

Turn with me in your Bibles, please, to the book of Hebrews, chapter one. The title of this evening's sermon is *Christ is Better*.

My economics teachers always told me to be wary of marketing that makes such vague statements as something is *better* than something else, without actually giving any details. In New Zealand when I was growing up one of the big laundry detergents was Persil. Their slogan was, *Persil Washes Whiter*. A thoughtful consumer might wonder, *whiter than what? Whiter than mud, perhaps?*

Well, tonight I'll answer that question up front, because *I* made the same ambiguous, vague statement – Jesus is *better... but better than what?* My friends, He's better than everything.

It's my heart felt desire today to preach to you the riches of Christ; and that's why we turn to this incredible book, which was written to proclaim the glories of our risen Savior. Jesus is better than everything else... and this evening we'll see why that is, with seven attributes of Christ that show that He's better... preeminent.

It's my prayer that as we work through these verses – if you're saved, you'll come to have a renewed passion and love for Him. We are emotional creatures, after all – that's how we were created – that's God's design for us, but there's a downside to that... our love for Christ can ebb and flow. Our relationship with Christ is at times strong, and at other times... well, not so much. It's not that we turn our backs on Him, but our affections cool. My prayer this evening is that your affections may be rekindled. That you may be reminded why we are committed to Him, and His Lordship over our lives.

And, if you don't yet know Jesus Christ as your Savior... if He is *not* the Lord of your life... my prayer is that the Holy Spirit may draw you irresistibly to Him, even now as you hear these words, and you'll wonder how you ever resisted Him. I long to preach a Christ that is irresistible to you.

We don't know the original form for the book of Hebrews. Some scholars believe it was a sermon, preached by Paul and transcribed by Luke... the reason for that is, the book has the rich features of Pauline theology, with a great depth of Old Testament knowledge, but the *language construction* is similar to Luke's handling of the Greek.

Others believe that it was a letter written by Apollos. I think the internal evidence points to this as a strong possibility... but then, people much smarter than I am have debated over this point for centuries, with no clear consensus. Point being, no one knows for *sure*... but what we *do* know is that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit; and in that we can trust.

We also know that the book of Hebrews was written to a small group of Christians possibly living in or near Rome, about 30 years after Christ's ascension into Heaven. These were Jews who had come out from the shadows of Judaism into the indescribable light of Christianity. They had been raised with all the vestiges of Old Testament religion, but had become established believers in the Christian faith, mature enough to be teachers in the church, converted and trained by men who had personally seen Jesus' ministry.

But there were no worldly advantages for Jews in converting to Christianity; quite the opposite, in fact. Persecution in the Roman Empire is on the rise, with one trial coming after another... suffering was commonplace, and persecution was very real. You see, Rome was somewhat neutral toward the Jews – tolerant, if not accepting. But it was notorious for its hatred toward Christians.

And the greatest “hater” of them all, it seems, was Nero, who was the Emperor ruling over the mighty Roman Empire at the time. He was infamous for his loathing toward Christians. And while these Hebrew Christians hadn’t faced death yet, they could see it coming... in just the next few years, Nero’s fury against Christians would be unleashed in unthinkable ways.

If you were one of the fortunate ones, you’d be crucified. Others would be wrapped in animal skins and thrown to the dogs, or to the lions in the coliseum... but others were burned alive at his parties to serve as mood lighting, or candles in the twilight. Just *inconceivable* cruelty.

I want you to take a moment to imagine with me what life would have been like for these Christians. These were believers *just like* you and I. They had seen the rise of Nero, and his increasing campaign of cruelty. *Imagine being with them in worship.* You don’t have the New Testament – your theology really is very incomplete, compared to our body of knowledge today... but you have some of the words and promises of those who had seen Christ Himself, and you have the Holy Spirit living within you.

