

The Supremacy of Christ – part 2

This morning we continue with part two of this message on the supremacy of Christ. Last week we looked at Hebrews 1:1-2 and how Christ was the supreme, definitive, and final Word from God, and that this is the case because of who Christ is. Today we will be looking at verses 3-4 of Hebrews 1.

Hebrews 1, verse 1-4:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Let's pray...

I want us to focus our attention today on the portion of this text, “After making purification for sins, he...” and we will, in the process, be exploring the whole text of verses 3-4.

Pastor D. James Kennedy once said in a sermon, “I remember years ago talking to a man in his home about Christ and asking him who he thought Jesus was. He said, ‘Oh, he’s a wonderful man. He was the greatest man who ever lived, the most loving and gracious person who ever walked upon this earth.

“I said, ‘Let me tell you something I believe will startle you. According to the Scriptures, and the historic Christian faith, Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter of Galilee was and is the eternal Creator of the universe, the omnipotent, omniscient, and Almighty God.’

“Instantly, his eyes filled with tears and this man of about fifty-five or sixty said, ‘I have been in church all of my life and I never heard that before. But I have always thought that is the way it ought to be—that God ought to be like Jesus.’”

Our passage says, “After making purification for sins, he...” I want to begin by taking a close look at the “he” which this text is referring to.

To believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, in the first century would have come with great cost to Jewish Christians. Not only would there be exclusion from Jewish society, but at times there would even be violent persecution. The author of Hebrews would have wanted to let his readers know that Jesus Christ was worth putting their faith in.

Verses 2-4 contain seven statements of the supremacy of Christ, which is the “he” of this text.

The first two we covered last Sunday so I’ll just go over them quickly.

First – He is the heir of all things

Second – He is the Creator of the world

With these **first two**, we see Jesus Christ as Lord in his person and work. This, as we saw last Sunday, is because of Him being Creator and because of the redemption which He wrought. But even more than that, it has to do with Him being the Son of God. As Son, He is the heir of all things. All things are rightfully His inheritance, and shall be His in actuality in the end.

The author of Hebrews goes on to say, “through whom also He created the world.” As we saw last week, Jesus Christ is Lord and King because of His divine role in creation. Not only was the world made *for* him, but it was made *by* Him. This is the strongest claim for Lordship. If you are the one who made something, then you are its rightful Lord.

To say that Jesus Christ is Lord, if we are to claim this properly, we have to realize that this involves Jesus being our ruler...our King...our perfect King...and for us that involves obedience. And not just selective obedience or giving lip service to obedience, but a complete change of lifestyle which correctly aligns our life with His. This may take some radical readjustment, but the call is for nothing less. Someone who is truly born again will have a desire to do this, though. It is a fruit of the New Birth. Our heart is changed from being set against God in rebellion, to being for Him in acceptance. More on this later in this message.

Not only is Jesus the heir and Creator of all things, but **third**, He also “upholds the universe by the word of His power.”

Colossians says, “and in Him all things consist or hold together.” This means that He is the sovereign King of this universe and nothing, absolutely NOTHING escapes His control. R.C. Sproul says, “There are no maverick molecules in the universe.”

As Christ was with God the Father and involved in the creation of the world as we see in John 1:1-3, so He is with His Father in upholding all things. Jesus says not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the Father. We see in Job that even the evil of this world is under the ultimate sovereign control of God, and Satan can go no farther than what God allows him to.

The passage says that He upholds the universe “by the word of His power.” The word that was spoken in creation has never lost its power and shall never fail. When God speaks, it holds firm, never to be shaken, never to be moved.

1 Peter 1:24 says,

The grass withers,
and the flower falls,

²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

So number 1, He is heir of all things. Number 2, through Christ, God created the world. Number three, through Christ God upholds the universe by the word of His power.

Numbers 4 & 5 we'll look at together – “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.”

This passage not only exalts Christ as Lord of all, but also as the One who perfectly reveals God in all His glory. In this He is not only our perfect King, but also the perfect Prophet. It is only through Him alone that we can even know God's glory.

