

The Dignity of Christ

Hebrews 1:5-14

1/14/18

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There are mornings where we come and we look at God's Word together and we do the work as a pastor of preaching a sermon. But this morning, as we look at God's Word, this morning is less about trying to get into, if you will, the deep sauce of a passage. Because sometimes in getting into the deep sauce of a passage, we miss its thrust. My role this morning as the one who is called to preach to you this morning is to serve as encourager-chief. I want to encourage you this morning. I want to encourage you this morning because you've been given an opportunity, as we all have, to discover again in God's Word what is in plain sight—something which actually, people give their whole lives to do, but scarcely are able to experience. And that is to discover gold.

You may not know this if you've never been a resident of Florida, but having been a resident of Florida, one of the things you recognize—there are people who give their whole lives to doing nothing but sitting in a boat, traveling around the coast with very old maps and very high-tech equipment in the hopes of finding buried treasure in sunken ships. In 2015, this finally happened to a family who had given their entire lives to doing so. And off the Atlantic Coast of Florida, the location never disclosed for obvious reasons, William Bartlett was on what was generally their way of life—he was on a dive. They had been studying this part of the coast for years. And they found, finally, a three-hundred-year-old shipwreck with a metal detector in 2015. And he found what was a very cool thing: a gold Spanish coin. And then he found another. And then two became so many, he had to stuff them into his diving glove.

What was discovered that day was \$4.5 million in sunken treasure over three hundred years old. They did interviews. It was absolutely going to change their lives. But every Sunday morning, it is not preacherly hyperbole to say to you that we have the opportunity to open God's Word together to discover gold that does not require a degree, that does not require ships and expensive equipment. It simply asks of us to open it. Some of you have heard me in the refrain of my prayers prior to preaching, "Help the teacher." It's because I need the Holy Spirit's help. And this morning is no different.

There's another refrain which I use commonly, and this will demonstrate to you that what is declared to you is not simply preacherly hyperbole. It is drawn from Psalm 119. Hear these words: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things in your law." That was the psalmist writing in the longest psalm in the entire psalter. He simply asks, "Open my eyes, that may behold wondrous things, treasures in this your law, your Word." When we turn to Hebrews 1 again this morning, we will come to what is still the introduction to the entire book. I want you to receive it by faith as words of gold, that God might open our eyes that we might see wondrous things in his Word. And may he help the teacher. Hear now God's Word, church of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:5-14:

For to which of the angels did God ever say,
"You are my Son,
today I have begotten you"?
Or again,
"I will be to him a father,
and he shall be to me a son"?

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,
"Let all God's angels worship him."
Of the angels he says,
"He makes his angels winds,

and his ministers a flame of fire.”

But of the Son he says,
“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,
the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”

And,
“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment,
like a robe you will roll them up,
like a garment they will be changed.
But you are the same,
and your years will have no end.”

And to which of the angels has he ever said,
“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who
are to inherit salvation? [ESV]

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Please, pray with me.

Now, Lord, by your Holy Spirit, open this your Word that we might see wondrous treasures in this
your law. Help the teacher. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

You’ll see in your outline what is the preacher’s purpose. You’ll see the dignity of the Son. You’ll
see the superiority of the Son. The preacher’s purpose, the dignity of the Son, and the superiority of the
Son. We must understand the preacher’s purpose. Because he began this letter, this sermon, when he
writes to them that God in ages past had spoken to the prophets. But now in these last days, he has
spoken through his Son. And he goes on to introduce who this Son is, as we looked at last week. But he is
continuing. But he does so in a particular way, a unique way, when compared to the rest of the New
Testament writers.

First and foremost, it must be understood that his audience, as you recall from last week, his
audience is largely Jewish who have converted and are walking with Christ, living in an urban area, most
likely Rome, who are undergoing great persecution but who themselves are suffering under the greatest
dangers—drifting, dullness, and hardening. And they have grown dull to the Word of God. They have
grown dull to who Christ is, because their circumstances are screaming out at them, and they’re afraid to
utter the name “Christ” as the one who has redeemed them. They are wondering and doubting, “Is the
Lord working?” And so his purpose is to establish for them again, to encourage them, to see Christ.

