His Son.
 - d. May God bless this portion of His Word to our hearing this morning. Amen.