Wouldn’t you be wondering *why?* Why are you being so persecuted? Why the violence toward you? What had you done? And the bigger question – *where is God in all this?* Doesn’t He care? Your allegiance to Christ is about to be put to the greatest test... and you stand alone.

Perhaps you should go back to the way things were. The way things *are* for your neighbors, and your friends, your family. Judaism is so *safe*. When you converted to Christianity, your family burned all of your possessions... they even held a funeral service for you – you were officially dead to them.

Thrown out of the Synagogue, you had little or no way to provide for your family. You’re now an outcast; a spiritual leper. Your Jewish friends despise you, and your family won’t acknowledge you. Your business associates have cut ties with you; you’re no longer able to attend school, or get any education. *Times are desperate; you need a word from God... but He’s silent.*

I wonder, do you ever feel that way? Do you ever feel like the world is coming down around you? We’re blessed in this nation with no real persecution, but our trials are just as personal, and painful to us. Just as threatening to our faith. Perhaps you’re struggling in your marriage; your spouse just doesn’t understand you. Or your career isn’t taking off like you thought it would, you’re fighting to stay afloat financially. You’re struggling to find acceptance in school.

Perhaps you’re finding yourself at odds with the world *because* of your faith. Or... you can’t shake off those feelings of sadness, of grief. You’ve lost a loved one, and just can’t imagine how a good God would do such a thing. Life just seems so *unbearable*.

Under great persecution from Rome *and* their fellow Jews, these New Testament converts were

dealing with seemingly *unbearable* circumstances... battling the temptation to go back to Judaism; tempted to abandon this new Christian faith. *What if you had been there with them?* Would you be thinking back to your forefathers, who had worshipped the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; *their* faith was close... it was good enough for them. Perhaps it would be best if you went back to it... it was *familiar*... the sacrifices, the priests, the lambs. If Judaism was the faith of your forefathers, and Jesus was after all a Jew... perhaps you should return to your old ways.

*And where is God in all this?*

But wait! A letter has been sent! Finally, an encouraging word from someone who actually *knew Christ!* Huddled in your home church, hoping you won't be disturbed by the Roman soldiers, you open the scroll and read the opening lines...

Verse 1... *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he [that's God] created the world. [Christ] 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...*

Beloved, can you see that this is a letter of *hope?! It's a letter written at just the right time to reveal the glories of Jesus Christ and His new covenant... as opposed to the old ways of the forefathers. There's a confidence, an assurance to the Christians... and a warning to unbelievers, that they must receive Christ. This letter is a presentation of Christ, the Messiah, the Author of the new covenant, which is greater than the old. A greater covenant... and a greater Messenger.*

In the past, long ago, God spoke in many different ways to the fathers, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son. The original Greek doesn't say *by His Son*, but rather, *in Son*. The author is stressing the *nature* of the One through Whom He has spoken... in the past, God spoke through ordinary men like you, and me. But now, in these last days – He has spoken to us *in Son*. That's in a Person who possesses the very quality and nature of God. It's a distinction that wouldn't have been lost on these New Testament believers.

And the theme of the letter? It's Christ's superiority – His *preeminence*. He is the best that they could have... better than *anything* that has come before. Better than the prophets. Better than the angels. Better than Moses, better than Joshua, better than the Aaronic Priests. He's better than the Old Testament sacrifices. The sacrifices could never end under the old covenant, because they were never enough. He's *better than everything!*

And that's the promise this small group of struggling, persecuted believers needed. It's exactly what they needed to hear that day, in the shadow of Judaism and the even darker shadow of the might of Rome.

And it's *exactly* what *we* need to hear this very day. He's *better*, beloved. Better than our *old* ways. Are you tempted to fall back into your former ways of life? Given over to your appetites, your selfishness... your pride... doing whatever it takes to achieve financial success, or popularity. Perhaps you'd have greater prestige, or opportunities for advancement. For young people –

compromising your integrity in order to be accepted by the “in” crowd. Those popular kids.

