

MOVING ON TO MATURITY

Angels, Jesus and You
Hebrews 1:5-14

Spirituality is “in.” I was walking through Barnes and Noble the other day and noticed the number of books that address our deep inner desire for something beyond ourselves. Such books rake in more than one-half billion dollars annually.

One of the most popular in recent years is James Redfield’s *The Celestine Prophecy*. It stayed on the New York Time’s Bestseller list for over three years. It’s published in more than 40 languages and has sold over 14 million copies. It basically recounts how a fellow named John, the main character, finds in Peru a deeper connection with the “divine,” and opens himself up to a greater sense of energy called his “guiding intuition.” Apparently, through this means he’s able to unlock the secrets of his destiny. The author, Redfield, describes it this way:

If you are like millions of us out there, your investigation of your inner spirituality began with books and scriptures and other descriptions of the spiritual life. Yet what you already know somewhere inside you — and what I believe will be looked upon as the grand insight of our time — is that *spirituality is first and foremost a set of elusive and transcendent experiences*. James Redfield

For many today, these “elusive and transcendent experiences” include a fascination with angels. Maybe you’ve seen the television drama *Touched by an Angel*. And in that same bookstore where I was the other day, you’ll probably find such best-sellers as *Angels A-Z*, *Know Your Angels*, *Ask Your Angels*, *Meditating with Angels* and even one called *Big George: The Autobiography of an Angel*. Some are very good, like Billy Graham’s *Angels*. Others probably not so good, like *Angels and Aliens*. There is even a magazine out today called the *Angel Times*!

Not unlike today, the original readers of this letter to the Hebrews had placed a big emphasis on the role of angels in their spiritual life. And to a certain degree, this was a good thing. After all, the Bible has an awful lot to say about angels. And so does the passage we’re looking at today.

As I read our passage, Hebrews 1, I want you to ask: What’s the big deal about angels? What is the speaker trying to tell us? After we discover that, we’ll see just how this rather perplexing, highly theological passage speaks to you and me and our everyday lives.

ANGELS

A couple of weeks ago, we saw in verses 1-4 seven characteristics of God’s final word, His Son, Jesus Christ. He is inheritor, creator, revealer, sustainer, redeemer, and ruler. And as such, as verse 4 concludes, Jesus is *superior* to the angels: “So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.” And that’s what the passage we’re looking at today (verses 5-14) is all about. It begins in verse 5 with a question: “For to which of the angels did God ever say...?” And like bookends on a shelf, it ends in verses 13-14 with the same question: “To which of the angels did God ever say?”

You might wonder right off, “What does that have to do with me?” “After all, you don’t need to prove to me that Jesus is superior to the angels. And even if you did, what’s the point? I really see little, if any, relevance to my daily life!”

According to the Bible, angels have two primary roles. And both of these are referred to here in these verses. Their first role is *worship*. Hebrews 1:6 says (citing Psalm 97), “Let all God’s angels *worship* him.” We see this often in the book of Revelation. Thousands upon thousands of angels are gathered around the throne of God with one purpose: worship (cf. Hebrews 12:22). Worship comes from the old English *worthship*, meaning to declare the worth of someone. And that’s what angels do best. We’ll say more about this in a moment.

The second role of angels is *service*. Verse 14 says, “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to *serve* those who will inherit salvation?” How do they serve? Their primary means of service is being a messenger. In fact, that’s what their name means. Angel means “messenger.” And as messengers, angels in the Old Testament were often mediators (or “go-betweens”) between God and people. Even in chapter 2, verse 2 we read that, as messengers, they had a special role in giving the law of the Old Testament (Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19). On many occasions, God manifested himself in the form of an angel, what the Old Testament calls “*the Angel of the Lord*.” Through angels, God revealed himself to his people. As messengers, they held a place of great dignity and power and privilege. Angels have a very important place in God’s program. They are high and exalted. But as great as they are, consider Jesus Christ; He is even greater.

