



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ♦ Deo ♦ Gloria

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

Hebrews 1:1-3

The Superiority of Christ, Part I

January 18, 2009

¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,...

- I. **God Revealed Himself in the Past**
- II. **God Reveals Himself Today**
- III. **Jesus Christ is God the Father's Final Word**

- In Matthew 16:13-16, we read of the account where Simon Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ:

“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and other Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”

- I can think of possibly no chapter anywhere in the New Testament that answers the question, “Who do you say Christ is?” more than Hebrews 1.

I. God Revealed Himself in the Past

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,

- ❑ God has spoken for centuries, even prior to the birth of Jesus Christ.
- ❑ In fact, what the writer of Hebrews is asserting is that **God has spoken** in the past, **at many times and in many ways...**
 - Throughout the Old Testament, we read of God revealing Himself – speaking – to His people.
 - As the writer notes, God did so in many ways...
 - God spoke through dreams, visions, and the Urim and Thummim.
 - He also spoke through angelic revelations, prophetic words and events.
 - For example, He spoke to Moses in storm, thunder, and in the burning bush (Exodus 3; 19:19, Deuteronomy 5:22).
 - He spoke in a still small voice to Elijah (1 Kings 19:12).
 - He also spoke to and through Prophets, Priests, and sages.
 - Yet, the primary means that God spoke in the Old Testament was through His Prophets.

II. God Reveals Himself Today

but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,

- ❑ Notice that the author writes, “...but in these **last days**...”
 - Yet, this phrase is to be taken in a strictly eschatological sense.
 - Rather, as Richards D. Phillips states, “The point is not that Jesus is about to come back any minute, as many take this to mean (though other New Testament passages tell us to have this perspective), but that this is the age of fulfillment when God’s revelation has been made complete. This is what makes the *when* of Christian revelation so much better.”
 - John Calvin even comments, “It was not a part of the Word that Christ brought, but the last closing Word.”
- ❑ In this passage the reader gains a sense of what is referred to as ***progressive revelation***.

- That is, from Genesis through Malachi, God has progressively revealed Himself to His people.
- However, the concept of *progressive revelation* in no ways suggests that later revelation may (or can) contradict previous; rather, it means that as God's revelation progresses, it becomes fuller, more complete.
- Yet, the fullness of revelation is found only in God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- As F.F. Bruce writes, "...the progression is not from the less true to the more true, from the less worthy to the more worthy, or from the less mature to the more mature...The progression is one from promise to fulfillment..."
- Another way of stating it is that it is from incomplete to complete.
 - Each of the Old Testament book, therefore, reveals a facet of the character and nature of Jesus Christ.
 - Genesis beautifully captures the truth that God created all things out of nothing. It reveals the fall of man and our need for a Savior. In Leviticus we discover the sacrificial system and the Aaronic priesthood – pointing to our need for an intercessor and mediator. In Ruth, we read of the kinsman redeemer. In 1 and 2 Samuel, we learn of the anticipation of a Davidic King...and in Hosea Christ is revealed as the means of our being redeemed...bought back, even while we were yet sinners (harlots).
 - However, in Christ, it is all fulfilled.
- Few, if any, analogies capture the nature of Christ as the culminating, final revelation of God. Yet, one that may be close is that of a simple puzzle. Each piece is true, in that it is a piece of the whole. Yet, when viewed as a whole, when all the pieces are in their proper place, the complete picture is evident. So it is with the Son. **He is the complete picture...the finished puzzle, if you will.** The prophetic utterances, the visions, dreams, and angelic revelations of old were but the pieces which found their fulfillment in Christ and in Christ alone.
- Furthermore, the revelation of Jesus Christ is **final**. That is, **there is no revelation beyond or outside the Person and Work of Jesus Christ!**
- This is why Jesus states, in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."
- Yet, unfortunately, Christ, and His Word, is far too *insufficient* for many professing Christians. Christians often say, "LORD, speak to me." Yet, He already has. We long for "signs" or "visions" or "dreams." May we no long for the "days of Elijah" when the LORD spoke to His people through the prophets.

Yet, as the author of Hebrews so often urges, we must never look back to the days and ways of old.