But the writer of Hebrews is making it clear – why would you? Christ is better than ALL of those things! We can be obedient to the commands of God, and see Christ as better. When we recognize His preeminence, that He is beautiful beyond compare. If you’re not growing in the faith as you should... you need to consider these things.

Christ is better than our sin... He’s more fulfilling... we should love Him more than we love our sin. I wonder... do you love Christ enough to turn away from your sins? Those sins that keep calling you back...? Enticing you? You know what they are... those sins that seem so terribly attractive, especially in times of trial. Or when you’re alone, and no one else is watching.

God’s Word has come, my friends – not on cold tablets of stone, as in times past, but in the flesh and blood... of His only Son!

The point of these first few verses is, there’s none other like Him. And the overwhelming warning throughout the book of Hebrews? *Don’t go back!* Don’t go back to your old ways... don’t succumb to the temptation to seek meaning or comfort in some thing or some one else. Because no one is better. Jesus surpasses all things!

It begins - *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.* It’s important to note that while the Son is superior to the prophets, He doesn’t replace their revelation. God progressively communicated through the prophets in many ways – in dreams, in visions, by the preaching of His prophets... and these Old Testament scriptures are still valid as Scripture for the followers of Jesus – it’s still God’s Word. The term “progressive revelation” means that God’s revelation is given to us in pieces, building one upon the other to a culmination, or a climax if you will. Friends... Jesus Christ IS that climax.

While the prophets were God’s spokesmen, they never had the full revelation of God; the Son, on the other hand, stands as the heir of all things, and as such His revelation is better. It’s better because it’s complete. The Old Testament was fragmentary – no one prophet had the entire truth. But when Jesus came, He was truth incarnate, the very definition of truth, God fully revealed. Second Corinthians 1:20 says, “...all the promises of God find their Yes in Him.” That means that all of God’s promises are made possible, and are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Verse 1 tells us that God has spoken to us in these last days by His Son. The Old Testament Jews saw the last days as the time when all of God’s promises would be fulfilled. Promises would stop, and fulfillments would begin. Salvation would come, and Israel would no longer be under bondage. And that’s what Christ came to do – He came to fulfill the promises. God has spoken – past tense, meaning He has finished speaking... His Son is His final and complete revelation.

In these first few verses of Hebrews – which was one long, triumphant sentence in the Greek – we see seven attributes of the Messiah, which clearly establish that He is the preeminent one... vastly superior to everything else. Tonight we’re going to look at those seven attributes.

## **The first attribute is this – He is preeminent in His possession. *All things belong to Him.***

*God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things...*

If Jesus is the Son of God, then He's the heir of all that God possesses. Everything belongs to Christ. So, why would look anywhere else for fulfillment? Or joy? All things are eternally His, because the Father has appointed him heir of all things.

The stars were created for His pleasure. The solar system was created for His pleasure. The angelic realm... the animal kingdom... every tree, every mountain, every ocean... for His pleasure. Every thing and every one – including you and I – was created for Him, and ultimately for His glory.

Jesus said *"All things have been handed over to me by my Father..."*<sup>1</sup> Everything that was ever made was made *by* Christ, and *for* Christ. Romans 11:36 says, *"... from him and through him and to him are all things."*

Turn with me to Revelation chapter 5... God is sitting on His throne, and He's holding a scroll in His hand. That scroll is the title deed to the earth and all that's in it.

Verse 1... *Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.* When you wrote a will in Roman times, you had to seal it seven times. As you rolled it up, you sealed it and then you rolled it and sealed it again and rolled it and sealed it again. You kept on doing that so nobody could break it open and tamper with it.

And John says in verse 2, *I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"* In other words, *who is the rightful heir to the earth? Who has the right to move in and possess the earth, and all that's in it?*

Verse 3, *And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.*

The Lion of the tribe of Judah... the One Who has conquered – it's Christ!

