

The Nature of the Incarnation, Part 2

Scripture: Hebrews 1:2-4

Code: 80-207

As you know, we are going through the gospel of Luke. That is such a tremendous privilege. We have just completed the section in Luke that deals with the birth of Jesus Christ. As I said last week, we've looked at the historical part of that, we've gone through all of the part of the story that directs its attention to Zacharias and Elizabeth and the birth of John, the forerunner of the Messiah. And we've talked about Joseph and Mary and Gabriel the angel and the shepherds and Bethlehem and the manger. And we've looked at the birth of Jesus Christ from the historical perspective.

I can't let it go at that though, as I've mentioned to you. I want to look at the birth of Christ from the divine perspective. You know, there were really people in Bethlehem at the time of the birth of Jesus who could look at the child and absolutely not understand nothing about what they were seeing. In fact, in that lean-to arrangement, that sort of traveler's rest stop where Joseph and Mary were likely staying in that stable area and in the manger where they put the baby, they would have been surrounded...they would have been surrounded by people, people who certainly would be curious about a woman...a woman who was in imminent childbirth, a woman who was in labor pain, a woman who then brought forth a child, a new little baby. They certainly would have been around. There would have been a lot of attention given to her in that very public place. They could look down at the face of that little Jewish boy wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in the straw or in His mother's arms and not understand anything really. Just another little baby born to another Jewish couple.

It may well have been too that the shepherds who were there, apart from what they had been told by the angels, would have looked into the face of the baby and not understood anything other than it was just another baby boy born into the world. It's really important that we not come up short in understanding the birth of Jesus Christ. It's wonderful to see it from the perspective of the historic narrative. But to really plunge a little deeper into the reality of who was that child, I've asked you to turn with me to Hebrews chapter 1 in your Bible. So we're taking a bit of a digression. You can go there, if you will, now.

Hebrews chapter 1, this is a book written to Jews, Jewish believers, for the most part, but some Jewish non-believers. And here God has inspired the writer, who we don't know, to talk about who was this child from the divine side. This is God's own commentary on Bethlehem, God's own commentary on the birth of Jesus. And it opens up to us just the most profound summary, the most far-reaching summary of the identity of Jesus Christ given anywhere in Scripture. Perhaps the closest thing would be to go through certain passages in Paul's epistles, namely Colossians chapter

1, Colossians chapter 2, Philippians chapter 2. But here in a very brief, brief section...really verses 1 through 4, or 1 through 5, you have the comprehensive identification of Jesus Christ as God. The emphasis here is on His deity, on His divine nature, that Jesus is in fact God...the child born in Bethlehem was none other than God Himself in human flesh. And it's an important perspective. And that's why I wanted to go in to Hebrews chapter 1 and take a couple of weeks to just look at what it says here because it fills in the divine perspective on the wonderful narrative of the story of the birth of the child Jesus.

And, of course, there's nothing more wonderful to me than lifting up Jesus Christ. I'm often asked...what's my sub...what's my favorite subject to preach on? It's an easy question to answer, my favorite subject to preach on is Jesus. And that's why if I belabor the point a little bit you'll understand. And beyond that, of course, to understand who Jesus is is essential to understand the Christian faith, it's essential to understand the gospel, it's essential to believe the gospel and be saved. You cannot be saved if you do not know who Jesus Christ is and what He has done.

Exalting Christ is really what we do. Paul said, "We preach Christ and Him crucified." And that's right. He said, "I'm determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ is the theme of Scripture. He is the theme of Old Testament Scripture, New Testament Scripture. He's the theme of all faithful biblical preaching. Exalting Christ is our duty. Exalting Christ is also our privilege. And we have had the honor of doing that as we've looked at the narrative text and we have the privilege of doing that now as we look at Hebrews chapter 1.

This very complete identification of Jesus Christ is presented to us in very straightforward short statements that make it easy to wrap our arms around it and get a grip on it.