But this week, we will see particularly, first in the preacher’s purpose, how unique his style is.
Because he has a very unique style. First let me let you be aware that in the book of Hebrews alone, we
will hear roughly thirty-seven Old Testament quotations, forty allusions to Old Testament stories or
characters, nineteen cases where the Old Testament material is summarized, thirteen where the Old
Testament name or topic is referred to without reference to a specific context. The preacher of Hebrews
quotes and draws on the Old Testament more than any other New Testament writer save for the Book of

Revelations. But the way in which he uses it—he uses it differently than the way it was originally given, largely because he was likely drawing on what is called the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew. And one of the ways that he does it differently is he will use passages, and he will use them as questions when they were really oftentimes meant as a proclamation. He uses it for the purpose of drawing a straight line for his hearers to be reminded all the promises, all of those things which are talked about in the Old Testament, had a terminus, had an end, had a goal—and that is in the person of who Jesus Christ is.

But because his audience were Jewish converts, he was reminding them that these promises were given to their forefathers. And they were given to them to remind them that their hope is in God alone. And God has shown his faithfulness in fulfilling those promises. And so he turns to a people who are discouraged, who are wondering, “Where is God?” wondering, “Can he be trusted?” wondering, “What will happen to me if I call on the name of Christ?” — he is reminding them, “Guess what? Your forefathers wondered the same thing.” But he’s declaring to them by drawing back to them these familiar passages which we will look at in a moment, to encourage them: “Look what God has done.” So his purpose in drawing out these many allusions, quotations, echoes of the Old Testament? Hear this. It’s to say, “Look what God has done.” Secondly, “Look at who Christ is.” Not just who he was, but who he is. And because of that, the implied application is: be strong and courageous, for the Lord is with you. So he’s drawing them back in. “Look what God has done. Look at who Christ is. Be careful that you do not drift away from these things.”

It is so timely, I believe, for us as a people, because we see drifting almost as a hobby. Not spiritually drifting as a hobby, but drifting. This last week I had the opportunity in preparation for the sermon just to watch—whether I was at the grocery store, or I was in the car, whether it’s waiting in line at the doctor’s office—wherever it may be. If we have a quiet moment, we are drifting. We are drifting from that present place and that present moment through the ever present screen. We’ve become very good at it. Now, I recognize not all of you do this. But a vast majority of us do. We oftentimes have forgotten what it’s like to be bored and have nothing to do. Because when we feel that tinge of boredom or we’re not quite sure what to say, people bring out their phones. We don’t even—it’s become a habit. And so we as a people understand what it’s like to drift. When we feel uncertain, we have a down moment, we have a curiosity, we plug away. We type away.

And so if we think that these things—which has my clock on it, by the way—these things and all the things that are laptops and screens in our cars and everything else—this is shaping our behavior more than we are shaping its. It’s shaping us. And so many of you may not be aware, but yet sociologists are studying this all the time—that this also has effects on us relationally, effects on us spiritually. Because we’re so accustomed to getting our news cycles in fifteen-second or five-second, you know, little dots and reports, that when we sit down to read a book, how many of you struggle with keeping your eyes open after about ten pages, if you even make it that far? Because we’re so busy, we’re so kinetic, we’re keeping our minds so entertained and distracted, that when our bodies sit down to do nothing but read something on a physical page—I grow tired. Because my body thinks, “Oh, Randy’s sitting down. He must be ready to go to sleep.” So I struggle with this. I wonder if you do. Have you become a professional drifter? It so easily can shape us, it can also shape us spiritually. Instead of turning to the Word, we turn to something else to find answers, to scratch an itch.