Verse 6, *And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.*

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:27

So, the Lamb approached the throne and took the scroll from God. He takes it because He has the right to, as the rightful heir to the earth! And so we see in Revelation 5, through John's vision, that Jesus Christ will some day come and take the scroll out of the Father's hand and inherit the earth. He is God's heir.

Jump to Revelation 11:15 and we read, *Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.....* that's the *great and glorious climax!* The seven trumpets blow, and the earth is His! And His reign shall be forever.

For now, much of creation is in rebellion against Him. But one day these enemies of Christ will be subdued, and all creation will bow down and proclaim that He is the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords! Paul said in Philippians 2, *"...God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*<sup>2</sup>

Now, here's the good news! Not only is the Son the heir of all things, but if you belong to Christ, then you're joint heirs *with* Him! Romans 8:16 says, *"...we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."* That's an incredible promise! When we enter into His eternal kingdom, we will jointly possess all that He possesses.

James said, *"...has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?"*<sup>3</sup>

If you love Him, then you're the recipient of these promises. Why would you ever turn your back on that? We are co-heirs with the Son, and we've done absolutely *nothing* to earn it!! *By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it's the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*<sup>4</sup>

We can *cling* to these truths, and claim them as our own. And as rightful heir of all things, Jesus can make good on all that He promises:

- If he says, *"Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth"*<sup>5</sup> then he can make good on that promise, because He'll *own* the earth and have it under his control.
- If he says, *"Nothing in all creation will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus"*,<sup>6</sup> then he can make good on that promise because He'll *own* all creation and have it under his control.
- And if he says, *"There shall no longer be death or mourning or crying or pain"*<sup>7</sup> beloved, he can make good on that promise too, because He'll *own* life and He'll *own* death... and rule unhindered over everything that causes sorrow.

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<sup>2</sup> Philippians 2:9-11

<sup>3</sup> James 2:5

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:5

<sup>6</sup> Romans 8:39

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 21:1

Jesus has the power to fulfill His promise to keep us, to preserve us... to save us. *What could be better than that?*

So, the first attribute – He is *preeminent in His possession*.

## **Second, He is preeminent in His power.**

*...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.*

That which He stands to inherit, He created. On your best day, you couldn't even make a particle of dust. But the Son of God... *He spoke!* And the universe began.

Stephen Hawking, considered the most brilliant theoretical physicist since Einstein, has estimated our galaxy to be about 600 trillion miles in diameter. It has 100,000, million stars.

Our galaxy is one of 100 billion galaxies, each one about 600 trillion miles in diameter, each with about 100,000 million stars.

Our galaxy is relatively small, a mere 100,000 light years in diameter. The most distant galaxy is 13-14 *billion* light years away. By the way, a *light year* is the distance light travels in one year. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second, so in a year it travels 6 *trillion* miles.<sup>8</sup> So, 14 billion light years is quite a long way.

If you multiply the number of stars by the number of galaxies, and you get somewhere between a sextillion and a septillion stars. That's 10 with 24 zeroes after it. *That's a lot of stars!*

I know these numbers are overwhelming... we really can't conceive of such an enormous universe... Yet God has measured the Heavens with the spread of His hand<sup>9</sup> and He determined the number of stars... and *named them all!*<sup>10</sup> I have trouble once I reach the end of my fingers and toes! Yet He named every *one*.

John 1 – *"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 were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."*<sup>11</sup>

Galatians 1 – *"...by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities... all things are created through Him and for Him."*<sup>12</sup> That includes you and me.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://science.howstuffworks.com/dictionary/astronomy-terms/question94.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 40:12

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 147:4

<sup>11</sup> John 1:1-3

<sup>12</sup> Galatians 1:16

What an incredible Savior we have! The New Testament proclaims One Who can purify conscience and forgive sin. Jesus is the complete and final revelation of God. *Why would we ever turn back? Why would we ever turn away from the ultimate Creator? The One Who created us for His pleasure? The One Who has the power to save?*

If He has sufficient power to create *ex nihilo*, that's out of nothing... then He certainly has the power to save, and the power to see us through the trials in our lives. Why would we turn to something else?