Now let me remind you that in verse 1 we see the preparation...the preparation for Christ. Referring to the Old Testament it says, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers and the prophets in many portions and in many ways," that simply describes the Old Testament. The Old Testament is God speaking to the fathers, that is to our Jewish ancestors, and He did it through prophets. Those would be the writers of Scripture. Those who spoke for God or wrote for God, God spoke in the Old Testament to our ancestors, He used human writers and He spoke in many portions...portions is another word for books and the Old Testament has 39 books, and He spoke in many ways. Those books were revealed through visions and dreams and indirect words from God and direct words from God and sometimes God even carved out His Word with His divine finger on stone, as we know in the Ten Commandments. So there were many ways in which God spoke to bring together the many portions which are the 39 books of the Old Testament.

And the theme of the Old Testament, as we pointed out, is none other than the coming of Christ, the coming of Messiah. He is the seed of the woman in Genesis 3, which is the beginning of the Old Testament and He is the Son of righteousness who rises with healing in His beams in Malachi 4

which is the end of the Old Testament. And He is the theme of everything in between. Everywhere all through the Old Testament, Christ is the theme, the coming Messiah, the coming Savior, the coming King, the coming Son of the Most-High God.

So, the Old Testament gives us plenty of preparation. It tells us that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, the prophet Micah says that. It tells us things about His life, that He would preach the gospel to the poor. It tells us about His death, that He would die as a suffering servant for sinners. It tells us about His resurrection, the psalmist was told that He would not see corruption, that He would pass through death back into life as the risen Savior. All of those features and many, many others. There are 350 nearly prophecies in the Old Testament about Christ. He is the one symbolized in all the sacrifices and His work is even symbolized in all the feasts and festivals of Israel. His glorious, eternal Kingdom is even symbolized by the Old Testament Sabbath.

So the pictures of Christ are replete throughout the Old Testament. It is a full...it is a full look at Jesus Christ, just short of being complete. It cannot be complete without the New Testament and that's why verse 2 takes us from the preparation for Christ to the presentation of Christ. "God who spoke long ago in these last days has spoken to us in His Son." God spoke in the Old Testament and He spoke about His Son, but in the New Testament God spoke in His Son...He spoke in His Son. And that is to say His Son is the complete revelation of God. And the New Testament focuses on the fact that God came in the form of Jesus Christ. That is an unequivocal theme of the New Testament. The four gospels record the life and work of Jesus. The book of Acts records the impact of His life and work. And the epistles, the remaining epistles of the New Testament describe the theological significance and impact of His work. And the book of Revelation talks about His Second Coming when His work is consummated.

So, the New Testament focuses on Jesus Christ, focuses on God speaking fully in Christ. He spoke only partially in the Old Testament, He speaks fully in Christ. And we made that, I trust, clear to you last time. In the New Testament God didn't display some of Himself, He displayed all of Himself. God didn't display His truth in some facets or in some fragments as He had in the Old Testament, but rather in Jesus Christ who embodies all the treasures and wisdom of God, in Jesus Christ in whom all the fullness of the godhead dwells bodily. If you want to see God fully, look at Christ. Jesus said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father."

The writer of Hebrews is writing to these Jewish people to affirm to them that Jesus is Yahweh, that Jesus is Almighty God, that Jesus is none other than the covenant God of Israel, the creator God of the universe. To understand the Christian faith and to even understand Judaism in its completion is to understand that God came into the world in human form as Jesus Christ. And He is the preeminent person, fully man and fully God. And that's the message of this opening part of Hebrews. That is the heart and soul of the Christian faith, that Jesus is God. No one can be a Christian and deny that. No one can have their sins forgiven and deny that. To believe that is essential to be

saved, be forgiven and go to heaven.

That brings us then to the third point, the preeminence of Christ. From preparation to the presentation to the preeminence of Christ and I want to let this unfold because it's so marvelous. We looked at several of the seven-fold preeminence of Christ that is presented here.