This word is to remind us that we are susceptible to drifting. We are susceptible to dullness. And so he calls us again—what God has done, who Christ is, and to remember. He is with you. So let’s look together at these verses. The dignity of the Son. What he does in the dignity of the Son, immediately in verse five, he actually quotes two Old Testament passages: Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel. And what he first does in drawing out the dignity of Son is to establish that no one else has this actual name, this signification of being the Son of God. “You are my Son. Today I have begotten you.” Or again, “I will be to him a father. He shall be to me a son.” He has said that to no one else. And that dignity is to establish that Christ in the

flesh is the Son of God. And the one to whom we've been called to believe in was not merely man, nor was he merely divine. He was both divine and human. He is God's Son. And God establishes his dignity. He establishes his authority. He's establishing his beauty. And his purpose, again, is to remind—not so much to provide evidence or a logical argument, but rather to establish that Christ has received all the glory and all the dignity that he deserves.

And when he says in verse six “let all God's angels worship him,” again as I will repeat from last week, generally those who come face-to-face with angels in the biblical testimony, they themselves are brought down to their face or brought down to their knees or they run in fear. Here he says, “Those things which you thought were worthy of worship? They are called to worship him, because he is above all things. He is my Son.” And so the angels, Psalm 104, his angels are dispatched from God to do his ministry. But they are merely wings. They are merely to be ministers of flame with fire, to be about God's bidding, to do his work. But they are not his children. They do his bidding. But for what purpose? Again, to bring dignity and glory to the Son. When we see the angelic witness in the New Testament, they are witnessing not to themselves, but they are witnessing to who Christ is. The disciples who came to the tomb saw the same thing. “Why? Why are you in fear? No, he is no longer here. The tomb is empty.” Giving testimony to the work of Christ, because he is the Son.

But more than that, he then goes on in verse eight—and this is important for his hearers. “But of the Son he says ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. [... He] has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.’” What are the companions? Well, he's drawing on Psalm 45. He's simply comparing here the dignity of Christ the Son over the human dignity of earthly kings. Now, to those who were hearing this word for the first time, they were thinking about those who have authority over them, how they wield that authority, how they wield that power. And because they were facing persecution, you bet that that worldly power meant a great deal to these hearers. So to them, when someone is over you in authority and power and they're persecuting you or trying you or threatening you, who has the power in that moment? They do. And we grow very, very afraid of the power which can be used against us. What will we lose? What will happen to me?

Why, then, does the preacher bring out the dignity of the Son who is the king above all kings? He's saying, “You're fearful of this earthly king. I say to you, the dignity of my son, the King, is over all kings. They do not have the power. He does.” Because he's already said, “He's brought all things into existence.” He's already established that by the word of his power, Christ upholds all things. The implied question is, why would you fear any earthly power? For Christ is the one who has done all these things. He is the one who is to be feared. And the implication is, all kings will face judgment. All rulers, all those in power and authority will fall under the judgment of this king. And that which they have done in unrighteousness, they will face in judgment. That which they have done to tear down will be restored and be undone through Christ the Son, who is the ultimate king. He is the Son.

And so whether it be your boss, someone over you as a teacher, are there humans that you fear? Or their use of power and abuse of it? Do you find yourself depressed, do you find yourself wondering and doubting, because they have the power over you? The power over your paycheck? The power over your job? This word is to be a reminder to you. May they not become bigger in your heart and mind than Christ the King. You, then, are given the power to pray over those who have power over you and authority over you. Because you're praying to the one who has power over them. Pray that God would have mercy on them. Pray that God would change their hearts. And if he doesn't, pray that he would give you the courage and the strength by his power to work with them, underneath them, not to fear them, but to fear the One who is over them. Because he is the Son.

And then finally, in these verses he establishes the superiority of the Son as he continues to say, “He is the one who has received the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” But then in verse ten he says, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,” Psalm 102, “and the heavens are the

work of your hands.” And then he says—even though you’ve created all these things, he establishes the superiority of this one. Because he is the one who has created it. He says even it cannot reflect fully who you are, Christ, in your superiority. Why? He says these things will pass away. These things will be renewed. They’ll be changed like a garment, reflecting and looking to the future when Christ will return. The heavens and the earth will be made new. It’ll be changed like we do our clothes at the end of a day. Because he is the one who has created it. He is the one who upholds all things by the word of his power.

