

# Much Better than the Angels

SERMON

By

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**TEXT:** Hebrews 1:1-2:4

**PROP:** Because Jesus is so superior to the angels, indeed that he is YAHWEH, we must be very careful not to neglect so great salvation.

## Hebrews 1:1-2:4 (ESV)

### The Supremacy of God's Son

<sup>1</sup> Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

<sup>5</sup> For to which of the angels did God ever say,

“You are my Son,  
today I have begotten you”?

Or again,

“I will be to him a father,  
and he shall be to me a son”?

<sup>6</sup> And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

“Let all God's angels worship him.”

<sup>7</sup> Of the angels he says,

“He makes his angels winds,  
and his ministers a flame of fire.”

<sup>8</sup> But of the Son he says,

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,  
the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

<sup>9</sup> You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”

<sup>10</sup> And,

“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands;

<sup>11</sup> they will perish, but you remain;  
they will all wear out like a garment,  
<sup>12</sup> like a robe you will roll them up,  
like a garment they will be changed.  
But you are the same,  
and your years will have no end.”

<sup>13</sup> And to which of the angels has he ever said,

“Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

<sup>14</sup> Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

### **Warning Against Neglecting Salvation**

**2** Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. <sup>2</sup> For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, <sup>3</sup> how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup> while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

We do not know the author of the epistle but many suggest that it is Paul. (“Attested to us by those who heard” indicates that the writer was not one who heard) However that may be, the message of the epistle is very clear. There is no better description of the Lord Jesus Christ anywhere in the Word of God. We will see Jesus today not merely as a great teacher, not merely a high priest or a great prophet or even a great king. We will see him as far superior to the greatest of the angels, we will see him as the Son of God, as the righteous King, indeed as the creator of the universe.

God revealed himself to us through many great prophets, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Samuel, to name a few. But consider the great prophet Moses through whom God gave his Law. We read of Moses, (Exodus 33) '11So YAHWEH spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. God revealed his glory to Moses as he did to no other. 18And he said, "Please, show me Your glory." 19Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name YAHWEH before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.' Moses saw the glory of God in his **goodness**, his name YAHWEH, and his **sovereignty**.

How deep and rich is the goodness of God who said to his sinful people, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you." (Isaiah 43:2-3, ESV)

To Moses God revealed his lovely holy name YAHWEH and his incomprehensible sovereign mercy and compassion, "in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—" (Romans 9:23, ESV) Yet here in Hebrews chapter 1 it is not through Moses that God reveals his glory but through his Son. God, "--in these last days -- has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 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, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs." (Hebrews 1:2-4, ESV)

None of the prophets made the worlds nor are they the brightness of the glory of God nor are they the express image of the person of God. None of the prophets uphold all things nor do they sit at the right hand of God. It is the exalted Son of God alone through whom God speaks to us now in the pages of the Bible. Not even through angels does God speak to us but through him who is much better than the angels, Jesus Christ.

Angels are very great indeed. We will recall the angel Gabriel who appeared to Zachariah to announce the birth of John the Baptist. "And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news." (Luke 1:19, ESV) As you see the angels stand in the very presence of God and are given great authority. For

example we read, "no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." (Psalm 91:10-12, ESV) Yet Jesus is much better than they. "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" (Romans 8:33-35, ESV)

Again he says of the angels, "Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent. He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters; he makes the clouds his chariot; he rides on the wings of the wind; he makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire." (Psalm 104:1-4, ESV) Yet Jesus is much better than they. Jesus is far superior to prophets and he is much better than the angels. In his exposition of Christ the writer of Hebrews tells us that he is the **Son**, the righteous **King** and the **Creator**. We shall see that Jesus bears the covenant name of God which is YAHWEH. Because Jesus is great beyond our ability to conceive of it, we are exhorted not to neglect the great salvation he affords to us. First let us see that Jesus is the Son.

### 1. Jesus is the Son.

Sons are begotten by human fathers and they are born into this world by human mothers. However, Jesus is not a begotten Son of God but the **only** begotten Son of God. That he is only begotten means not that he had a beginning, but that he is unique, indeed, eternally begotten. There is none like him. As John puts it, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." (John 1:18, ESV) Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· **μονογενῆς θεὸς** ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

The writer of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 2 as he makes the case for Jesus as the Son of God. It will be well for us to take account of the entire Psalm to see what kind of Son this is.