Number one was His inheritance in verse 2. Now the writer wants to show us the preeminence of Christ, wants to show us that He is indeed God and the first thing he does is look at His inheritance. It says, "He is appointed heir of all things." Jewish people understood that the son, the firstborn, was the heir to everything the Father possessed. That didn't seem to be an unfair and unjust thing since the son bore the very image of the father, since the son was the very essence of the father, since the son basically was from the father's seed. That was a very appropriate thing. And so all that the father possessed passed through his seed to his son who was of his own essence, of his own very life blood. And when he says that Jesus Christ is the heir of all that God possesses, he is saying that He is of the same essence as God, He is of the same nature as God. He is a rightful heir. He has every right to possess whatever belongs to God because He has been begotten by God. That is to say He comes from God. He bears the same essence, the same nature and He therefore has every right to all that God possesses.

And so, we looked at His inheritance as indication of His deity. Secondly, His power. In verse 2 the deity of Jesus is emphasized by the statement, "Through whom also He being God made the world." God created the world through Jesus. It was His Son who was the agent of that creation. "By Him all things were made and without Him was not anything made that was made," John 1 says. And Paul says, "In Him all things consist and all things have been created by Him and for Him." He is the inheritor of all that God possesses, and in that sense He is the end of all things. He is the power by which God created and in that sense He is the beginning of all things. He can be no other than God if He is the heir of God and if He is the creator God who created everything that exists. And that's what he says, He is the heir of all things and He is the one who made the kosmos, the complete created order.

Now let's come, thirdly, to another element of the deity of Jesus Christ presented here, His glory. His inheritance, His power and His glory...verse 3 says, "He is the radiance of His, being God's, glory." When you talk about Jesus Christ, you're talking about the One who is the radiance of the glory of God. The word "radiance" is the word brightness. It simply means to send forth light. Jesus is the shining forth of God's glory. He's the shining forth of God's glory. John 1:14 says, "We beheld His glory," we looked at the glory of Jesus and what do we see? "The glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

What we saw when we looked at Jesus was the same shining forth that is true of God. In 2 Corinthians chapter 4, a very, very important passage along this regard, 2 Corinthians chapter 4 the

Apostle Paul has some very rich language. He says, "When we look at Jesus Christ, we see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ," 2 Corinthians 4:6. In verse 4 he says, "We see the light of the glory of Christ who is the image of God."

When you look at Christ, what you're seeing is the shining forth of God. Now what is the shining forth of God? What is God's glory? Well, in the Old Testament God's glory was simply the representation of His attributes. God is a spirit and God is invisible. How does God then put Himself on display? How does God manifest His presence? In the Old Testament He chose to do it through light...through light. We're doing a special edition at Grace To You of a children's book that I'm writing and Melinda, my daughter, is doing the art work on it and we were discussing how to portray God. And it was pretty easy. I said the way to portray God is the way that God always portrayed Himself in the Old Testament, when He revealed Himself He revealed Himself as light...the Shekinah glory, we call it, the glow of God.

When God revealed Himself in the Garden "in His presence," the term is Shekinah. Very likely when Adam and Eve walked and talked with God before the Fall, they were seeing the visible presence of God in the sense of light. Later on, you remember, when God appeared to Israel to lead them, He led them by a shining bright cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. And when the tabernacle was completed and He came down to dwell in the Holy of Holies, that shining glory came down and it was so overwhelming, the light was so bright that nobody could look at it. And later on when the temple was completed, the same thing happened, the glory of God came down into that place. When God manifested Himself, He manifested Himself as light.

In Exodus chapter 33, Moses was up in the mountain talking to God and he said, "Look, God, it's not easy leading this people." And He said, "Well, I'm going to go with you, I'm going to be there, you don't have to do it on your own." And Moses said, "Well, I'd like to believe that, so show me Your glory, let me see that You're with me. I can hear that You're saying that to me, but I want some visible proof." And God acquiescing His moment of doubt said, "All right," and He put him in a rock, sort of screened him off a little bit and tucked him in a cave somewhere and He said, "You can't see My full glory so I'll let you look out a little hole and you can see some of it, all of it would be enough to incinerate you." And he watched His back parts, the Hebrew says, the glory passed by and the glory was so overwhelming that it got all over Moses' face and it literally reflected off his face when he went down the mountain to speak to the people, as you remember.