So, we see that He's the heir of all things, and the creator of all things... preeminent in possession and power.

### **The third attribute – He is preeminent in His radiance of God's glory.**

*[Christ] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...*

"Radiance" is the outpouring of brilliant light. Just as the radiance of the sun cannot be separated from the sun itself, we cannot separate the nature of Christ from that of His Father. Jesus is the brilliant outpouring of God's glory.

John 1:14 says, *"We have seen His glory... the glory as of the only begotten of the Father..."* The *glory of God* is an expression that encompasses *all* that He is in His Being and in His nature, His character, His power, and His acts.

In the Old Testament God chose to reveal His glory through brilliant light. For example, at Mt Sinai, the appearance of the glory of Jehovah was like a consuming fire on the mountain top.<sup>13</sup> It was there that God showed the Israelites His glory, and His greatness.<sup>14</sup> Moses tells us that upon completion of the tabernacle, the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.<sup>15</sup> In Exodus 33 Moses asked God to show him His glory... as you know, God refused, as seeing God's glory would be too much for Moses – seeing God's glory would kill him. So, he had to be content with but a shadow of the mighty glory of Jehovah.

Jesus' own testimony was that *he who beholds Me beholds the One Who sent Me.*<sup>16</sup> To see Jesus is to see God.<sup>17</sup> And John gives us this stunning description from his Gospel, *"... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*<sup>18</sup>

What an amazing thing it is to realize that Jesus, who is the full expression of God in human history, can come into *my* life and give *me* light in the darkness of this world. That light enables me to *know* God, to *understand* God, and to be forgiven... for *all* eternity.

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<sup>13</sup> Exodus 24:17

<sup>14</sup> Deuteronomy 5:24

<sup>15</sup> Exodus 40:34

<sup>16</sup> John 12:45

<sup>17</sup> John 14:9

<sup>18</sup> John 1:14



How could you want more? Your sins could *never* enlighten you... and nothing else could bring the glory of God into your life.

So, He is preeminent in His possession, in His power, and in His radiance.

## **Fourth, He is preeminent in His presentation of the Father.**

He's exactly Who He claimed to be... the exact representation, or character, of God. ALL of the attributes of God are present in full measure in Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

Christ is the Father's very image... "*in him the fullness of deity dwells...*"<sup>20</sup> So perfectly does the Son bear the image of God, that He could say to the Apostle Philip, "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*"<sup>21</sup>

In all attributes and abilities, the Son is exactly like the Father. You cannot love the Father, but reject the Son. The world loves the idea of a supreme being – a god – but *hates* the name of Jesus. Likewise, you can't love Jesus, but reject the wrathful God of the Old Testament. They are co-eternal, co-existent... it's not like Jesus is the new, "softer" God. "God 2.0" if you will.

- God is omniscient – He *knows* everything
- He's omnipresent – He exists *everywhere*... all the time
- He's omnipotent, all powerful – He can do *whatever* He pleases
- He is sovereign – in complete control... *nothing* slips past His watchful eye... God doesn't sit watching Fox News with the rest of us, wondering how elections will turn out.
- He is Holy
- He is righteous, the *embodiment* of truth
- He is a God of wrath... and a God of love
- He is just
- He is merciful
- He is self-sufficient
- He's immutable – that means He doesn't change...
- He is eternal... *faithful*... and *perfectly* good
- He is impartial... incomprehensible... infinite... independent... righteous
- He is longsuffering... loving... patient... and kind.

*He is my God*... and Jesus, His Son, is my Lord... and my Savior. And I worship Him with joy and a profound recognition of the privilege that comes with His saving grace. Why would you ever go back to something that seems to be more comfortable... easier? Why would you ever reject His saving grace, or betray His great love for you? Christ is the groom... we, the church, *are His bride*... how could you *ever* be unfaithful to Him? He's *better*, beloved... He's *better* than your sin!

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<sup>19</sup> Luke 24:27

<sup>20</sup> Colossians 2:9

<sup>21</sup> John 14:9

## The fifth attribute of Christ – He is preeminent in His preservation.

Verse 3... *He upholds the universe by the word of his power.*

Not only did He make all things, and not only will He inherit all things, but right here and now He holds them... He keeps everything together. Everything is sustained by the Word of Jesus Christ. We are totally dependent on Him for *all* things.

If Jesus relinquished His sustaining power over the laws of the universe, for just a moment, we would cease to exist. He created us for a purpose, and *nothing* can get in the way of that. This universe was created intentionally, and it's held together intentionally, *with a purpose*, despite the best efforts of modern science to prove otherwise! Scientists who believe that they have discovered great and fantastic truths are doing nothing more than discovering the sustaining laws that Jesus Christ uses to control the world.

Let's take a look at the amazing force of the upholding Word of the Son of God...

- The sun has a surface temperature of 12,000 degF. That's about 6,500 degC, for my New Zealand friends. If we were any closer to the sun, we'd be burned up. Any further away and we'd freeze to death.
- Our globe is tilted on an exact axis of 23 degrees. If there was no tilt to the earth, vapors from the oceans would move north and south, and the planet would be covered with continents of ice.
- The moon's gravitational pull is responsible for our ocean tides. If the moon didn't retain its exact distance from us, the tides would completely inundate the earth twice a day.
- If the ocean floors were just a couple of feet deeper, the carbon dioxide and oxygen balance of the earth's atmosphere would be so completely upset that all human, animal, and plant life would cease to exist.
- If our atmosphere didn't retain its present density, but thinned out just a little, all those meteors which harmlessly burn up when they hit our atmosphere would constantly bombard us. NASA says that every day 100 tons of meteors enter the earth's atmosphere. One University of Oregon professor estimates that about 25,000,000 objects from space enter the Earth's atmosphere every day. That ranges from specks of dust to meteors the size of houses.

The universe exists in a perfect, delicate balance, and it does so because Jesus sustains all things, carrying them to their prearranged end. And He does so... without effort. Back in Genesis chapter 1, we see this principle in action. In the beginning, *God said...* through Genesis we see this principle continue... *God said...* and the universe responded immediately per His command.

Paul said in Colossians 1, speaking of Christ, that “*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 him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*”<sup>22</sup>

Everything proceeds according to the will of Christ. By Him *all* things were created in the past, by Him *all* things consist in the present and by Him *all* things are to be reconciled in the future.

But please note – not only does He sustain us *physically*, but He sustains us *spiritually* as well... through *any* trial. Through His active involvement, He’ll make sure that we’re brought to the end He desires for us. It’s called *preservation*. He *preserves* us. *He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*<sup>23</sup> When Christ begins a good work in your heart, He doesn’t just begin it and end it, He hangs on to it *all* the way through. He’s with us in the moment-by-moment details of our lives.

Why would you ever choose to dive back into your past sins? Why would *anything* appear to be more attractive – or, irresistible – than the Lord Jesus Christ? He sustains the world by His very spoken Word... no other idol could do the same. The carved idols of the world’s religions must be cut from fibers Christ Himself made... they must be picked up, and carried to their altars using hands that *Christ* created. Oh, the *blasphemy* of it all! You think that blasphemy is just what comes out of our mouths? What about all those things we do with our hands, our bodies, which were created by God for His glory... but used by us for despicable purposes?! Our Lord created this world, and everything in it, yet man continues to use that common grace for his own evil end.

