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# The Supreme Finality of Christ's Exaltation

## Hebrews 1:1-3

**Introduction** What is the most important message Christians need to hear today? I've thought a lot about that because I must preach to you regularly. What is it that you as a Christians need to hear from God?

**Think About This**

An observer of preaching today would be led to think that the church (and maybe non-believers as well) need to hear:

- That their greatest need is to find ways to deal with all the mental, emotional and psychological scars they are carrying that makes them feel bad about themselves. They need to see how the Bible is particularly related to their **significance**.
- That their greatest need is to find practical ways to carry on "Christian living" in the church, the home, the job and the society. They need to see how the Bible is particularly related to their **relationships**.
- That their greatest need is to find ways to deal with all the difficulties and stresses that are bringing pressure on in their lives. They need to see how the Bible is particularly related to their **problems**.
- That their greatest need is to find ways to deal with all the social and cultural ills that are so pervasive, particularly as we view ourselves as having some semblance of a moral consensus. They need to see how the Bible is particularly related to their **society**.

The subject matter and the message of most modern preaching is all about our significance, our relationships, our problems and our society. We are making a fundamental mistake in thinking that since the Bible is written **to** us, it is written all **about** us.

Though each of these areas may be important to some degree, they are not the primary message of the Bible. The Bible was not primarily written to tell us how wonderful we are, how we ought to relate to one another, how we can solve all our felt needs and problems—the Bible's primary message to all peoples of all cultures in all times in every situation is *the superiority and supremacy of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*.

And no book presses this home more than the book of Hebrews. Now make no mistake. This book is to be heard in the midst of the mess. It was written to Christians who had been converted out of apostate religion, Judaism. They lived in a depraved culture driven

by the athleticism of the Romans and the arts of the Greeks, which wound themselves together into a violent and pornographic society. At every turn they faced sensual attractions, greed and graft at every level of business and government. The politicians were utterly corrupt. Home life had disintegrated under the pressure of making a living, keeping up appearances and paying taxes. Personal and national debt in the civilized world was estimated to be multiple times the gross national product. Christianity itself was coming under the censure and condemnation of both the religious (idolatrous) and political worlds. They were losing their homes, possessions and lives all for affirming that Jesus Christ was the one and only and true God. They were being tortured for their faith and tempted to return to the relative safety and comfort and security of their previous religions.

To Christians in these situations comes the message of Hebrews: *magnifying Christ and maturing saints*. So we had better pay attention to this message. It may not fit our categories and our preconceptions, but it is vital for our spiritual welfare.

These opening verses of Hebrews are grand with the majesty of God and the preeminence of Christ. They are elegant in their construction and musical in their language. The concepts appear at first to be simple and yet are weighty with the words and wonders of God. So bear with me as we pan through this text, both to see its flow and to mine out the golden nuggets that make up its truth.

To magnify Christ, the author is going to use the word “better” over and over. He is at pains to show the superiority of Christ over the prophets, over angels, over Moses and Aaron and Joshua. Christ is better in His sanctuary, in His sacrifice, in His priesthood and in His New Covenant. When Christians, no matter what their life circumstances, have their minds filled with the truths of the superiority and supremacy of Christ then their affections will go out to Him in sacrificial love and their wills are turned to obey Him. But all of this means communication and revelation. This is what the 1<sup>st</sup> four verses are all about and why Hebrews begins as it does.

## **God's Revelation Spoken in Christ**

**(v.1-2)**

There is no salutation as was common in their day. We simply open with a wonderful statement that basically says, “God has spoken.” This is because this is a sermon, not a letter. It has a postscript once it was ready to be distributed – but this is a sermon in the synagogue form. Thus the opening is meant to draw the speaker into the subject and the issues while holding up the Lord Jesus Christ to be admired and acclaimed. The human author is unknown to us. The situation of the hearers can be seen through the book itself, particularly the final chapters point to the pressure and persecution in which they were faltering and failing. So this sermon will have two major threads running through it: instruction and exhortation. It will hold up this glorious Redeemer in all His perfections and then warn us and exhort us and call us to faith, to cling to Him in His promises even until death.