But the point being, that when God revealed Himself because He's an invisible spirit, He revealed Himself in light. And then when He identified what that was, He said to Moses, "My goodness and My mercy, or My lovingkindness, My compassion, you'll see those things." Well you can't see those virtues because they are virtues, but God manifested that glory, the glory of those attributes in light. Light was the symbolic representation of those attributes.

So when it says here Jesus is the radiance of God's glory, it simply means He possesses the same attributes, that He is the very shining forth of God...nothing less than that. He is the radiance of divine glory. He is all that God is. That's why I say, when you come to the New Testament you don't see God in a fragmentary way, you read the Old Testament, as I did this morning in Psalm 111, and the attributes of God are listed there for you. You come to the New Testament, you don't have the attributes of God listed in the New Testament like that, you have the attributes of God manifested in the New Testament through whom? Through Jesus. There you see wisdom, there you see creative power, there you see upholding and sustaining power. There you see the power to give light and His ability to raise the dead. There you see the infinite intelligence and mind of Jesus, His omniscience as He knows what's in the hearts of men that no one knows. All of that is manifest. You see God literally manifest in the flesh, Paul says. He is the shining out of all the attributes of God. Just as the radiance of the sun is not the sun, just as the warmth of the sun is not the sun, the light of the sun is not the sun, but it comes from the sun, so the attributes of God, the attributes of Christ are the emanating realities about God that flow out of His essential being. Jesus is none other than God. He is the very radiance of His glory.

The fourth element of the preeminence of Jesus that the writer of Hebrews presents...His inheritance, His power, His glory...is His essence, or His being, His nature. You can write nature down if you're keeping an outline. That is essential being, going behind the attributes, as it were, to the face that God is immutable, that is unchanging, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent spirit. Those attributes which are essential to His being. And he says this about Jesus in verse 3, He's not only the radiance, He's not only the very attributes of God manifest, but He is the exact representation of His nature. This is very specific language here. This is not at all vague. He is an exact stamp, He is an exact duplication, an exact replication of God. He is precisely what God is. He is the exact copy of God, the exact replica, reproduction of God. And it says He is the exact representation of His nature, of His essence, of His substance. That's what that means. Of His person, some translations indicate.

That is to say He is God of very Gods...God a very God, I should say, not with a plural. In Colossians 1:15 it says essentially the same thing. Colossians 1:15, it says at the end of the verse, "He is...at the beginning of the verse rather...He is the image of the invisible God...He is the image of the invisible God." Now when you take the word "image" there, it's the word eikon from which we get icon, which means a precise copy, a reproduction, an exact image. And that's exactly what the writer is saying to us here. The writer of Colossians uses one word and here different words are used to express the very same thing. He is the perfect portrait of God. That's why Colossians 2:9 says, "In Him dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily." All that God is essentially is in Christ. He is the very essential nature of God as well as manifesting the very communicable attributes of God. Theologians would say He is the incommunicable God as to His essence and He manifests the communicable attributes of that incommunicable essence. He is what God is and He manifests what God is to all those who see Him. To see Him is to see God.

When we talk about Jesus Christ, this baby born in Bethlehem, we're talking about none other than God. We're talking about none other than deity.

Number five, the writer of Hebrews affirming again the deity of Jesus looks at His authority...at His authority. No created being could be defined like this. No created being is the heir of all things. No created being made the universe, obviously. No created being is the very emanating radiance of the attributes of the glory of God. No created being is an exact duplication of God. And number five, he says His authority also sets Him apart because it is He who upholds all things by the word of His power. By the sheer power that He has to speak, He can uphold all things. All things meaning all things.