We often highlight the value of something by comparing it with something else. We compare value, we compare prices, some men (unfortunately) even compare their wives! The purpose of talking about angels here is to show the superiority of Christ. In fact, the word “better” is used thirteen times! Jesus Christ is *better* than the angels. He is *better* than Moses. He is *better* than the Old Testament priests. He is also *better* than any religion or popular “spirituality” that is out there. And he is *better* than anything *you* might value in life: your house, your friends, your car, your money, your career, your security, your education.

JESUS

And so Jesus is the real focus of these verses, not angels. How is Jesus better than angels or anyone or anything else? The speaker answers that question by citing seven passages from the Old Testament, each of which is listed on your notes. We don’t have the time to look at each one of these quotes in great detail. My purpose here is to simply bring out the big idea of each one, so that we can come away seeing the absolute superiority and authority of Jesus Christ. That’s what the writer wants us to come away with.

Several years ago, if there was anyone who was “into” the “new spirituality” it would be Anne Rice. The media called her the Queen of the Occult. She sold literally millions of novels about vampires and witches. Several of her books have also been made into movies, starring Hollywood big-shots like Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt. But since a near-death experience in 1998, Anne Rice has had a change of heart—she’s turned Goth to God.

In 2005, she stunned her fans by declaring, “I promised from now on that I will only write for the Lord.” Her 2005 release, *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* became a New York Times bestseller. In

the afterword of the book she summarizes what she has found in Jesus, calling him “the ultimate supernatural hero” and “the ultimate immortal of them all.”ⁱ That’s precisely what the author of Hebrews is saying. Jesus Christ is the “ultimate supernatural hero” and the “ultimate immortal of them all.”

I believe we can summarize the main idea of what the author is saying about the superiority of Jesus in these verses with five key words. The first one is ...

SONSHIP

We’ll begin at verse 5, where the speaker cites both Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14:

For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”? Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”?

By the way, before going any further, did you notice who is speaking in the Old Testament passage the author cites? Who is saying, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father?” That’s right, it is God speaking. And yet Psalm 2, as each one of these Old Testament passages cited, was written by a human author. And yet not a single one of these passages mentions the human writer. Each one is presented as God speaking.ⁱⁱ This obviously tells us something about how the writer of Hebrews and the readers of this book viewed the Old Testament. Without a doubt, God spoke through humans – some were prophets, some were kings, and others were poets and shepherds. But the end result was that it was *God* who was speaking, and not mere men.ⁱⁱⁱ

Do you get the point? When you and I open this book, we are not reading human opinions, human counsel, or human literature. We are reading the very Word of God which points us to the very Son of God. God is speaking here, and we better listen up! The same is true when we listen to this Word while here at church. My role as a communicator of Scripture is to simply let God speak. It’s not about innovation, creativity, interesting stories, or heart warming illustrations. That’s not really what I have been called to do. My job is to simply open up God’s Word as found in this book so that you and I can hear the voice of *God* speaking. And if you hear *God* speaking, it will transform your life!

To understand this verse 5, we need to go back to verse 4: “So he became as much superior to the angels as the *name* he has inherited is superior to theirs.” What is the “name” Jesus has inherited? It’s the name “Son” as verse 5 shows.

Here the speaker cites both Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14. In the Old Testament, the King of Israel (such as Saul, David and Solomon) was viewed as God’s adopted Son. Psalm 2 was probably cited when the king was crowned and took his throne. And the second citation (“I will be his Father and he will be my son”) is God’s promise concerning Solomon, son of David. But many of the promises made to David and Solomon would ultimately only be fulfilled in the true King, God’s divine son, Jesus Christ. That’s why these verses from the Old Testament, though originally referring to God’s anointed human King, find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

Now I know what you’re thinking. “Hasn’t Jesus *always* been the Son of God?” Why does it say, “You are my Son, *today* I have become your Father.” Yes, Jesus has always been the “son”

of God the Father. But the emphasis here is on what took place at Christ's resurrection. In fact, Paul cites this same passage (Psalm 2) in Acts 13:33 and says this:

We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, *by raising up Jesus*. As it is written in the second Psalm: "*You are my Son; today I have become your Father.*" Acts 13:32-33

When Jesus was resurrected from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God the Father, he entered into his inheritance of all the rights and authority of his position as God's Son. And according to Romans 1:4, it was at the resurrection that Jesus was publicly declared the Son of God with power.^{iv}

Sonship – no angel experiences such a privileged position.