## **The Diversity of the Former Revelation (v.1)**

Notice that God is the One speaking. God is the subject of the both of the verbs: God then spoke and now has spoken. This assures us that God is a self-disclosing God. He is a person who intends to reveal Himself and then does communicate. He is not absent. He is not silent. He is not dumb or mute like idols. He is not an impersonal force. He has spoken. If it is true that this is God speaking, what should that mean for our listening? Much noise goes on around us all the time. But let the tornado alarm moan its loud warning and it arrests our attention. So even against the constant clamor of the world's compelling noise, we had better give His speaking our attention.

That revelation was characterized by being a *PROGRESSIVE* revelation. I get this from the words "at many times and in many ways." These words signal that the revelation came over time and through various means. This is very important to understand, both in our grasp of the Bible and in our grasp of Hebrews. God has been progressively revealing Himself to us through time – each bit adds or explains or interprets the bits that went before. Yet we must never think that earlier revelation is wrong, rather it is limited. So when we come to the New Testament and we come to Christ, we have the fullness and fulfillment. It has also been noted that the variety of the means of revelation (through different times, writers, styles and situations) encourages us and helps us to understand the Bible. What we might not get in one place, we may understand in another.

That revelation was characterized by being a *PROPHETIC* revelation. It came from God through fallible, sinful men. It was mediated by fallen but redeemed men. Yet, the fathers (probably patriarchs) heard God speaking. Though the bearers of the message may be weak and frail in their sin, yet the message is pure and powerful.

That revelation was characterized as *PROPOSITIONAL*. Without a doubt, the author intends to show us that human language was the divine vehicle to carry the thoughts of God from the mind of God into the soul of man. God spoke, not in vague feelings or strange inner motivations, but in words and sentences and paragraphs as the Spirit imparted the images and realities that God wanted to say.

## **The Decisiveness of the Final Revelation (v.2)**

There is a great sense of the "then and now" between verses 1 & 2. The decisive finality of this revelation is seen in that there is no third phase. The speaking that God has done in these last days is not followed by another era of further revelation. Why is that so?

Because God has spoken in His Son. To be more accurate and to reflect the Greek more correctly, we should say that God has spoken in a Son kind of way. It is a Son-kind of speaking. It is like Philippians chapter 2, where Jesus humbled Himself even to the point of a cross-kind of death. So the final voice of God is spoken "Son-ly". Do not confuse this with the Logos of God in John 1. There, Jesus is the Word of God. He is the content of what God has to say. That is not quite the point here. Here, Jesus is the character of how God spoke.

I am struck by the similarity of this text with the thought and thrust of Colossians 1:15-20. Ponder these words as well.

*15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. [ESV]*

This revelation then is characterized by being *PERSONAL*. God has spoken in Son. It is more than words, it is a person. God's speaking is never merely words, merely information, merely data—it is the Son. It is the difference between my sending you an e-mail message and my sending you one of my children. God has spoken in verbal and written communication. He has also spoken in His Son.

This revelation is characterized by being *PERFECT* or complete. Here is a rebuke that we all need. There is no further revelation to be given than that which is given in Christ. For us, we have an inspired, written record which is sufficient for us. The Bible is an interpretation. This written record we call the Bible has perfectly interpreted what God has spoken in His Son. Even throughout all eternity, we will look no further than Jesus Christ for the final word from God. Yet, how many today are listening for another word, a clearer word, a different word and are returning to the mingled and mangled aspects of a prophetic word. O, loved ones, "Here I stand on the once for all delivered faith, On the Word He exalts above His holy Name. Here I stand, never changing one command, on the pure, sufficient Word of God. Here I stand!" (*Here I Stand*, Steve Camp).

This revelation is characterized as being *PURPOSEFUL*. Why does the author make these two assertions about this Son, this One who is the decisively final, spoken word of God? Why point out that Jesus is both the heir and the creator of all?

- It points to the centrality of Christ in all the purposes and pleasures of God. All that is not God, exists in the end for Christ and was brought into existence by Christ. He is the end and origin of all the cosmos, all the heavens and all the inhabitants of them. If Christ is central to their purposes and pleasures, then how else is God to reveal that *but by finally and fully speaking of those purposes and pleasures in Christ?*
- It also indicates that the end of the story is more important than the beginning, but you cannot understand the end fully until you know the beginning. This is why Jesus' being an heir is first, before His being the creator. He has been appointed by God to be the center of attention at the end. He is the heir. But to keep us from making a mistake and saying then that He is merely a man, who had a beginning and was elevated to this position, the author says that He created all things. God's purpose and pleasure was to magnify Christ by making Him the point of all things. And in doing so, God also created everything by Him as well.