## Psalm 2 (ESV)

- 2** Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
2 The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers take counsel together,  
against the LORD and against his **Anointed**, saying,  
3 "Let us burst their bonds apart  
and cast away their cords from us."  
4 He who sits in the heavens laughs;  
the Lord holds them in derision.  
5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath,  
and terrify them in his fury, saying,  
6 "As for me, I have set my King  
on Zion, my holy hill."  
7 I will tell of the decree:  
The LORD said to me, "You are my Son;  
today I have begotten you.  
8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,  
and the ends of the earth your possession.  
9 You shall break them with a rod of iron  
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."  
10 Now therefore, O kings, be wise;  
be warned, O rulers of the earth.  
11 Serve the LORD with fear,  
and rejoice with trembling.  
12 Kiss the Son,  
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,  
for his wrath is quickly kindled.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

The psalm begins with the rage and rebellion of the ungodly Gentiles and the kings of the earth, their rage directed toward YAHWEH and his MESSIAH (Anointed one vs 2). It is just as Peter notes, "for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." (Acts 4:27-28, ESV) But their rebellion is pure folly when we consider the greatness of YAHWEH. As Isaiah writes, "Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as

less than nothing and emptiness." (Isaiah 40:15-17, ESV) So YAHWEH laughs and holds them all in derision and places his Messiah King upon Zion's throne from which he rules the nations of the earth.

The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 2:7 with regard to Jesus, "Today I have begotten you". God, you see, does not dwell in time and space as we do, therefore it is eternally yesterday, today and tomorrow to him. [ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה σήμερον both have the force of *always* e.g. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8, ESV) ] He speaks of his Son with language that we can understand. Jesus was begotten by God as a flesh and blood man in the same sense that we are begotten but as he is also God he is eternally begotten and is given the Gentile nations as his inheritance and the ends of the earth for his possession. David was begotten by Jesse his father and was the King of Israel. But to the Son of God are given all the nations as his inheritance and the ends of the earth as his possession. This Son has been given all power and authority and therefore is the proper object of our Faith.

The Son is said to be the **firstborn**, "And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."" (Hebrews 1:6, ESV) The term *firstborn* does not mean that Jesus was the first one to be born but that he is the pre-eminent One or the chosen One who proceeds from God the Father. The term "firstborn" is used in this same sense by the psalmist to speak of David but ultimately of the Messiah, "And I will make him the **firstborn**, the highest of the kings of the earth. My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him." (Psalm 89:27-28, ESV) It is for this reason that the angels of God worship him. Jesus is much higher than the angels. For this same reason we must also worship him. If we do not worship Jesus as we should or fail to obey him as we should it invariably means that our view of him is deficient. That is, we do not really believe that he is the all powerful Son of God, that he is El-Shaddai, God All-Mighty.

## 2. Jesus is the great King of righteousness.

As we have seen from Psalm 2, to kiss the Son ( נִשְׁקָה ) is to bow with trembling knees to the exalted King of the universe. It is to worship him. The Hebrew word is used elsewhere to refer to idol worship. "Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." (1 Kings 19:18, ESV) Jesus is not just a great King. David and Solomon were great kings as far as the kings of the earth go, but as Jesus is much better than the angels so is he therefore much better than all the kings of the earth who are below the angels.

The writer of Hebrews now quotes another Psalm with regard to the Son. Notice verse 8 of our text, "But to the Son he says, and there follows the text of Psalm 45:6 and 7

**45** TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO LILIES. A MASKIL OF THE SONS OF KORAH; A LOVE SONG.

- 1 My heart overflows with a pleasing theme;  
I address my verses to the king;  
my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.
- 2 You are the most handsome of the sons of men;  
grace is poured upon your lips;  
therefore God has blessed you forever.
- 3 Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one,  
in your splendor and majesty!
- 4 In your majesty ride out victoriously  
for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness;  
let your right hand teach you awesome deeds!
- 5 Your arrows are sharp  
in the heart of the king's enemies;  
the peoples fall under you.
- 6 **Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.**
- 7 **The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;**
- 7 **you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.**  
**Therefore God, your God, has anointed you**  
**with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;**
- 8 your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.  
From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad;