WORSHIP

The second line of argument, which is found in verse 6, can be summarized as *worship*.

And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." Hebrews 1:6

Here the speaker is citing possibly from two passages in the Old Testament: Psalm 97:7 and Deuteronomy 32:43. What he's saying is this: If angels worship the Son, the "firstborn," then certainly the Son is superior to the angels.

Some of you may be troubled by the word "firstborn." But remember Pastor Reilly's message several weeks ago from Colossians chapter 1? He pointed out that "firstborn" doesn't necessarily mean that one is given actual birth or that one is "born" before another. It is rather an expression that refers to someone being first in honor, authority and position. And that someone is Jesus. No wonder the angels worship him. They recognize the awesome beauty, majesty and authority of the Son of God.^v Do you?

Is Jesus, God's "firstborn," the object of your worship? You say, "Why of course! I wouldn't be here today if he wasn't! But during the week, what do you worship? Is God's Son the central focus of your life?"

KINGSHIP

The fact that Jesus is king is the emphasis of the next three verses:

In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." Hebrews 1:7-9

Here the writer is citing another Psalm called a "Royal Psalm." Just like Psalm 2, it would be used when a king in Israel was crowned as king. While angels are servants, Jesus is King! And

he's not just any king. He is a divine King. Notice what he says, "Your throne, *O God*, will last forever..."

Over the years, both in Europe and here, I have had many discussions with Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses. They will often argue that Jesus is not God, but *a god*. Next time one of these cults comes to your door, take them politely to this verse. "But about the Son he says, "Your throne, *O God*..."

Do you recognize the "kingship" of Jesus in your life? He is King today in heaven. Someday he will be King on this earth. Is he King in your life?

WORKMANSHIP

He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

Jesus Christ stands outside of time. He is the creator of all that exists. That means that all that exists, as well as our lives and circumstances, are under his control and authority. When we look at the awesome dimensions of the universe and realize that at its source stand Jesus Christ, this should bring us to our knees in worship.

Much of modern day science says, "In the beginning were the particles and the particles somehow became complex, living stuff. And the stuff imagined God." The real debate today between evolutionism and creationism is really between those who think that God created man and those who think that man, in his imagination, created God. If there is no creator, then there is no purpose in life and there is no such thing as sin. Sin is being in a wrong relationship with God. You can't be in a wrong relationship with the "particles." "Particles" don't care how you live.^{vi} Apart from a creator, there is no sin, but there is also no savior. And there is no hope.

But these verses tell us there that is a "workman," called Jesus Christ who is the author of all that we see in the universe. It also tells us that He never changes. Recently I cleaned out my closet. One thing I can't stand is junk. I'm a "thrower-outer." Some are "keeper-weepers." They "keep" and then they "weep" when a "thrower-outer" throws out what they want to keep! Well anyway, I was cleaning out my closet, throwing out old pants, shirts, socks. Some of this stuff was in pretty bad shape. Nobody would have wanted it. Why I had been hanging on to it (particularly me, being a "thrower-outer") I have no idea! Some of the stuff was worn out, had holes in it, and was just taking up space. So I folded them up and laid them aside.

This is what the universe is like. It's going to wear out. Jesus Christ will one day roll it up just like I rolled up those clothes to get rid of them. The universe changes. We change. Our circumstances change. But Jesus, the creator, never changes. He remains the same. His years never end. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever!

RULERSHIP

To which of the angels did God ever say, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? Hebrews 1:13

While our Staff was eating lunch together the other day at the Mongolian Grill, I picked up a fortune cookie on the way out. I bit into it and was curious to find out what message it might have inside. It read: “Your road to glory will be rocky, but fulfilling.” I believe that’s what these verses, as well as this entire book, is saying. Your road to “glory” (not your personal glory but the true glory of being with God throughout eternity) will be rocky. But as you keep your eyes on Jesus, it will be fulfilling.