The created universe...the created universe in terms of its physical identity and even of its immaterial or spiritual identity which we as human beings who are eternal possess and which angelic beings as well possess, He sustains all that. He upholds all that. Supporting, maintaining the entire order, the universe and everything that's in it sustained by Christ. He's not like a watch maker that makes a watch, ships it off to a retailer and never sees it again. Jesus Christ is not only the creator but He is the sustainer, He is the principle of cohesion. He makes the universe a cosmos instead of a chaos. He makes the universe, He sustains the universe as an ordered reliable unit instead of an erratic, unpredictable muddle. The laws of nature really the laws that you hear so often, the laws of nature this, the laws of nature this...I'd like to just remind you, a little footnote...in the Hebrew language there is no word for nature as we would use it, there is no word because there is no Mother Nature. There is no nature unless you're talking about the sin nature, unless you're talking about the essence of the being of someone. We talk about Mother Nature did this and Mother Nature did that...there is no Mother Nature. There is no nature...there's no nature in the Hebrew language. Everything can be tracked back to God. God through Christ sustains everything. The laws of nature are the laws of God, the mind and power of Christ working through the universe. No scientist and no mathematician and no astronomer and no nuclear-physicist, no anybody else could do anything without the upholding, sustaining power of Christ. The authority that He has will hold the entire universe together by those laws which are nothing more than a reflection of His power. We don't have a consistently functioning universe just because, we have it because He holds it together and makes it function consistently. The whole universe hangs on His arm, His unsearchable wisdom, His boundless power, His ability to control every element, every atom, every minute component of every atom to control it all of the time keeps Him directing, sustaining the complicated movements of this incredible universe.

For example, if the earth's rotation slowed down a little bit, we would ultimately fry and freeze. The sun has a surface temperature of 12,000 degrees Fahrenheit, if it was any closer or any farther away we would ultimately freeze or fry.

Our globe is tilted at 23 degrees exact angle which enables us to have four seasons. Any alteration of that would cause vapors from the ocean to pile up on the North and South Pole and we would have massive continents of ice dramatically effecting even the capability of life. If the moon didn't remain at its exact distance from the earth, the ocean tides would inundate the land completely twice a day. If the ocean slipped to a few feet deeper than it is, carbon dioxide and the oxygen in the earth's atmosphere would be completely absorbed and no vegetable life could live on the planet. If our atmosphere didn't remain constant, just thinned out a little bit, many of the thousands upon thousands of meteors that come plummeting toward earth and are now harmlessly destroyed, burned up in our atmosphere would bombard us if it was a little bit thinner.

Who holds all this in delicate balance? This just doesn't happen because it happens. Christ who directs all movements, all developments and all actions in the universe, He is the preeminent power who appeared on earth in servant form. He is the sustainer of the universe.

Number six in the elements of the preeminence of Christ takes us into another dimension. We have seen that He is clearly manifest as God by virtue of His nature, by virtue of His power. But look at the incredible statement at the end of verse 3. "When He had made purification of sins..." The sixth element of His preeminence is His atonement...His atonement. And this in the end matters most, doesn't it? This matters most.

This is to say that He brought about the purification, or the cleansing of sins. This is our great need. And no one else could do this, no one. There had been a lot of prophets, they couldn't do it. There had been a lot of priests, thousands upon thousands of priests, they couldn't do it. Millions upon millions of sacrifices, they couldn't do it. Nobody could do it. No one was found who could provide the purification for sins. All the Old Testament priests could do would sacrifice and sacrifice and sacrifice and sacrifice over and over and over and over and never ever was sin purified. All that sacrifice just pointed to the desperate need for a sacrifice that could be given once for all and purification accomplished. And that's exactly what Jesus did. The writer of Hebrews later says, "By the offering of Himself, He perfected forever those that are sanctified." "He by one offering brought about the forgiveness and cleansing of sins."

