

SERIES: The Absolute Supremacy of Jesus Christ

SERMON: **Angels Are Son Worshipers**

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 1:4-2:4

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Last Lord's Day we read Hebrews 1 and learned that the author's principal point is that "as great as angels are, Jesus Christ is vastly superior." We also observed that in order to grasp his argument fully we needed to have a truly biblical understanding of angels. So instead of jumping headlong into the argument, we examined all that the Bible teaches about angels—their existence, their nature, their number and organization, their ministry to God, to Jesus Christ, and to God's people. In fact, we mentioned ten ministries angels have in the lives of believers.

Now if I were preaching to the same audience the author of Hebrews was writing to, it probably wouldn't have been necessary to take a whole sermon to review the theology of angels, because Jewish Christians in the first century were very conscious of angels. As a matter of fact, if anything, they tended to exaggerate the importance of angels, sometimes even worshiping them. It is with that in view that the author of Hebrews sets Jesus Christ apart from the angels. As great as they are, he tells us, Jesus is much greater, and He alone should be worshiped.

By the way, following the sermon last Sunday a number of you related to me possible angel encounters you have had in your own lives. That was a real blessing to me. Now let's dig into the text of Hebrews 1 and examine some of the ways in which Jesus is superior to angels.

Jesus Christ is superior to the angels.

Again I want us to start at verse 1 and read the entire chapter:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

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"?

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

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."

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."

To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"?

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? This is the Word of the Lord.

The author shares five ways in which Jesus is superior to the angels:

1. He has a superior name. (4,5) Verse 4: "So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs." This may seem like a strange argument to us, but it wasn't at all in a culture in which names were not just labels but really meant something. The superior name given to Jesus is "Son of God." The questions the author asks in verse 5 are, of course, rhetorical, and the obvious answer expected is "none." God never called any angel "My Son."

The fact of the matter is angels sometimes *are* called "sons of God" in the Scriptures, for example in Job 1:6. Even evil angels are called "sons of God" in Genesis 6:4. But there's a big difference between the term "sons" and "the Son" or "My son." When angels are called "sons of God" it simply indicates they were created by God and owe their existence to Him. In the same vein human beings are sometimes called "sons of God." But that is very different from the unique relationship that Jesus has to His Father as His "one and only Son."

All the quotations in this chapter are from Messianic passages in the OT. When we call a passage Messianic we mean that it is ultimately a prophecy regarding Christ. That may not always be obvious in the OT passage itself, because sometimes the passage is speaking about a king or an event in Israel, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the NT author is able to see a double fulfillment, an ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

The first quotation in verse 5 is from Psalm 2:7 and the other from 2 Samuel 7:14. Both raise some interesting interpretive and theological questions. On the one hand I hesitate to dig into these issues for fear we will be distracted from the point of the passage. On the other hand, I don't want to gloss over them because you may be asking the same questions. So I will try to briefly address a few of the issues without belaboring them, and I will address more of them in the footnotes on the website.

One question relates to the time referred to in verse 5: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." To what does the term "today" refer? And if God became Jesus' father on a particular day, what was their relationship before that day, or did He even exist before that day? There are cults, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, who answer that Jesus was Himself a created being, and the term "today" refers to the day God created Him. They also identify Jesus as

Michael the Archangel. Of course, if God created Jesus, then Jesus cannot be God. While their interpretation may seem to explain this one verse, it violates much of the rest of Scripture, including verse 8, where Jesus is clearly called “God.” Besides, the whole point here is that God never called any angel, even Michael the archangel, “My Son.” But He did give that name to Jesus.

So we can reject the Jehovah’s Witness answer, but we still have the question, “To what does the term ‘today’ refer?” Some scholars think it refers to the incarnation when Jesus was born of Mary and became a “Son” in the physical sense. But the context of the Psalm causes me to believe it refers to His exaltation through the resurrection and ascension, when He took His place at the right hand of the Father. In fact, we have virtual confirmation of that in Acts 13:32-33, where Paul quotes the same Psalm when preaching in Pisidian Antioch:

*“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.’”*

Jesus was *always* the Son of God by relationship, but when He was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of His Father, he was enthroned or installed in a unique sense as “Son of God” by position. Romans 1:4 puts it this way: Jesus “was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.” It doesn’t say He *became* the Son of God by His resurrection but that He was *declared* to be so, and the declaration was accompanied by divine power.