To us in the midst of our mess, God has spoken with great variety, clarity and authority in the Scriptures. He has spoken with great finality in His Son in this age in order to show His supremacy and supremacy. Do you need a word from God? Are you looking for a voice behind you saying? Are you hoping that the next book, the next author, the next gift will give you a new word? Then hear this: God still speaks ... through what and Whom He has spoken. Let us hear Him in the Word. For Christ is the source, substance and sum of everything God has to say.

Christ is supreme not only because of God's revelation spoken through Him, but because of the revelation of God that Christ is in His very nature.

## **God's Reality Shown through Christ (v.3a)**

Here I want to tread very carefully for we are coming onto hallowed ground. Before the wonder of these realities, angels shroud their dazzled faces. Here are three assertions which show how Christ is supremely the manifestation of the reality of God.

Now to understand this, we must first begin with a few Biblical truths.

- God is spirit. This means that His divine essence is not physical. He is incorporeal and therefore invisible. He is uncreated and unmade. He has no source or origin outside of Himself. He has neither beginning nor end. He is the environment and atmosphere, the sea on which the bubble of all created reality rests.
- God is truth. This means that everything that God is, thinks and does is totally without error. He makes no mistakes. He thinks no error. He sees both Himself and everything that is as it really is. There is no self-deception nor self-delusion. God's self knowledge is utterly pure and perfect.
- God is holy. This means that God is utterly separate from all that is against His nature. He is wholly and completely devoted to His own glory and majesty and pleasure and it is totally right that this is true. To be unholy is to be devoted in any measure to anything besides the glory and majesty and pleasure of God.

So why are these truths foundational to these assertions? Listen to them. Christ is:

### **God's Glory Radiated**

Jesus **is** God's glory radiating out from the Father. The author has in mind the sun. The sun is a brightly glowing object in the sky. In the sun is a process which causes light to radiate outwards in all directions. When we see the radiated light, we have seen the sun.

So Jesus is the glory of God radiating out from the Father. When we see Jesus, we see the glory of God. When His grace and truth shine brightly in the eyes of faith, we have seen and felt the glory of God. God dwells in light unapproachable, so Jesus shines on us bringing to us the very glory of God. And seeing that glory, seeing Christ, transforms us to be like Him.

## God's Essence Represented

Jesus is the exact representation or image of God's nature. God the Father and God the Son (and God the Holy Spirit) are exactly alike in their essence and nature. God's essential nature, resident invisibly in the Person of the Father, is stamped by God's thought and word in the person of Christ. Think of it this way, as Jonathan Edwards did. God the Father's self-knowledge and self-idea is so true, so accurate, so comprehensive that it is another Person, the Son. If you want to know what God is like, learn about Christ.

So these two statements go together to show us that Jesus is the exact representation of the nature and character of God, not like a painting or a photograph, but like the rays of the sun cause us to see the sun.

## God's Power Revealed

The words here are a complement to those in the end of verse 2. Jesus not only brought all things into existence but He carries them along and sustains them for the end to which they were created. I was helped by one author to think about how Christ is supreme when God's power is revealed.

- *JESUS IS POWERFULLY PRESERVING EXISTENCE.* Now this sounds strange to modern ears. Since childhood, we have absorbed the idea from science that the foundational reality of existence is physical, energy in various states. The Bible tells us that the foundational reality is spiritual—it is Christ and His Word. What we think is so real, is, in fact, very fragile and hangs by a slender thread on the brink of extinction. All that is would cease immediately to exist if Jesus stopped thinking about it and stopped sending out His sustaining Word to preserve it. (Piper)
- *JESUS IS POWERFULLY GUIDING PROVIDENCE.* The word used here literally means “to be carried along, to be held up.” I see in these words that Jesus is working through His power to unfold in time and eternity the purposes and pleasures of God. We are used to thinking that what happens is solely the product of chance or choice. God has designed the flower of history, folded it in the bud of the past, and opened it petal by petal by the powerful Word of Christ so that in full bloom, the supremacy of God in Christ will be fully revealed. And the fragrance will be sweet while the colors will be bright with glory.