And at the word of his power at his return, all that which is done in unrighteousness will be undone. All that which has been torn down will be restored. It will be made new. Death belongs to this age, not the one to come. Sin belongs to this age, not the one to come. Foul language is the one that tears down people in this age, not the one to come. Tears are the one that fill this age, but not the one to come. This age, this earth which we are called by God’s grace to be the hands and feet of Christ to bring restoration to, to make known the glory of the Gospel, are about that restoration because we’re building for a greater restoration. Your work, your words of encouragement, your works of service, your hard work of excellence, regardless of what you do, is not done in vain. It will be established in the world to come, and it will be restored. So your work matters, but your suffering is but for a moment. And this is not the end. Because the one who is superior over all things, who has conquered sin and death, will come again and will raise us anew. This is the one we are called to worship.

This is the gold of the Word that is given to us. This is what we need on Sunday morning and what we need on Monday morning and on that odd Thursday afternoon when frankly we just need more coffee and chocolate, and I can’t take this job any more. When the children have harranged you and you’re about to ring their necks. We’ve been there. When you and your spouse have frankly had enough of one another and you’re ready to send each other off to your own retreats. When in your dating life, you’re so tired of meeting people who frankly have no clue about relationship and you just want to give up on it all. When you find yourself in mid-life, and you’re wondering, “What does all of this add up to? What will be my legacy?”

The Word reminds us that, indeed, it is not ultimately about us at all. It is about the superiority of the one who has brought salvation, who has made all things, who is over all things, whose story is being written in our lives. And we are called again out of dullness, hardness, and drifting to trust in him. Because he says these words, speaking of the creation, the work of his hands, verse eleven, “they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.” As the Word says, there is no shadow of turning with you.

Verse thirteen, he finishes on this great, triumphant statement quoting Psalm 110: “And to which of the angels has he ever said, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’? Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?” So angels are to minister to us. We, in turn, worship Christ. Because Christ, he says here, as I mentioned last week, it bears repeating again—Christ is seated on the victory throne. He draws on this Old Testament biblical allusion of being seated at the right hand of God. This right hand establishment is an Old Testament allusion, a biblical allusion, of the place of victory—the most prominent place. So Christ who is the Son, victorious over sin and death, sits in a throne that does not await victory. What it is awaiting is the fullest revelation and the fulfillment of what that victory has already accomplished. The victory is done, but it will be finally revealed and tied up when all these enemies will be put to death. They will be laid down. But those who are children of the Lord will know his everlasting love, his everlasting grace and mercy.

And so if you come into this room this morning defeated, discouraged, know this—that the Lord comes to you, and he says, “Remember my Son who is seated on the throne.” He is the Lord. He is your Lord. He is your Redeemer. He is victorious. And he meets you wherever you are to give you grace for today. Neither angels nor demons, neither death nor life, no authority, neither depth nor height, will be

able to separate you from the love of God in Christ. Dear church, this is the treasure of gold we've been given that does not spoil or fade, cannot be stolen. But it is ours to rejoice in. May the Lord give you great encouragement this day and in this week to come. May he fill you with his Spirit. May his Word echo in your mind and heart. And may he by his Spirit open your eyes, that we all might see wondrous things in this his Word and most principally, Christ Jesus our Lord. Let's pray.

Lord, I ask that by your Holy Spirit you would minister to your people. Whether they be discouraged, whether they are doubting, whether they are rejoicing, I ask you, O Lord, to minister to these your people. I pray that you would point them again and again to the dignity and superiority of your Son, Christ Jesus our Lord. Remind them of his victory that is ours in him, that your Spirit would minister to them by writing this your Word on their hearts. And wherever you send them this week, whatever be their circumstances or difficulties, I ask you, O Lord, to remind them that you are with them, that you will never leave them nor forsake them. And again and again, O Lord, show them the glory and beauty, the dignity of the Son. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.