- **We must realize that the revelation of Jesus Christ, which we have, is far greater, far complete, far superior to any other revelation – regardless of mode – of God!**
- One can imagine the temptation of the first century Jews to want to “go back” to the days of their fathers. No doubt, they all, to some degree, shared the nostalgia of the “days of Moses and Elijah and David” when God revealed Himself in pillars of clouds, through burning bushes, and elaborate dreams. Yet, Christ was the supreme revelation of God.
- In the 1994 film, *The Shawshank Redemption*, we meet Ellis Boyd “Red” Redding, played by actor Morgan Freeman. Red is a prisoner at Shawshank prison, a maximum security facility in Maine, and in 1927 he begins serving a life sentence. He is denied parole multiple times, but then, in 1967, after serving 40 years, Red is released. However, like so many prisoners who become accustomed to life behind bars, Red finds it difficult to cope with life and the freedom offered in the world outside Shawshank. In fact, he even considers committing another crime in order to return back to his “familiar” and “comfortable” cell in prison.
- Yet, tragically, this is the life of so many professing Christians who do not seem to grasp the infinite freedom and joy that is to be found in Christ and Christ alone. Also, it seems that many, if not most, professing believers, would rather God speak to us in the incomplete shadows as He did before Christ. Visions and dreams and prophetic utterances seem so much more “spiritual.” Yet, all of these or but shadows compared to Christ. For, it is only in Christ that we find God’s perfect, complete, and final revelation.

Indeed, there is no revelation outside Christ.

- Consider 1 Corinthians 1:20, where the Apostle Paul writes, “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.”

III. Jesus Christ is God the Father’s Final Word

- The author of Hebrews then sets out to demonstrate the magnificence of the Son, as the final revelation of the Father, in a sevenfold manner: (1) He is the heir of all things; (2) He is the agent of Creation; (3) He is the radiance of the Father’s glory; (4) He is the exact representation of the Father’s being; (5) He sustains all things by His powerful word; (6) He provided purification for sins; and (7) He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

1. Christ is the heir of all things.

whom he appointed the heir of all things

- This statement most certainly parallels Psalm 2:8, the LORD states,

“Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.”

- This is also the fullness of Abraham’s promised inheritance.
 - However, the inheritance is in no way limited just to the earth. It embraces all of creation as well.
 - Yet, the primary point here is that Jesus Christ is the *firstborn* of all creation, and therefore, He alone has the right of inheritance. The concept of *firstborn* is something that is not well understood in the Western world today, but emphasizes the **right of Jesus to the inheritance of the Father. That is, ALL that is the Father’s is His.** Note, however, that the idea of *firstborn* does not imply that Jesus was in some way created. It simply means that He has the rights and authority associated with the firstborn.
 - Also, when we are regenerated and place our faith in Christ, we are united with Him. And, when we are united with Christ, we, His people, become **joint-heirs with Him.**
 - This appointment of the Son as the heir of all things was the Father’s appointment. It was his purpose in Creation...that the Son would be “blessed and glorified through the receiving and inheriting of all things.”
 - Yet, also, Philip E. Hughes writes, “His inheritance is the innumerable company of the redeemed and the universe renewed by virtue of his triumphant work of reconciliation.”
 - As one scholar also writes, “The heir is also the creator. He is not inheriting what he has not been connected with. He inherits what he himself made.”
 - Yet, ultimately, Christ will offer His inheritance up to God the Father. As 1 Corinthians 15:23-24 states, “But each in his own order: Christ he firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.”

2. Christ is the agent of Creation.

through whom also he created the world.

- Next, the author of Hebrews begins to assert the full deity of Jesus Christ, attributing to Him the act of Creation.
- These words are, once again, consistent with the New Testament testimony that **Jesus Christ was God the Father's agent of Creation.**
 - Colossians 1:16 states, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through and for him."
 - Also, John 1:3, "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."
 - This is also possibly based on Proverbs 8:22-31 ("The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth...") where Divine Wisdom is personified and was with God in the beginning.
 - Another possible parallel, which would have been familiar to a first century Jewish audience was in the intertestamental (Apocryphal) work, *Wisdom of Solomon 7:22-30* where wisdom is also personified.

3. Christ is the radiance of God the Father's glory.

He is the radiance of the glory of God

- Next, in the author's assertion of the deity of Jesus Christ, He is referred to as "the radiance of the glory of God."
- The Greek word for *radiance* is *apaugasma*, which means, "to send forth light."
- As John MacArthur states, "The only radiance that reaches us from God is mediated to us from Jesus Christ. Just as the rays of the sun light and warm the earth, so Jesus Christ is the glorious light of God shining into the hearts of men. Just as the sun was never without and cannot be separated from its brightness, so God was never without and cannot be separated from the glory of Christ."
- This is certainly why, throughout the New Testament, Jesus Christ is revealed as "light." For, without Him, there is only darkness.

