

Heb. 1:1-14

Boosting Our Esteem Toward the One Who Has Spoken

Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they – v. 4

God has spoken – we should listen. This was the theme we considered in our last study and in a sense this is the message of this entire epistle. Verse 2 tells us that God has spoken unto us by His Son. The first verse in chp. 2 which contains the first exhortation of the epistle tells us *we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard*. These two verses, then, are tantamount to saying that God has spoken – we should give heed. For if we give heed to what God has said through His Son then we will persevere in the faith – that’s Hebrews in a nutshell.

One of the points I made in our last study was that we should listen to what God has spoken to us through His Son because of the character of the One who has spoken to us. This is a point we have to return to and look at in fuller measure because it becomes a point that is emphasized again and again throughout this epistle.

The essential character of Christ is given to us very concisely and yet comprehensively in the first 3 verses of chp. 1. In space of just 2 verses, verses 2 and 3 we learn that God’s Son has been appointed the heir of all things. And it was by God’s Son that the worlds were made. God’s Son is the brightness of His Father’s glory and the express image of His person. God’s Son upholds all things by the word of His power. God’s Son accomplished our salvation by purging our sins and God’s Son is now seated on the right hand of the majesty on high.

Surely God’s Son is the One we should hear and heed. But Paul is not content to leave the issue there. He’s aware of the pressure that was being brought to bear on his Jewish brethren and he knew that they were being tempted to give up their walk with Christ. And in our day it’s much the same – the deceitfulness of riches and the pressures and trials we experience in the world make us careless – careless to the point that we fail to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard and as a result we let those things slip and we neglect so great salvation. Do you not find it to be so in your own lives? How devoted are you to Christ? What kind of time do you spend in fellowship with Christ? How devoted are you to His word and to prayer?

In many cases it’s all a family can do to even make it out to the Lord’s house on the Lord’s Day – and many find that to be difficult. It’s not that you don’t show up but how many, I wonder, do any kind of advanced preparation and look with anticipation to being in God’s house? How challenged we should be not to let these things slip. How concerned we should be over the message we convey to our children when we demonstrate to them that we tend to let these things slip.

So Paul will press the matter even further by noting not only Christ’s essential glory and what a compelling argument His essential glory makes to giving earnest heed to Christ.

But he will also note Christ's comparative glory to the very angels of heaven. This is a subject that he begins in v. 4 of chapter 1 and this section will continue all the way to the end of chp. 2. Look at just a few of the references to angels beginning in 1:4 and running through to 2:16:

- Heb 1:4 *Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.*
- Heb 1:5 *For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?*
- Heb 1:6 *And let all the angels of God worship him.*
- Heb 1:13 *But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?*
- Heb 2:7 *Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour*
- Heb 2:16 *For verily he took not on [him the nature of] angels; but he took on [him] the seed of Abraham.*

It's important to keep in mind the design of the author of this epistle as he makes these comparisons between Christ and the angels. And his design is to impress upon you the character of the One who has in these last days spoken unto you. We know in life, don't we, that when an equal or a subordinate speaks to you maybe you'll listen, maybe you won't. I can remember from my days in printing that when people attempted to exercise authority over me who really had no authority, I wouldn't give all that much weight to what they said. I would categorize their sayings as suggestions that I would decide for myself whether to take their advice or not.

But when the foreman of the department spoke to me I would pay closer heed and when the manager of the department spoke to me I would pay closer heed still and if by some rare chance the owner of the company would speak to me then it wouldn't matter what anybody else had said, he would be the one I would give heed to. And so a pattern emerges that we can apply to the spiritual realm. When God speaks to us by His Son, through His word and by His Spirit then we do well to give the more earnest heed. Certainly we'll give more heed to what we would give to any and all who are of lesser importance.

And the more you and I can be impressed with the importance of who it is that speaks then the more likely it will be that we'll give earnest heed to the things that are said to us. And so the design of Paul becomes very clear in making this comparison between Christ and the angels. He is endeavoring to boost our esteem for the One who has spoken to us. Isn't this a challenge we need to rise to? We never run the risk of esteeming Christ too much but it seems that too often we face the temptation of not esteeming Him highly enough. And so our thoughts toward Him need to be magnified. We need to appreciate in greater measure His authority as well as His grace and His love. And so this is the theme that I want to consider today this theme of:

Boosting Our Esteem for Christ

How can we boost our esteem for the One who has spoken to us? Consider first of all that we can boost our esteem for Him:

I. By Appreciating His Excellence

The end of v. 3 takes us to where we find Christ today. He is seated at the right hand of the majesty on high. Some of you may recall that when we studied the book of Acts a few years ago, I pointed out time and again that one of the most encouraging things we can draw from that book is the fact that Christ is in the same place, during the course of that book, that we find Him today. He's risen and ascended and seated at the right hand of God. The early Christians were convinced of that and that's how you can account for their zeal.