Only He could have done it because it had to be a spotless lamb. In order for one to pay the price for sin for others, He had to be perfect or He would have had to pay the price for His own sin. So there had to be a perfect substitute. To be a substitute, someone had to be without sin. And since no one in the world is without sin, it had to be someone from outside the world. It needed to be a man to take the place of men. It needed to be a sinless one who could die as a substitute for sinners and the sinless one was none other than God in human flesh, Jesus Christ. He became a man to take man's place, He was sinless and thus He could be a substitute for sinners. And on the cross He died and by the offering of Himself He put away sin. By taking the full wrath of God for your sins and my sins, God's wrath was then satisfied and God can forgive because Christ paid the penalty for our sin. He

took our place. That is the great heart and soul of Christian gospel preaching. The wisdom and power of the mind of God which created the universe, also created the plan of redemption. God designed that someone would die for sinners and that someone had to be perfect. That left it only to Him because none is perfect but Him. And it had to be a man to die in the place of men.

So the God/Man Jesus comes to die for sinners. And on the cross He accomplishes redemption. That's why at the end, John 19:30, said, "It is finished," and once for all forever He paid the price for sins for all who would ever believe.

Now the cross was a real stumbling block to Jewish people, still is. But this letter was written to Jewish people and the writer didn't hold back. Even though it was a stumbling block to them, the Holy Spirit never apologized for that because you can't. You can't avoid the cross. If you avoid the cross, you avoid salvation. He presents it as one of the excellent glories of the Son. You can't have a Christianity without the cross. You can't have a Christianity without the death of Jesus Christ. You can't have forgiveness of sin without putting your faith in the one who purified you by being offered in your place.

One of the excellent glories of Christ no matter how it may offend is that Jesus died on the cross, shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins but it had to be the blood of a perfect sacrifice and He was that. He bore in His own body our sins on the cross. He who knew no sin became sin for us. The basis of salvation then is at that point and Jesus, God in human flesh, died for us and thus purified us from our sins. Why? Because our sins deserve punishment. God punished Him in our place. Therefore our sins have been dealt with and some day those of us who believe will be completely delivered from sin which has already been paid for but we'll be completely delivered from it when we leave this world and enter into the perfection of the life to come.

Christ accomplished what no priest could ever accomplish. Christ accomplished what no angel could ever accomplish. Christ accomplished what no prophet or holy man or great religious leader could ever accomplish...not Moses, not Abraham, not David, not any of the great heroes of Israel could accomplish this. Not the great prophets, not Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, not Elijah, not Elisha, no one...no one. Not John the Baptist, the greatest and last of the Old Testament prophets, only the God/Man could die for men in perfection as God and be the substitute for sinners and provide the purification of sins.

This is a huge issue to Jewish people. At that time they had been going to the temple and going to the temple, this book was written a few years, maybe just two or three years before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and at that time the temple was the center of their life. And what did they do when they went there? Made sacrifice and sacrifice and sacrifice and sacrifice and go away knowing their sins were never purified...never purified...never purified. And it all seemed so cyclical and so

relentless and sometimes so hopeless.

But Jesus provided what the blood of bulls and goats could never provide, purification from sins. And so for those of us who put our trust in Jesus Christ, our sins have been completely washed away, totally forgiven because of His work on the cross in our place.

Then finally, having presented the glories of Christ, the preeminence of Christ through His inheritance, through His power as creator, through His glory as the brightness of God, through His nature as the very being of God, through His authority as the sustainer of the universe and through His atonement as the sacrifice for sin, he comes at last to His exaltation. When you look at the exaltation of Jesus, you can conclude nothing other than that He is God. He says at the end of verse 3, here's His exaltation, "He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high." Boy, that is a really significant statement.

When Jesus died and rose from the dead, He then ascended into heaven. You remember His life on earth ended, His ministry on earth ended 40 days after the resurrection when He ascended into heaven. And when He ascended into heaven God seated Him at His right hand. Philippians 2 says at that point He gave to Him a name which is above every name, and the name is Lord...Lord which means sovereign master. He gave Him the title of Lord and sovereign Master. Philippians 2 says that at the name of Jesus, the name Lord, every knee should bow, every knee should bow, whether you're on the earth or whether you're under the earth or whether you're in heaven...every knee bows to the lordship of Jesus. He is exalted to the right hand of God. And the right hand always symbolizes the side of power and authority and prominence and preeminence.