## God's Redemption Secured by Christ (v.3b)

Christ is also superior in the redemption He has accomplished. A great section of Hebrews is devoted to unfolding the full meaning of these two phrases. But even here, let us ponder the final superiority of Christ in His redemption and reign.

### Jesus the Savior - Its Essential Character

I want us to think about what this wonderful phrase implies.

- The main problem human beings have is **sin**. I am afraid that we have lost sight of that today. If you ask most people what is man's greatest problem, few people professing Christianity will say that it is sin. We think that our problem usually has to do with psychological, relational or physical categories. Jesus' redemption is first and foremost a dealing with our sin.
- Sin stains, mars and corrupts. I get this from the word "purify" or "purge". It tells me that sin is more than an honest mistake. It is a terrible stain on our lives. It is a corruption at the core of our being. It is constantly compared to leprosy. It spreads and deadens and eventually brings death.
- Redemption purifies and purges. Jesus' work on the cross actually deals with our sin. If sin is a stain, redemption purges. If sin is corruption, redemption purifies. All that sin is and does to us, the redemption of Christ reverses.

Let us not lose sight that this redemption is in Jesus Christ alone. There is only one salvation. It is in Him, and Him alone. There is no other name under heaven whereby you may be saved.

### Jesus the Sovereign - Its Necessary Consequence

I love the image of this phrase. I imagine the Lord Jesus Christ, after His resurrection and ascension, marching with great accomplishment to the throne and turning and looking out over the sea of glass. And amidst the shouts and praises and songs of redeemed souls and elect angels and principalities and powers, HE SITS DOWN.

- He sits down to show that what He has accomplished is finished. The superiority and supremacy of Jesus is seen in these grand words—He sat down. The work of redemption has been accomplished and finished forever. No one can add to it. No one can take from it.
- He sits at the right hand of the Majesty *because He Himself is majestic*. He has a right to sit there. His glory and brightness and wonder is the shining forth of the Father.
- He sits on the throne because He is the sovereign. He is the ruler. Having finished the work of salvation as the savior, He now sits down to rule as the sovereign.

Listen to the Word of God. If you are going to trust Christ to save you, you must also bow to Christ to rule you. The purifying work of Jesus' redemption is designed to bring us under Jesus' rule. If you will not have Him as your Lord, you cannot have Him as your Savior.

Finally, let me show you how important it is that Jesus has sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High. The writer originally penned this verse as one clause with one subject and one main verb. Everything else serves to shed light on that one main assertion. The subject is “He” (or “who” in the original) that is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The one main verb is “sat down.” So the one main clause of the verse is: “He sat down at the right hand of Majesty.” Everything else in the verse serves that assertion and sheds light on that.

John Piper suggests that the way to hear this is to translate it like this:

- He...being the radiance of God’s glory...sat down on the right hand of majesty.
- He...being the exact representation of God’s nature... sat down on the right hand of majesty.
- He...upholding all things by the Word of His power.. sat down on the right hand of majesty.
- He...having made purification of sins sat down on the right hand of majesty.

So here are the reasons for the final supremacy of Jesus’ exaltation:

- He is the radiance of God’s glory— so He sat down on the right hand of majesty.
- He is the exact representation of God’s nature— so He sat down on the right hand of majesty.
- He is upholding all things by the Word of His power— so He sat down on the right hand of majesty.
- He made purification of sins— so He sat down on the right hand of majesty.

- Christ’s three offices are seen here.

**Prophet** He is superior as both the final revelation and full reality of God.

**Priest** He is superior as the final redeemer and purifier of sin.

**King** He is superior for He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

- The superiority and supremacy of Christ is eternally demonstrated.

- Final revelation
- Full reality
- Finished redemption

## Conclusion

I close this morning by commending this great Person to you that you might trust in Him, and love Him and worship Him. He is alive and sitting at the right hand of God with all power and authority and will one day come in great glory. He has that exalted place because He is Himself, God the Son; and because He upholds you and me by the Word of His power; and because He made a perfect purification of sins.

O, my friend, would you not come to know the One who has made you; who upholds your existence; who reveals God to you the way light reveals the sun; who has made purification for your sins and has gloriously ascended to heaven and is now, SEATED for you?