Here is an illustration I hope will help. Suppose a certain man works in his family’s business right alongside another man who works just as hard and contributes just as much. The second man understands that he will have a different destiny than the son of the owner.ⁱ He may be successful and even well-compensated, but he will never inherit the company. And the day the father finally installs his son as the new owner, their relationship takes on a whole new meaning. He was always his father’s son, but now he inherits the father’s company and blessing. He is, in effect, declared the father’s son by position.

Angels are like the second man in this illustration. They are really servants. In fact, the term “angel” means “servant” or “messenger.” It is true that servants or slaves are sometimes treated well by good masters and are even given special privileges. But no matter how well they are treated, servants are always aware that the master’s son is in a category by himself. That seems to be the author’s point—Jesus has a superior name to that of the angels.ⁱⁱ

2. He has superior worth. (6) Verse 6: “And again, when God brings his firstbornⁱⁱⁱ into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’” We only worship that which is superior to us, so if God is telling the angels to worship Jesus, He must be superior to them. In fact, it is a sin to worship anyone but God. So if God Himself says that the angels are to worship the Son, then the Son must be God. John Bunyan wrote, “If Jesus Christ be not God, then heaven will be filled with idolaters,” for in Revelation and Daniel, those biblical books which give us a special glimpse into the heavenly realms, we see millions of angels engaged in worshipping the Son.

But in verse 6 we have another problem, for the exact quotation, “Let all God’s angels worship him,” is not found in our best OT manuscripts. It is, however, found in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT used by Jesus and the apostles—in Deuteronomy 32:43. And the same truth is found in Psalm 97:7: “worship him, all you gods.” The term there is Elohim, or “supernatural beings.” And of course, the angels did worship Him, even at Bethlehem’s manger. And they continue to do so, as we see in Rev. 4 and throughout the book of Revelation.

3. He has a superior nature. (7-12) A contrast is set up in verse 7: “In speaking of the angels God 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.’” What does God say about the nature of angels? According to this quotation from Psalm 104:4, they are “winds” and “flames of fire.” Interestingly, when you go to that Psalm you discover that it is the Psalmist, not God, who is speaking. But the author of Hebrews sees no contradiction in stating that what the Psalmist says is what God Himself says. The Scriptures, after all, are the very breath of God (2 Tim. 3:16).

But what is the point in calling angels “winds” and “flames of fire”? Perhaps it is this: both wind and fire are powerful forces, but they must be controlled by a superior intelligence in order to be useful. Not so the Son. In contrast to the angels, God says of Him, “Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever. . .” This quotation, taken from a Messianic Psalm (45:6-7), indicates that the Son, far from needing to be controlled by a superior intelligence, is the Controller, is God Himself.

The deity of Christ, denied by virtually every cult, is affirmed here so clearly that one would have to be wearing blinders not to see it. John MacArthur states, and I agree, “This verse gives the clearest, most powerful, emphatic, and irrefutable proof of the deity of Christ in the Bible.”^{iv} But there is more in this quotation from Psalm 45 than just an affirmation of Christ’s deity; it also tells us that Jesus has a throne and a kingdom that will last forever, and righteousness will be the scepter of that kingdom. Verse 9 refers to both the actions and motives of Jesus: “You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.” One can see both the love of righteousness and the hatred of wickedness in the Temptation of Christ. One can see both in the cleansing of the Temple. One can see both at the Cross.

The conclusion is drawn in the last half of verse 9: “Therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”^v Who are these companions above whom Jesus is placed? It could be His followers or his disciples, but I am inclined to believe it refers to His heavenly companions, the angels themselves. Jesus is above them.

Then in verse 10-12 the writer quotes another Psalm, 102:25-27 to show that the universe will grow old wear out, and eventually be discarded and exchanged for a new heaven and a new earth. But the Son remains the same and his years never end. Interestingly, if you were to turn to Psalm 102, you would no doubt come to the conclusion that the words quoted here were addressed to God the Father. And I think you would be right. But the author of Hebrews tells us they are also applicable to Jesus. He, too, was there at creation and laid the foundations of the

earth. The heavens are the work of His hands, as well as His Father's. He also will remain for eternity, for Hebrews says later in chapter 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever."