When Jesus went into heaven, He did what a priest never did...He sat down. Priests never sat down because their work was never done. But Jesus work was done. He had accomplished it on the cross, it was finished and He sat down. There were no seats, by the way, in the temple, no chairs, no benches for the priests because they never sat down. Their work was never done. When Jesus' work on the cross was done, it was finished, He went to glory and sat down. He sat down on the side of God, on the power side, the might side, the seat of honor, the seat of rule. And there He sits as our great High Priest and intercessor.

Now to show how great the exaltation of Jesus is, the writer says this, verse 4, "Having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they, for to which of the angels did He ever say, 'Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee and again I'll be a Father to Him and He'll be a Son to me?'" Now here's his point, this is really very important. Jewish people greatly esteemed angels. They did, they still do if they're true to orthodox Judaism. Every Hebrew was aware of angels and they knew that angels were an important part of God's unfolding purpose among men. They believed that angels surrounded the throne of God and worshiped God. They had glimpses of that from Isaiah 6. And they saw God as accomplishing His purposes through angels

who from time to time in the Old Testament came down to earth and achieved the purposes of God. So they believed that angels did God's work, that angels occasionally mediated between God and men, as in the case of Daniel when God was dispatching an angel to come and assist Daniel in his dilemma. They believed that God existed in celestial glories of heaven, surrounded by angels for the purpose of worship and service. They believed that angels were messengers from God.

But most importantly, they knew that angels were the agents by which God delivered the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Law. They believed the Mosaic Covenant was brought to them by angels. And the Mosaic Covenant was really the key to them. The Mosaic Law was what they tried to live by. Unfortunately they tried to become saved by it. They knew it was a righteous and holy reflection of God's will. They believed it had come by the instrumentality of angels. And so angels were really exalted in the Jewish mind. In fact, when you went higher than an angel, you came to God. They believed that people were lower than angels and only God was higher.

And so, the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus has a much better name than angels, a much more excellent name than they have. For to which of the angels did God ever say...You're My Son, today I have begotten you? To which of the angels did God ever say...I'll be a Father to Him and He'll be a Son to Me? The answer...no angel...generically angels are sons of God in the sense that He created them, generically human beings are sons of God in the sense that God created mankind. And as believers, we are sons of God in a spiritual sense. But to no individual angel did God ever say...You're My Son. And therefore He has a name Son which makes Him better than angels...a more excellent name than angels. Christ is superior to angels.

Now any Jew will tell you if you say Christ is superior to angels, you're saying Christ is God. There's only one step up from angels and that's God...that's God. He was better than angels and consequently He had a better name than He have. And what was His name? His name was Son. No angel has that name. Of no angel did God ever say, "Thou art My beloved Son."

Now for a little while...for a little while it tells us in Hebrews chapter 2 verse 7, Jesus was made lower than the angels when He took on the form of a man, when He humbled Himself, when He came down to earth He was made for a little while lower than the angels. But that was just a little while, just that brief 33 years. But truly before He came into this world He was better than angels, even while He was in this world He was better than angels. And after He ascended back into heaven, He was restored to the glory that He had before He was certainly better than angels. It was just that little while when He was here and took the form of man that He was lowered. Now if you're saying He's better than angels, you're saying He's God. They understood that.

Well what does it mean to say that He is His Son, "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee?" Well, that is referring to His deity again. Everything in this passage refers to His deity. And I confess to sort of meandering a little bit on this passage through the years, trying to come to a strong

conviction as to what the intent of the writer here is...at last under some pressures from some people who really want to know where I stand on this. I've come to, I think, the appropriate understanding of the passage. And what I believe is intended by the phrase "You are My Son" is an expression of eternal deity. The thing that compels me to that is this, I ask myself the question...now what do I think, not how does this hit me, not what do I as a twentieth century Gentile bring to this passage, but how did a Jew understand this? If Jesus said He was the Son of God, if the writer of Hebrews says to Jewish people He is the Son of God, how do they perceive that? Do they think that's a human title? What do they think that means? That's the compelling issue.