4. Christ is the exact representation of God the Father's being.

and the exact imprint of his nature,

- Next, in possibly the strongest assertion of the deity of Jesus Christ, He is revealed as the “exact imprint of His nature.”
 - The Revised Standard Version translates this phrase, the Son of God “**bears the very stamp of his nature.**”
 - The Greek word translated *imprint* is the word **charakter**, where we, of course get our word *character*.
 - **Christ shares the very character, or nature, of God the Father.**
 - Yet, the word originally was used for *a die or engraving*. Donald Guthrie notes, “[This word] is highly expressive since a stamp on a wax seal will bear the same image as the engraving on the seal.”
 - The idea is that, although a distinction exists in the Persons of the Father and Son, they both possess the exact same **nature**, for they are both fully God.
 - F.F. Bruce agrees, “What God essentially is, is made manifest in Christ. To see Christ is to see what the Father is like.”
 - This is consistent with Colossians 2:9, which states, “For in Him (Christ) all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”

5. Christ sustains all things by his powerful word.

and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

- Next, not only is Christ the CREATOR of all things, but He is the SUSTAINER as well.
- What is significant here is that the means by which Christ uphold (sustains) all things is the exact same means He created it – the means of **His word**.
- Notice the parallels as well with John 1:1-3 (“In the beginning was the Word...”) and Colossians 1:17 (“all things hold together”).
- Consequently, we see that Christ is the **Past** (in Creation) and the **Present** (in Sustaining). He not only is the transcendent God, but He is imminently working in His Creation, actively working to sustain all things in accordance with the will of the Father.
- I love how F.F. Bruce describes this passage, stating, “He (Christ) upholds the universe not like Atlas supporting a dead weight on his shoulders, but as one who carries all things forward on their appointed course.”

6. Christ provided purification for sins.

making purification for sins,

- ❑ Next, the author speaks of Christ's finished sacrificial work, for he made "purification for sins..."
- ❑ Several things are significant here; but, this truth is complimentary to the deity of Jesus Christ. The reason is because the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ was accomplished on the basis of his **HUMANITY**.
- ❑ For Jesus was **able** to accomplish this work because He took on human flesh in the Incarnation, becoming our representative. Had He remained only God, He would never have been able to satisfy the wrath of the Father *on our behalf*.
- ❑ Yet, by condescending to us and becoming Man, Jesus Christ accomplished something we never could have accomplished ourselves – the purification of sins.

7. Christ sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ...

- ❑ Finally, the Hebrews author speaks of the **finality** of Christ's finished work. The reason for this is that **after Christ made purification for sins He sat down**.
- ❑ For Christ to be seated represents at least two truths:
 - He is the Sovereign King who is in absolute control – as a king would be seated on a throne; and
 - His sacrificial work is **finished**.
- ❑ Richard D. Phillips writes, "There were no seats in the temple at Jerusalem. The priests offered sacrifices for the purification of the people day and night without ceasing because the problem of sin had not yet been solved. They never sat down. But when God's Son, the true priest whom the old covenant priests merely represented, shed his blood for us, his atoning sacrifice was the one to which all the others had merely pointed. He sat down, because there was no more sacrifice to be made, God's Son having offered his infinitely holy and precious blood once for all."
- ❑ Yet, not only did Christ **sit**, but He did so **at the right hand of the Majesty on High**.
 - The picture here is one of **honor** and, once again, demonstrates the fulfilling of Old Testament Scripture.

- In Psalm 110:1, the Psalmist writes, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’”
- Also, in Luke 22:69, Jesus says to the Sanhedrin, “But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”
- **Christ’s work is, indeed done!**

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- Consequently, the Exalted Christ is our all-sufficient King!
- In these few short verses, we have seen the exaltation of Christ in one of the most powerful ways in all of Scripture.
 - First, we see that He is the perfect **Prophet** through whom God the Father has now spoken His final Word;
 - Secondly, Christ is the perfect **Priest**, completing the perfect, once-for-all final sacrifice for our sins;
 - Thirdly, Christ is our perfect **King**, sitting enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on High, sustaining all things by the power of His word.
- Yet, not only is Christ our perfect Prophet, Priest and King, but He is our **Alpha and Omega**.
 - The reason for this is that Christ is the Creator of all things (beginning...Alpha).
 - He is also the Sustainer of all things (present).
 - And, finally, He and He alone is the Heir of all things (the end...Omega).
- Yet, even more, Christ is the perfect **Son of God** and **Son of Man**.
 - That is, as the *radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature* Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God...in His Deity.
 - Yet, as the one *who made purification for sins* He was our representative, as the perfect Son of Man...in His Humanity.

<p>And so, with all of this, Jesus Christ is, indeed, the UNIQUE (<i>monogenes, μονογενες</i>) Son of God who alone is worthy of all of our worship, praise, and adoration!</p>
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- So, if Christ were to ask us today, “Who do *you* say that I am?” This passage offers the answer. **You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!**