And now these Hebrew Christians needed to be impressed with that truth again so they could withstand the pressure and endure their trials and persevere in their faith. And so Paul summons his readers to behold Christ in the glory of heaven seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. And in this heavenly and holy environment where sin has no place, and the will of God is done quickly and completely and where angels, who constantly behold the glory of God dwell and perform God's bidding as His ministering spirits, we are told in v. 4 that Christ is *so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.*

To appreciate the excellency of Christ, then, we must have some understanding of the excellency of angels. And it seems that whenever you find those passages in Scripture that take you into the presence of God and reveal the glory of God to you angels are near at hand.

For example – In Isaiah 6 Isaiah tells us in verse 1: *In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.* In order to magnify God's glory Isaiah goes on to describe the fact that above this throne seraphims stood. So we read in vv. 2,3 *Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.*

Such was and is the glory of these beings that in the book of Revelation you find the apostle John on two occasions falling before an angel to worship the angel. So in Rev. 19:10 we read *And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not.* And in Rev. 22:8,9 *And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.* Such is the glory of these beings that John twice mistakenly took them for beings to be worshipped.

You are familiar, of course, with the account in Luke's gospel of the birth of Christ and how an angel appeared to the shepherds to announce that birth. And following that announcement we're told in Lk. 2:13 *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

It seems, then, that in most every scene in scripture in which the radiant splendor of God's glory is revealed, angels are on hand to contribute to the glory of that particular scene. Interestingly enough when it comes to the revelation of the glory of God from Mt. Sinai when God descended upon the mount, and there was the sound of a trumpet exceeding loud, and the mountain was engulfed in a thick cloud and there was lightning and thunder and the quaking of that mountain – you do not find angels specifically mentioned in that narrative in Exodus 19 but we are told by Stephen, in his sermon to the Christ-rejecting Jews that a part of the heritage of that nation was that they had received the law by the disposition of angels, and but not kept it (Acts 7:53). And in Ps 68:17 we read: *The chariots of God [are] twenty thousand, [even] thousands of angels: the Lord [is] among them, [as in] Sinai, in the holy [place].*

Such is the glory of these spirit-beings, then, that they are on hand constantly to contribute to the revelation of the glory of God. Now with this summary background about angels in mind look again at our text in Heb 1:4 which speaks of the One seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high as *Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.*

In His intrinsic glory, as the second person of the Trinity, Christ outshines the angels – so much so that they must cover their faces in Isaiah 6 when they sing of the holiness of Jehovah. But it is not the intrinsic glory of the Son of God that Paul has in mind in our text here in Heb. 4. It is the glory of Christ in His role as the Mediator between God and men that Paul has in mind. Note how he states the reason for Christ being made so much better than the angels. *As he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.* His exceeding glory over the angels is traced to the inheritance that He obtained.

This brings you and me into the picture of Christ's exceeding glory. He has obtained a more excellent name, you see, by what He accomplished in redemption. He obtained us as His inheritance. Among the things that Paul prays for regarding the saints at Ephesus in Ephesians 1 is that they would know in their hearts *what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints* (Eph. 1:18).

By condescending to become *a little lower than the angels* (2:14) in order to suffer death and taste death for every man we now see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. He has obtained, therefore, a more excellent name than they.

Now remember Paul's design or his aim. God has spoken to us by His Son. God has spoken to us by the One who has obtained a more excellent name than the angels. God has spoken to us by the One who has obtained us as His inheritance, the One who is crowned with glory and honor because He has tasted death for us. Isn't this the Person we should

give the more earnest heed to? Isn't this the One we should listen to very carefully? There are times, you know, when angels should be listened to. When Zacharias, the Father of John the Baptist, doubted the angel who spoke to him he was chastised by not being able to speak until his son, John, was born. But on the other hand there are times when angels are not to be listened to. Paul tells the Galatians in Gal. 1:8 that *though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*

The gospel, you see, pertains to Christ – what Christ has spoken and what Christ has accomplished. And Christ has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. How our esteem for Christ, then, should be boosted as we learn to appreciate His excellence.

There is much more to be said on this point that we'll have to come back to. In the verses that follow v. 4, Paul makes his case all the stronger for proving his point about the surpassing excellency of Christ. I must hasten on, however, to consider next that not only can we boost our esteem for Christ by appreciating His excellence. But we may also boost our esteem for Christ:

II. By Glorifying in His Accomplishment

Call to mind again the setting of these opening verses. We find Christ in glory. We find Him risen and ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high – exalted not only over angels but exalted over all – that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ did not take His place on the right hand of the Majesty on high by virtue of His essential glory. His place on high came as a result of what He accomplished. Note again v. 3 – *having purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty of high.*

You've heard it said from the pulpit and from Sunday School lessons in the catechism that Christ's office as our King is an office He gained as the reward of His work as our Priest. The verb tenses are very important in this epistle especially as they relate to Christ's work. The verb tense in v. 4 is a past tense when we read that *Christ obtained a more excellent name than they.* And in v. 3 *when he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

This will be a repeated pattern throughout Hebrews so when we see references to Christ's work we'll see past tense verbs which indicate to us that the work of Christ's atoning death is an accomplished work. Indeed, we'll see His work contrasted to the work of those earthly priests who constantly offered sacrifices and whose work was never done because redemption could not be accomplished by the blood of bulls and goats.