Jesus upholds all things. He upheld my wife as she lay in intensive care those few weeks ago. He upheld the surgeon’s hands as he worked to save her life. And by His *grace* and *mercy*, and through the prayers of many of the saints in this room, He brought her back to us. He could have just as easily called her home, but He chose to uphold her and sustain her; and I’m so thankful for that.

Worship Him today, beloved, for *Who He is*, and for the profound truth that the Word of His power preserves and assures our very existence. He can save you. And He can *preserve* you through the hardest of trials. Don’t go back... don’t be enticed back to your past sins, your old way of life, because things seem to be *hard* for you right now. Don’t go back to your sin, *even for a moment*, like a dog to its vomit... Christ is *better*. The pleasures of this world don’t compare to the pleasures of Jesus Christ!

He is *preeminent!* He’s preeminent in His possession, His power to create, His perfect radiance, His presentation of the Father, and His preservation.

## **Sixth, He is preeminent in His purification. Truly, He’s the only One Who can purify us.**

Verse 3 – *After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...*

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<sup>22</sup> Colossians 1:16-17

<sup>23</sup> Philippians 1:6

Sin defiles us. It makes us disgusting to God. It kind of hurts to think of that... we think we're special, don't we? But our sin makes us as filthy rags to a Holy God... it corrupts our very souls. Everything about God is clean... brilliantly white. And so we need to be purified to be in His presence. To obtain this purification, the Old Covenant required a priest to carry out purification rituals. Without the shedding of blood there's no remission for sins; and so a priest would offer endless sacrifices.

But these priestly sacrifices merely *covered* their sins – they couldn't wash them away. Think of a beautiful, priceless brilliantly white robe. Our sins mar that robe... stain it in the ugliest ways. Their sacrifices would cover those stains with patches, if you will... but the quality of the patches could never compare to the quality of the robe.

But Jesus went to the Cross, and was able to obtain not just a pardon for my sins, but He obtained purification of my sins. That priceless robe... now it has been washed clean. No patches, no *covering* of our sins... *our sins are gone!* They're washed away!

In the Old Testament the priests had to make sacrifices day after day and year after year not only for the purification of the people, but also for themselves. Jesus made but one sacrifice when He offered Himself. And because His sacrifice is unblemished, and spotless,<sup>24</sup> His sacrifice can *purify* our sins; something that *all* the Old Testament sacrifices together could *never* accomplish.

Hebrews 10:4 tells us that *it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*. Verse 11 says, *every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins*. For that, a better sacrifice was required. Christ tells us that He came to do the Father's will, to be the greatest sacrifice of all. For by a single offering he has perfected for *ALL* time those of us who are being sanctified.<sup>25</sup>

Turn with me for a moment to Hebrews 9:12... Hebrews 9 tells us that when Jesus appeared as High Priest, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle... not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His *own* blood, to obtain *eternal* redemption.

Verse 12 - *He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*<sup>26</sup>

MacDonald summarizes the purifying work of the Son writing that, "He, Creator and Sustainer, became the *Sin-bearer*. In order to create the universe, He only had to speak. In order to maintain and *guide* the universe, He only has to speak, but in order to put away our sin once for all, He had to die on the cross of Calvary. It's staggering to think that the sovereign Lord would stoop *so low* to become the sacrificial Lamb. Sir Isaac Watts wrote, "*Love so amazing, so divine, demands my*

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Peter 1:18-19

<sup>25</sup> Hebrews 10:14

<sup>26</sup> Hebrews 9:11-14

*soul, my life, my all.*<sup>27</sup>

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt..... on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God!  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Jesus Christ went to the cross, died our death and dealt with the penalty of our sin. His blood *cleanses us from all sin.*<sup>28</sup>

It's important to notice the tense of the wording here... Jesus "*had made*" purification for sins; it doesn't say He "*is making*" or "*will make*." The work of purifying sins is totally, and completely finished. The Pharisees believed that they could purge themselves of the guilt of sin – that they could purify themselves through their good works and public piety. But the writer of Hebrews is introducing an external purification for sins. That's one outside of ourselves... one beyond our ability to govern or even *earn*.