According to Hebrews 1:6 it is of the Son the psalmist writes, and we can see that very clearly from the psalm itself. The sons of Korah write concerning the King and what they write comes from hearts overflowing with love and adoration. This King is fairer than all human beings and he is eternally blessed by God the Father. He is graced with glory and majesty and he sits on an eternal throne. The psalmist refers to this great King as God in verse 6. His scepter is a righteous scepter. His reign is not degraded by adultery with Bathsheba or the murder of Uriah but is a holy, righteous reign. It would never be necessary for this king to confess, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me

with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."  
(Psalm 51:3-7, ESV)

Notice the further reference to the deity of the King in Psalm 45:7, "Therefore God (the King), Your God (the Father), has anointed You." His garments are scented with the most exquisite perfumes and he dwells in the ivory palaces of heaven. Most assuredly this king is the True and Living God and as we have seen he is distinguished from God the Father though he has the attributes of God and the writer of Hebrews informs us that this great King is Jesus. What a clear and powerful statement of the deity of Christ and how we must be moved to desire him and love him with our whole being. Would God that our own hearts would overflow with adoration and obedience. Again we see that if our love for Jesus is weak and careless it invariably means that we do not see him as this great King of Glory.

### **3. Jesus is the Creator.**

The writer of Hebrews is not finished with his subject yet. Having set forth Jesus as God the Son and God the righteous King, he now shows us that he is YAHWEH the Creator.

The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 102 with regard to Jesus as is clear from Hebrews 1:6 "But to the Son he says:"

#### **Psalm 102:19-27 (ESV)**

- <sup>19</sup> that he looked down from his holy height;  
from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,  
<sup>20</sup> to hear the groans of the prisoners,  
to set free those who were doomed to die,  
<sup>21</sup> that they may declare in Zion the name of the LORD,  
and in Jerusalem his praise,  
<sup>22</sup> when peoples gather together,  
and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.
- <sup>23</sup> He has broken my strength in midcourse;  
he has shortened my days.  
<sup>24</sup> "O my God," I say, "take me not away  
in the midst of my days—  
you whose years endure  
throughout all generations!"
- <sup>25</sup> **Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands.**  
<sup>26</sup> **They will perish, but you will remain;**



**they will all wear out like a garment.  
You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,  
27 but you are the same, and your years have no end.**

You will notice that psalm 102:25 does not use the word *Lord* as it does in Hebrews 1:10. We read in verse 25 "Of old **You** laid the foundations of the earth." However, when we read the context of Psalm 102:25 we see that the psalmist speaks of YAHWEH. In verse 19 YAHWEH views the earth and in verse 21 YAHWEH declares the name YAHWEH in Zion. Therefore the psalmist speaks of YAHWEH when he says "Of old **You** laid the foundation of the earth." So the writer of Hebrews speaks of Jesus when he says, "You, YAHWEH, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of your hands." Not only is Jesus said to be the Creator, and said to be eternal, ("But You are the same, And Your years shall not fail"), but he has the name which is above every name; YAHWEH. It is the name more excellent than the angels. Jesus has the lovely exalted covenant name of God used 6828 times throughout the Old Testament. He has the great memorial name of God.

Paul informs us, "because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (YAHWEH) and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." (Romans 10:9-10, ESV) Therefore we see that it is very important to us to have a real heart belief in the deity of Christ. And you see how we have fleshed out the phrase *deity of Christ*. To be saved we must believe that Jesus is YAHWEH just as the writer of Hebrews says he is. We must really believe that Jesus is God the Son, that he is God the righteous King and God the Creator. This must be our real heart belief if we are ever to see him face to face when we die.

All of this is to say with the writer of Hebrews, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, **how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?** It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." (Hebrews 2:1-4, ESV) Are we drifting away from a love for Christ and his kingdom that excludes all else? Do we neglect the worship of God? Do we in fact neglect our salvation; Our relationship to the Savior? If this is so in our lives then our view of Jesus is not what it should be. Hear the exhortation of the writer of Hebrews, "how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" It is not characteristic of

those who are regenerated by the grace of God to continually neglect their relationship to Christ. The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit enables us to more and more die unto sin and live unto righteousness. May we all hear this exhortation to give more earnest heed to the means of grace, to the Word of God, to the Sacraments, and to prayer, that we might not drift away from a strong and obedient love for the Triune God.