And when I had that question answered in my mind it sort of solved the puzzle for me. When Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, according to John 5:18, immediately He was charged with blasphemy...immediately. And they said, "He is making Himself equal to God." So the Jews understood this as a statement about essential, eternal, divine nature. And I think that's the right way to understand it. If He didn't mean that he should have said...Whoa, whoa, guys, when I say Son of God I don't really mean that, I'm just talking about something that, you know, sort of happening now in my incarnation.

If that's what He meant He could have straightened that out. But it was this charge, You're claiming to be the Son of God, that was the charge the Jewish leaders made that ultimately put Him on the cross. And when He was hanging on the cross, they executed Him basically because He claimed to be the Son of God which they knew was saying You're equal with God. When He was hanging on the cross they said to Him, according to Matthew, they said, chapter 27, they said, "Why don't You come down off the cross, You claim to be the Son of God." And then later they said, "Why not ask Him that for He said I am the Son of God." That was what galled them, that was what stuck in their throats like a bone. He's claiming to be the Son of God. They understood that as a claim to deity. It didn't mean anything other to them than that. And it was that that infuriated them.

But the fact of the matter is, if you are higher than the angels, if you are more excellent than they, if you have a better name than they have, then you're God. Cause there's only one step up from the holy angels. And verse 6 says, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." So when God brought that firstborn into the world, He said let the angels worship Him.

Every way you look at it, the preeminence of Christ is presented here. He is God. He is God because He is the heir of all things. He is God because He is the creator of the universe. He is God because He manifests all the attributes of the glory of God. He is God because He is a duplication of the being of God. He is God because He sustains the entire universe by His power. He is God because God alone has the power to purify sin. He is God because He has been exalted to the very throne of God above the angels. This is the preeminence of Christ and this is written to, remember now, to Hebrews who need to be assured that the Lord Jesus Christ is in fact God. They have not turned from God in embracing Christ. They have not forsaken Judaism in embracing Christ. They

have turned to the true and living revelation of God. God spoke once many ways in many portions through prophets to their ancestors, but now God has spoken fully and completely in His Son who is God in every sense.

We could say then that the deity of Jesus Christ then is established in this chapter because He is given divine names, He is called Son of God, He is called Lord, He is called God. He is given divine works, creation, sustaining of that creation, governing that creation, purging sin, redeeming sinners. He is given divine attributes, He is omniscient, omnipotent, immutable, eternal. And He is to receive divine worship from the angels in verse 6 who are called to worship Him. There can be no other conclusion than that Jesus is God and that is the heart and soul of the Christian faith.

Now there's more in this chapter that is so profound and rich. And I want you to notice, I don't know if you have the kind of Bible that sorts it out, but starting in verse 5 and going to the end of the chapter, almost everything in there is quoted out of the Old Testament. Almost everything till the last verse, verse 14, is quoted out of the Old Testament to show the superiority and the preeminence of Christ. Next time we'll look at just an overview of that as we consider the greatness of this child. Let's bow in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for giving us this wonderful picture of Christ, our blessed, matchless, incomparable Christ, majestic beyond all others, the supreme exalted person, the theme of Scripture, Old Testament, New Testament. We thank You that He is the binding on the book of Revelation, the book of Scripture. What the Old Testament concealed of Christ, the New Testament revealed. What the Old Testament contained of Christ, the New Testament explained. What the Old Testament gave in principle, the New Testament gave in perfection. What the Old Testament presented of Christ in shadow, the New Testament presents in substance. What the Old Testament presented of Christ in ritual, the New Testament presents in reality. What the Old Testament presented of Christ in picture, the New Testament presents in person. And we give glory to Jesus Christ. We give honor to Jesus Christ, Son of God, for the glory of His person and the wonder of His salvation. We confess Jesus as Lord and Savior, as the one alone who died in our place and bore our sins in His own body, the one who knew no sin but yet was made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. And, O God, we thank You and we praise You for the saving work that has been granted to us through Christ. May we love Him and adore Him, exalt Him and honor Him, serve Him, obey Him and proclaim His gospel far and wide and we pray these things for His honor. Amen.

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