Titus 2:14 says that Christ "*gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession.*" Revelation 1:5 says that *Christ loves us, and freed us from our sins by His blood, making us priests to God the Father.*

Beloved, it's an amazing work that Christ did in creating the world. It's an amazing work He does as He sustains the world. But He did an even greater work when He *purged the sins of men*.

## **Finally, seventh, Christ is preeminent in His position.**

Because *after making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...*

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<sup>27</sup> MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson

<sup>28</sup> 1 John 1:7

Year after year, decade after decade, century after century, the High Priest would go into the holy place to make atonement for the sins of the people.

The Holy Place was a small room in which the sacrifices were made; and it was very purposefully designed by God. Inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant. Just outside the Holy of Holies was the Holy Place, in which was an altar of incense, a table for the showbread, ten lampstands, two decorative pillars with chains and bowls. Very specifically built, to God's exacting requirements. Every morning and evening sacrifices were offered...

But there's a piece of furniture missing in this small room... there was nothing in the Holy Place on which to *sit down*. And the reason for that was clear – the priest's work was *never done!* It was *never* appropriate for him to sit, because his work of purification and sanctification was *never* complete. *All* of his offerings, and *all* of his efforts couldn't cleanse one person of even one single sin.<sup>29</sup> None of the Old Testament sacrifices took away our sins... the Old Covenant forgave no one.

So why do it? Why do all those sacrifices, day after day, year after year? They did it because of what *ALL* of those sacrifices pointed *to*... they pointed to one thing... one *glorious* thing; or rather, one glorious *Person*. They pointed to the Son, who would ultimately serve as both High Priest *and* our ultimate sacrifice.

For the first time in the history of redemption, *a Priest sat down*. He didn't sit down because He was tired; He sat down because His work was *done*. It was *finished*. That's what Jesus meant when He cried out from the Cross, *It is finished!* And what couldn't be accomplished in *all* the Old Testament sacrifices over the centuries was accomplished *once*, by Jesus Christ, for *all* time.

In the ancient world, the right hand of the Monarch symbolized royal power, absolutely authority, and unparalleled glory. The seat that Christ has taken is the throne of God where He rules as sovereign Lord. This is a picture of a *victorious* Savior, not a defeated martyr. He wasn't dragged away to die... He gave Himself, to be the propitiation for our sins... the payment for our unfaithfulness.

I ask it again – *why would you ever go back?* What trial is so great that it surpasses the incredible, sovereign rule of the Son of God? Jesus sat down at the Father's right hand to reign. *He* is the One to Whom you owe ultimate allegiance... not to a football team, or to an employer, or a school, or a religious leader for that matter. To Christ, and Christ alone.

Our sins can be completely and utterly forgiven. *Wiped clean!* Jesus has made full and final purification for our sins... you can stand strong, beloved, steadfast and unshakable against the temptations that cause you to doubt your salvation... you can be completely and irrevocably forgiven, no matter how heinous your sins may have been. We can be *confident* in the hour of trial and in the hour of death... confident that the purification of your sins is *sure, real, and sufficient*... to give you unhindered entrance into heaven. Praise be to God for His saving grace! That's a grace we don't deserve. Unmerited favor.

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<sup>29</sup> Art Azurdia, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7ka7CXxnZs>

In dying for us, Jesus Christ covered our sin so completely that it can be said that we are perfected before God. By one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. In *Christ* we are forgiven for *all* our sins... and, to use Paul's language, we are acquitted, and reckoned righteous. And not just for a while, but "for all time."

Jesus Christ is preeminent in all His offices. Beloved, He's a prophet, and further, He's the final spokesman for God. We've seen Him as priest, doing His great work in atonement and intercession. And we've seen Him as King, controlling, sustaining, and seated on the throne. *This is our Lord... Jesus Christ.*