2 Corinthians 4:6

⁶ For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But not only is Jesus the radiance of God's glory, but He is also the exact imprint of His nature. The Greek word here refers to the stamp or imprint made by a seal. An example is a coin that bears the image of a ruler's face. If you look at one of our American coins, you probably will see an imprint or image of one of our past Presidents. The image of the person has been stamped on the coin. In an even more perfect way, Jesus perfectly bears God's image or imprint, so that when we see Christ we see God.

John 14:9 says, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

Another passage provides a great correlation to these verses:

Colossians 1:15-17

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.

Sixth – He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high

We will be looking at Christ's death on the cross momentarily, but just a word now about His resurrection. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, we would still be in our sins. Salvation would not be complete.

1 Corinthians 15:16-19

¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But praise God, this is NOT the case. Paul goes on to say:

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. – vv. 20-22

Seventh – His is the name that is above all names

We see this clearly in Philippians 2:6-11:

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

What does all this mean? It means that...

Point #1: Only Christ alone is qualified to be our all-sufficient Savior.

Let's go back to our phrase again... "“After making purification for sins, he...”

This time I want to focus on that word, “sins.” If Jesus made purification for our sins then we need to understand something about what that entails. “Sins” are what He had to deal with.

Nowadays people don't seem to want to talk about sin much. It's uncomfortable. It makes us uneasy. It hurts to talk about it because it doesn't build up our self-esteem or stroke our ego.

There is a trend in America today and may I say that it is extremely unhealthy and even dangerous. The trend goes like this:

“I just want to talk about what is positive. There's too much negativity in the world, we need to just be positive and talk about positive things.”

Now I'll agree. Nobody wants to be around a person who is always negative all the time or seems to have a negative attitude. Some people are always complaining about something, and if there's nothing to complain about, they make something up. I certainly don't want us to become like this at all. If you don't know of anyone like that, then it's probably you!

There are also some people who take the other extreme and seem to be so unreasonably hard on themselves, suffering under the weight of failure after failure of self-imposed rules that God never placed upon them, and then thinking God is always angry at them. These people never experience the joy of their salvation in Christ. They live by a set of rules, not realizing that grace not only sets them free from the self-imposed rules and self-righteousness, but also sets them free to enjoy their relationship with God in Christ Jesus.

But in the process of trying not to be like those people, somehow the pendulum has swung too far and we have cast out all mention of the gravity and seriousness of sin. In doing so we have gutted the gospel!

The gospel is good news, but what is good news to anyone who has never understood that there was bad news to begin with? By choosing to only focus on only being positive and ignoring the gravity of sin, we do two things:

1. We hate sinners. Yes, you heard me correctly. By choosing to not mention sin, we hate sinners. We may THINK we are loving them, but in reality we are hating them. If you were a doctor and you had a patient who had a terminal disease that you know had a cure, but you didn't want to be negative, you didn't want to make them uncomfortable or offend them, are you being a good doctor by not telling them and just letting them go on untreated? John MacArthur said, "Sin is a deep-seated, terminal disease that can be cured only by the healing work of the Great Physician."
2. Second thing we do when we choose to ignore the gravity of sin is, we lead people to a false gospel. This is the "Hallmark Channel, Oprah Winfrey, New Age, talk about prayer and our guardian angels" gospel. This is the "power of positive thinking" gospel, the Joel Osteen gospel, and it is really no gospel at all.

Look what Paul has to say about this:

Galatians 1:6-10

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Some might even say that Paul is being negative. How can you say such negative things, Paul? Let them be accursed? That'll hurt their feelings. I guess Paul would never make the cut for an appearance on Oprah.

What's important here is what GOD has to say about sin.

Please turn over to Hebrews chapter 3 and look with me at verses 12-19.

Hebrews 3:12-19

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵ As it is said,

*"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."*

¹⁶ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his

rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

In this passage we see six things that describe or define for us what sin is and what Jesus dealt with on the cross:

1. Sin is deceitfulness – v. 13 – When we follow down the path of sin, we are deceiving ourselves. We are being duped. We think we can get away with it, that after all I'm not murdering anybody or hurting someone else, but we're deceiving ourselves. And if it keeps going unchecked...
2. Sin hardens our hearts – vv. 13, 15 – That's what happens when we have our heart set against God. Before we come to Christ, our heart is hardened against God and it needs to be softened by the New Birth. That's why Jesus says clearly, "You must be born again!"
3. Sin is rebellion – vv. 15, 16 – God is King and sin is rebellion against His rule. Plain and simple. And this...
4. Sin provokes God to anger – v. 17 – God is angry at sin. Make no mistake about it. We want to look at the passages that say that God is love, and see Jesus meek and mild and full of compassion, and that is true. But that's only one side of the truth. God is holy and God is angry against that which is unholy, that which ruins His perfect creation, and mars the image of God in mankind. He is angry because sin separates us from Him. He is angry because sin is the opposite of His character and He cannot associate with sin. Matthew Henry said, "Dare we make light of that which brings down the wrath of God?" Yes, God's wrath is upon sin and upon all who persist in sin. God is angry at sinners! You don't think so, take a look at...
John 3:36 - *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*
Romans 1:18 - *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*
Romans 2:5 - *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.*
Romans 2:8 - *but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*
Ephesians 5:6 - *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*
5. Sin is disobedience – v. 18 – disobeying God's commands. We have broken God's law. And Jesus says even if we haven't done it outwardly, be careful that you don't do it in your heart. In Matthew 5, Jesus equates being angry with your brother with murder, and lusting after someone as adultery.
6. Sin is unbelief – v. 19 – flows from lack of trust in God

Point #2: Sin is rebellion against a holy God.

That's the bad news. And this brings us to the good news of this passage. Jesus has made purification for our sins, which is to say, He has both made an atonement and He has cleansed us or purified us who have faith in Him.

This is referring to two distinct acts that God did through Jesus' death on the cross.

1. **Propitiation** – a synonym for this would be “satisfaction.” As we said before, God is holy and is rightfully angry at sinners. His wrath is upon them. That wrath is just and it means that sin **MUST** be punished. He **CANNOT** just let it go and sweep it under the rug or wink at it and say, no big deal. This is the holy God of the universe! It's a big deal! But...He also loves them and has provided a way for sinners to be saved from His own wrath.

John 3:16-17 - ¹⁶ *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

Romans 3:23-26 - ²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

Hebrews 2:17 tells us why Jesus had to become a man - *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

2. **Expiation** – In Leviticus 16 it talks about the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement was a Jewish festival where once a year at this time the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies and offer a sacrifice for the sins of the whole nation of Israel. This foreshadowed what Jesus Christ would do once and for all, which is what Hebrews talks about at length.

We read in Leviticus 16 that there were two goats.

The first goat was to be slaughtered and the blood sprinkled upon the mercy seat. This is a picture of propitiation. This provided a satisfaction for the penalty of their sins, though temporarily and imperfectly. It atoned the sins of Israel and turned away God's wrath. But again, this had to be done every year.

The second goat, the high priest was to place both hands upon the goat and confess the sins of the nation, thus placing their sins upon the goat, and then he was to release the goat out into the wilderness. It's where we get the term “scapegoat” from. This removed their sins, or cleansed them of their sins for another year. This is a picture of expiation. It is when our sins are not just legally taken care of, not just satisfying God's justice and turning away His wrath, but also cleansing and removing the sins from them.

That is a picture of what Jesus has done on the cross. His blood has propitiated the Father, that is, satisfied His justice, and provided the means by which He can justly turn His wrath away from us. But it didn't stop there. Jesus' blood has also cleansed us from our sins and removed them from us so that we bear them no more!

That's why we sing that old hymn, It Is Well With My Soul, and the verse that says, "My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part but the whole, was nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!"

Point #3: Christ's work on the cross has purified us of our sin once and for all.

Now, we look at this passage and we see its truths, but it wasn't written for us just to know. This was never meant to just be words on a page. This was never meant to be just a great thought or something that we just affirm and build a religion around. The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ requires faith. And this is much more than just mental ascent. It is trusting your whole life in what Christ has done. It is letting it be settled for you once and for all. It is accepting the truth that when Jesus said, "It is finished," that there was nothing and there IS nothing more to be done!

But it also means that we recognize WHY Jesus had to pay this price, and WHY He went to the cross in the first place. It was our sin. And that means that we are to repent, to change our mind concerning our rebellion against God. We agree with God that His Word is truth, that we have indeed sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are all deserving of eternal punishment.

Ephesians 2:1-10

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Point #4: God calls people to faith in the finished work of Christ.