4. He has a superior destiny. (13,14) Verse 13 & 14 read, "To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'?" The answer is clear that God never said any such thing to any angel, but He did say it to Jesus. The quotation here is from Psalm 110, one of the great Messianic Psalms, quoted many times in the NT. It is the Son's destiny to sit at the Father's right hand and to remain there until every enemy is subdued, a privilege never offered to any angel. Of course, that subjection of all enemies has not yet been accomplished, but it will be. Philippians 2:10 predicts that one day "at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

In contrast to the destiny of Christ—to sit at the right hand of the Father—the author asks another rhetorical question to reveal the destiny of angels: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" This time the answer expected is, "Yes, of course." The assignment God gave to the angels is to serve His people. They are ministering spirits, not enthroned sons. Their destiny is to serve, not to reign, and thus He has a superior destiny.

By the way, last Lord's Day we spoke of guardian angels for little children, based upon Matthew 18:10, but according to verse 14 angels seem to have a guardianship that goes beyond childhood, at least for believers. The angels serve a favored class of human beings—the heirs of salvation. And apparently angels don't wait until a sinner repents before ministering to him, but rather are assigned to those who will repent at some point in the future. Some of you perhaps can testify that though you didn't become a Christian until you were an adult, you can now look back at your life before Christ and see evidence of angelic protection until such time that you heard the Gospel and did put your faith in Christ.

5. He has a superior message. (2:1-4)

"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? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

Angels, we are told, were active in the giving of the Law of Moses. But, the author goes on to say, something greater than the Law was announced by the Lord Jesus, and that is the Gospel of grace, the plan of salvation. The Law could not save anyone; it focused on punishment and judgment. But the message of Jesus focused on forgiveness and restoration. The Son has a superior message.

Now having seen these five ways in which Jesus is superior to the angels I want to ask this

question: Is there anything in our lives that we are elevating above Christ? Maybe it's not angels but it could be just as distracting. Maybe it's something good, even something biblical, but it's getting in the way of our fellowship with Jesus. Maybe it's church work. Maybe it's some teacher we have become dependent upon. Maybe it's our career or family. Whatever it is, nothing should be allowed to take His place as the center of our life.

I want us to focus for a few moments on the warning against spiritual drift and neglect of truth that is found in these first four verses of chapter 2. This is the first of five severe warning passages in Hebrews, and these warnings should force us to do some very serious self-examination.

Three reasons why neglect of God's salvation is so intolerable.

Someone has written, "Hell is undoubtedly full of people who were never actively opposed to Jesus Christ, but who simply neglected the Gospel." I fear that is precisely the case. Many know the truth about Christ and may even intellectually accept the fact that He is who He claimed to be. But they are not willing to commit their lives to Him. So they drift past the harbor of salvation and are lost forever.

The author of Hebrews is extremely concerned about this possibility. He is not satisfied simply to teach doctrine; he wants to be sure that it is applied to the shoe leather of life. He is not satisfied to prove that Jesus is superior to the angels; he wants his readers to receive Jesus as Lord. He is not satisfied to have his readers intellectually convinced; he wants to be sure they are personally committed.

Now the first reason neglect is so intolerable is. . .

1. Because of the incomparable Savior God has provided. (2:1) The little word "therefore" is nowhere more meaningful than in this verse. "We must pay more careful attention, therefore. . ." What is the point? Because Jesus is all that chapter one says, because He is the Son and heir of all things, the creator of the world, the radiance of the glory of God, the exact representation of the divine nature, the sustainer of the universe, the one who provides purification for sins, the one who sits at the right hand of the majesty on high, the one who is worshiped and served by angels, the unchangeable, everlasting God for whom His enemies will one day serve as a footstool—for all these reasons we must pay more careful attention and refuse to drift away. If He were less than this, then inattention might be excusable. But considering who Jesus is, there is no excuse for those who reject Him or neglect His salvation.