Here the speaker cites another Psalm, this time Psalm 110. This Psalm is cited in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament text. Why? Not only because of its theology, speaking of the promise that Christ *will* one day reign. But also because of its encouragement.

As becomes clear later in this letter, the readers were overwhelmed with the difficulties of their circumstances. Things seemed out of control. Persecution was everywhere. They needed the assurance that God was in control.

As they looked around, they saw so many things that did not appear to be “subject to Christ.” That’s why the writer says in 2:8

Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. Hebrews 2:8-9

Notice that the answer to our everyday struggles is *not* “Eight Easy Steps to Happiness” or a “feel good” message on love and peace and how one day everything will turn out all right. Amazingly, the answer we are given is very *theological*. It begins with a clear understanding of *who* Jesus Christ really is, including his supremacy and the authority that His is to have in our lives. How do we stay the course in our Christian faith? We consider Jesus. That is the constant call of this book. Look at Jesus.

YOU

But this emphasis on the high, exalted position of Christ and the inferiority of angels in comparison is not the only point this passage is making. The real reason the speaker talks about angels is to prepare us for the argument in chapter 2:1-3.

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the *message spoken by angels* was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? Hebrews 2:1-3

In light of what we have seen in this passage about the person of Jesus Christ, we must avoid two tendencies. If you're here today and you have never placed your faith in Jesus Christ as your savior from sin and leader of your life, then the message is: don't *reject* Christ. How will anyone escape if they neglect so great a salvation? Will you receive this Jesus today? Will you ask Him to forgive you of your sin and give you eternal life?

On the other hand, if you are a believer, the message here is: don't *neglect* Christ. Recognize his supremacy. Submit to his authority. Bend the knee and worship Him in every area of your life. Ascribe to him the *worth* that is due him. For you too will not "escape" if you neglect so great a salvation.

ⁱ Jennie Yabroff, "Anne Rice Has Gone from Goth to God," *Newsday.com* (11-21-05); Cindy Crosby, "Interview with a Penitent," *Christianity Today*; submitted by Bill White, Paramount, California. Clipped from www.preachingtoday.com.

ⁱⁱ For example, verse 5 reads: "For to which of the angels did *He* ever say...? He then goes to cite Psalm 2:7. The "He" refers to God speaking, not the human author of that Psalm. Look also at verse 6: "And when *He* again brings the firstborn into the world..." Again, "He" refers to God who is speaking in 2 Samuel 7:14, and *not* to the human author of those words. And the same is true for each of the seven Old Testament quotes in these verses.

ⁱⁱⁱ Not only is God speaking through His Word, but the author piles one Old Testament passage upon another in order to prove without any shadow of a doubt that what he is saying is true. During the time in history in which the author wrote, it was quite common to have a sort of "chain quotation" (one quote after another) in order to prove one's point. The idea is that, by the time you get to the end of the verses cited, the listener is shaking his head, saying, "Yep, I see your point; you're right!" No wonder when we come to Hebrews 2:1 the speaker says, "We *must* pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard..." And no wonder he says in chapter 3, verse 7, "So the Holy Spirit says..." and then cites Psalm 95: "Today, if you hear *his* voice, do not harden your hearts..."

^{iv} This is important to understand in order to grasp what the speaker is now going to say throughout this book. He's going to focus our attention, not on *who Jesus was* before coming to earth, or even on *who Jesus was* during his ministry on earth, but rather on *who he now is now* having been resurrected from the dead and exalted to God the Father's right hand. Other passages of the Bible focus on who Jesus was before coming to earth. Other passages of the Bible focus on who Jesus was while on the earth. But most of Hebrews focuses our attention on who Jesus is and what he does *now* in heaven as well as what he will do in the future as he establishes his kingdom. And it is these truths that will keep you and me going in the toughest of times.

^v Peter tells us that they long to look into the salvation that the Son has purchased for you and me (1 Peter 1:12).

^{vi} "When you give away creation, you have given away everything." Terry Mattingly, senior fellow for journalism at the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, from his column "Phillip E. Clipped from www.preachingtoday.com.