

A Study of the Book of Hebrews

Sermon # 1

Jesus is Better

Hebrews 1:1-3

The writer of the book of Hebrews returns again and again to the word "*better*" which is found some thirteen times in this book to show the superiority of Jesus to every other religious system. "*Christ is better than the angels (1:4). He brought in a better hope (7:19) because He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises (8:6).*" [Warren Wiersbe. "Be Confident."

(Wheaton: Ill.: Victor Books, 1982) p. 8]

This letter is written to a group of people who are about to give up on their faith. This is a group who are at a standstill spiritually and in danger of going back-wards (5:12). They are exhorted to take stock of what Jesus has to offer and not to give in to fear or doubt and stay the course.

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, (2) has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..."

Ever since the world began, God has been speaking to human beings at different times and in different ways; sometimes by direct communication, sometimes through dreams and vision but most of all through his prophets. In biblical times when a God's prophets spoke and His people listened. The reason was simple. When a prophet spoke, the people knew they were hearing from God. The Apostle Peter says, "*For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy*

men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

In the Old Testament period God spoke to His people through the prophets. This self-disclosure was periodic and partial in nature. It was spread over a period of at least 10 centuries and it was given in a variety of means.

The point here is that God’s message is no longer spoken through the prophets but now through God’s very own son. The prophets were merely instruments in the hand of God but Jesus was the visible presence of the invisible God. Formerly the revelation of God was fragmentary now it is complete, formerly it was partial now it is perfect, formerly it was preparatory now it is fulfilled. God did not entrust His full revelation to be given by man. He took the initiative to declare it Himself through His Son.

As John MacArthur states in his commentary, *“Every religion is but man’s attempt to discover God. Christianity is God bursting into man’s world and showing and telling man what He is like.”* [John MacArthur. MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Hebrews. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983) p. 3]

Now the writer of Hebrews gives his readers seven Good Reasons that “Jesus is Better” than the prophets!

Let’s pick back up with verse two, *“... whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; (3) who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”*

First, He is the Heir of all things!

"whom he has appointed heir of all things"

Since Christ is the Son and even more particularly the only Son, of God He is also the heir, the sole Heir of all things.

He is the Heir of all things because and he is ...

Second, He is the Creator of all things!

"through whom He also made the worlds"

The apostle Paul says of Christ relation to the Creation, *"For by him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created by Him and for him. (17) And He is before all things and in him all things consist."* (Col 1:16-17) Paul explains that all things are not only made by him but for Him. John says, (1:3) *"All things are made through Him, and without Him was made that was made."*

Interestingly it says in Hebrews "he made the worlds" the word translated world here is not the normal Greek word (*kosmos*) but rather (*aionos*) which means "the ages." Jesus not only made the universe but he brought space, time and matter into existence. Jesus is He who was before history, at the beginning of history and will be at the end of history.

He is not only the Creator of the Universe but...

Third, He is the Sustainer of the Universe!

"upholding all things through the word of his power"

Not only did Jesus create all things by His word (John 1:1-5) but He also upholds all things by that same powerful word.

"Consider ...what instant destruction would happen if the earth rotation slowed down just a little. The sun has a surface temperature of 12,000 degrees F. If it were any closer to us we would burn up; if it were any further away we would freeze. Our globe is tilted on an exact angle of 23 degree, providing us with four seasons. If it were not so tilted, vapors from the oceans would move north and south and develop into monstrous continents of ice. If the moon did not retain its exact distance from the earth tides would flood the land completely, twice a day.... If the atmosphere did not remain at its present density, but thinned out even a little, many of the meteors which now harmless burn up when they hit the atmosphere would constantly bombard us.... How does the universe stay in this kind of fantastically delicate balance?" [McArthur p. 17]

Well you can choose to believe that it is the result of millions of years of evolution or you can accept that the Bible says, Jesus maintains and sustains the balance of the universe.

He is not only the sustainer of the universe but ...

Fourth, He is the Radiance of God's glory!

"who being the brightness of his glory"

No mere prophet could make this claim!

Fifth, He Is The Exact Representation Of His Father!

"express image of his person"

The word translated *"image"* (*charakter*) carries the idea that Jesus is an *"exact representation of the very substance of God."* What we know of the person of God we know through Jesus!

At the beginning of his gospel John explained in 1:18 *"No one has seen the God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father. He has declared Him."* The word translated declared is literally (*exegesato*) and means he "exegeted" Him. The goal of every preach is to "exegete" or explain the scripture. Jesus exegeted or explained God.

Later when the disciple Philip asked Jesus to show him the Father he replied, *"He who has seen me has seen the father ..."* (John 14:9) There is not one feature of the character of God that Jesus does not reveal.

He not only is the exact representation of God the Father but...

Sixth, He is the Redeemer of Mankind!

"He.. himself purged our sins..."

When Jesus went to the cross he solved the problem of sin, Forever. Once for all time. The apostle Peter says, *"... you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot."* (1 Peter 1:18-19).

He not only is the Redeemer of Mankind but ...

Seventh, He Is Ruler of the Universe.

"... when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Lastly Jesus is shown superior in that when he had completed the redemption of man, he was escorted by the angels to the throne of Almighty God. He sat down at the favored place of the Father with

calmness and confidence. The implications of that phrase are staggering *"he sat down."* Few other statements in the Bible are filled with greater importance.

"We know a great deal about the temple (in Jerusalem) and its furnishings, but, fascinatingly, there were no chairs in this billion dollar building that took 46 years to complete. There were no chairs because the priest of Israel never sat down. They never sat down because their work was never done. Their work was never done because the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. It was a stop-gap; it was temporary; it was incomplete. And so, priest after priest, course after course, year after year, century after century, with monotonous repetition, would come to the Temple; and they would function, but they would never sit down. They could never rest for their work was never done, the task was never completed."

[Marv Rosenthal. Israel My Glory. "He Sat Down" (April/May, 1987) p. 4]

But Jesus once for all time paid the penalty for sin! The writer of Hebrews will later explain (10:11-12) *"And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (12) But this man (Jesus), after He had offered one sacrifice for sin forever, sat down at the right hand of God."*

And so Jesus offered himself as the *"once for all time"* sacrifice for sin. The work was now done and never needed to be repeated. *"He sat down"* – that is the significance of His triumphant words from the Cross when he shouted (*telestai*) *"It is finished"* (John 19:30).

And then "*He sat down*" – his work is finished. "*He sat down*" – his position is fixed. None of the angels held such a position of honor in heaven. Seated in honor, Jesus remains superior.