2. Because of the certainty of judgment for those who reject Him or neglect His salvation (2:2-3). The point is clear: if neglect and disobedience of the Law were judged and punished by God (and they were!), how shall we escape if we ignore the great salvation revealed in Christ? We have a tendency to view the OT as a time of judgment and punishment, while the NT is a time of tolerance and grace. But no one should ever conclude that God is somehow less concerned today about our obedience or responsiveness to Him. On the contrary, He is more

concerned. “To him who has been given much, much will be required.” And we have been given far more than our OT counterparts. How shall we escape if we neglect truth that is so much more clearly understood? And that takes us to the third and final reason why we must not drift:

3. Because of the confirmation God has provided that salvation is available. (2:3-4)

God went to great lengths to demonstrate and validate the truthfulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: “This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him (the apostles). God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” At the three primary periods of human history when Scripture was being written—the time of Moses, the time of the great OT prophets, and the time of Jesus and the Apostles—there were corresponding periods of amazing signs and wonders, miracles and healings. This was to make it clear to men that God Himself was speaking.

The greatest miracles in the Bible were, of course, performed in the Gospels and Acts, as Jesus and the Apostles were preaching the Gospel of the kingdom. The book of Hebrews asks, in effect, “How shall we escape if we neglect a salvation so clearly confirmed by the Apostles and so clearly proven by divine miracles?” The answer is, of course, that we cannot. Friend, if you have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, namely that your sins can be forgiven by repentance and turning in faith to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, and you do not respond, you have only yourself to blame. I urge you to put your faith today in Christ.

Conclusion: I offer a brief postscript to believers who may be drifting in their walk with God, neglecting the truth of the Gospel. You know, it can happen slowly; you quit reading your Bible, you stop praying except at meals; you begin to neglect the fellowship of other believers. And before you know it you are in deep spiritual trouble. If you are on that dangerous road, stop and think about the fact that God is warning you this morning in order to bring you back. He is offering you every benefit and every help possible.

The story is told of a textile factory many years ago in which there was a large sign on the wall: “If your threads get tangled, send for the foreman.” One woman who was fairly new was a diligent worker, but her threads got tangled one day. She tried to disentangle them herself, but her efforts only made matters worse. Finally in desperation she gave up and called the foreman. When he got there he took one look at the mess and then said: “You’ve been trying to untangle them yourself, haven’t you?”

“Yes,” she replied.

“Why didn’t you send for me,” he said, pointing to the sign.

She shrugged her shoulders and said: “I did my best.”

He responded firmly, “Remember that doing your best is sending for me.”

How often in life have we tried to fix things or make them work, only to make them worse? We think that a little more human effort, a bit more human wisdom, a touch of human ingenuity, pulling the right levers, speaking to the right people may be the solution. But we end up making the same mistakes over and over again. Bad habits remain in place; errors are repeated. We

excuse our conduct by saying: “I’m doing the best I can.” Then God gently, yet firmly, reminds us: “Doing your best is calling for me. Doing your best is trusting My Son, Jesus.”

i. I found this illustration in a sermon by Steve Zeisler, preached at Peninsula Bible Church on August 24, 1986.

ii. The other quotation in verse 5 comes from 2 Samuel 7:14, where God is promising to David a son who will build a house for God’s Name. And God promises to establish the throne of his kingdom forever. The passage is clearly referring to Solomon, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the author of Hebrews sees in the statement, “I will be his father, and he will be my son,” another more far-reaching fulfillment in the person of the ultimate Son of David, namely Christ.

iii. There is also a difficult term in verse 6, the term “firstborn.” Some of the cults tell us that this means Jesus must have come into being at some point in time. But “firstborn” does not speak of His origin; rather it speaks of His position, for in ancient times the firstborn was always the heir to the father's estate. What the author is saying is that Christ, who existed before all creation, was made heir to it all, and was granted the rights of the firstborn.

iv. John MacArthur, *Hebrews*, 33.

v. One cannot really grasp the meaning of Psalm 45 without belief in the Trinity. Verse 6 addresses the Son as God, but then verse 7 says to the same person, “Therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions.” Only a person in the Trinity, namely Jesus Christ, could be addressed as God and, at the same time, be said to have a God. God the Father is the God of Jesus.