Christ's work, however, by virtue of the excellency of His person, could accomplish a once and for all purging of our sins. And had this work not been accomplished He would

not have earned His mediatorial reward of taking His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Our assurance of salvation, therefore, comes through seeing Christ seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high. Our sight of Him there which we have by faith in His word indicates that His atoning death was successful and redemption was accomplished. You won't gain assurance of salvation by looking within. You hand the devil a club to beat you with when you look within or when you look to what you think you've done. Even our faith is tainted with sin and even our best works are defiled. Assurance comes when we behold Christ seated in glory, recognizing as we do from v. 3 tells us that Christ took His place on high after He had, by Himself, purged our sins.

I like the way the Amplified Version translates v. 3. The Amplified Version of the Bible seeks to compile the translations of a number of other translations and so *amplify* the meaning of each verse. Listen to how the Amplified version translates v. 3 *He is the sole expression of the glory of God – the Light-being, the out-raying of the divine – and He is the perfect imprint and very image of God's nature, upholding and maintaining and guiding and propelling the universe by His mighty word of power, When He had by offering Himself accomplished our cleansing of sins and riddance of guilt, He sat down at the right hand of the divine Majesty on high.*

I like the emphasis on accomplishing our cleansing and riddance of guilt. We are cleansed! Our guilt is gone! That seems hard to grasp when we know in our experience that the feeling of defilement and the sense of guilt are very real and alive within us. This is why we don't look within, but we look rather to the One who is seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high and your assurance of sins forgiven and guilt being gone is gained through the knowledge that He wouldn't be seated there had His work not been accomplished.

And so we glory in His accomplishment and we're able to glory in His accomplishment no matter what the world hurls at us. *And not only so Paul writes in Rom. 5:3 but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*

And why this shedding abroad of the love of Christ by the Holy Ghost? Paul goes on in v. 6 of Romans 5 *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.* Doesn't this boost your esteem for the One who has spoken to us in these last days? Doesn't this encourage you all the more to give the more earnest heed to the things you've heard?

Our esteem for Christ is boosted when we know and appreciate His excellence and our esteem for Christ is boosted when we glory in His accomplishment. It remains for us to consider finally and briefly that our esteem for Christ is boosted:

III. By Our Anticipation of His Conquest

Look at v. 13 near the end of the chapter – *But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?*

As glorious as angels are, the answer to the question is that to none of them has God ever said sit at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. This is a prophetic statement that comes from the 110th Psalm. And it looks forward to Christ. And now that Christ is seated at the right hand of God having purged our sins we are able to anticipate the rest of the text coming to fulfillment to due time.

Which is tantamount to saying that Christ's cause will prevail. His Kingdom will come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. This was important for the Jewish Christians to know because from their perspective they might have had cause to doubt whether the Christian religion would last very long at all. It was despised by the world – it would soon be if it wasn't already despised by the Roman Empire and of course the unbelieving Jews were doing all in their power to stamp it out. And yet Rome has come and gone and even Israel has come and gone and then come again – and still the cause of Christ advances.

This is certainly an encouraging thing for us to bear in mind when we find ourselves so taken in and taken up with the wickedness of our day. If you haven't learned by now you will learn eventually that politicians will fail you and political systems will not bring in the Kingdom of Christ.

I was able to sit down for lunch recently at our last week of prayer with Myron Mooney and Ivan Foster who has been in the realm of politics in Ulster. Ivan was sharing his conviction that politics will not advance the cause of Christ. Corruption too easily overcomes those in politics. He then expressed his view that it's the preaching of the gospel and the suffering of Christians that advances the cause of Christ better than anything else. The point I want to leave with you this morning is that Christ's cause will prevail. This is God the Father speaking to His Son when He says *Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.*

So we have good reason to not lose hope and good reason to press on and persevere in our faith. Christ is seated at the right hand of God. The next thing to happen is for His enemies to made His footstool. Should this glorious truth not boost our esteem for the One who has spoken to us?

And so we see a number of contributing factors to boosting our esteem for Christ. His excellency succeeds the excellency of all created beings. His accomplishment has purged our sins and reconciled us to God. And His cause is destined to prevail in this world. Who, then, can speak with greater authority? Who should we give heed to more than men or angels? Who draws us to God and to heaven more effectively than the One who is seated at the right hand of God – as He woos us with His word and encourages our souls in midst of tribulations and assures us that all will be well because all is well between your soul and God. May we be moved to esteem our Savior highly that we may give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard.