

Jesus: Express Image of the Father

Part 1

Text: Hebrews 1:1–3

As you have discovered, the Book of Hebrews stands alone in its single focus on the incomparable Christ. The writer compares Jesus to the angels, Moses the lawgiver, the Levitical priesthood, the old covenant, the tabernacle in the wilderness, and the entire sacrificial system of the old economy and concludes that Jesus is better by far.

The repetition of themes and the converging strands of illustrative history make the case irresistible and undeniable — Jesus simply is better. The writer is determined to quell the doubts and uncertainties of Jewish converts who might have been wavering in the crucible of persecution and social unrest.

Some argue, with a degree of plausibility, that the apostle Paul may have penned this epistle to the believers in the Jerusalem church who would shortly face the destruction of their city. If so, the writer was reminding that if all is taken away — the temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the Law — the best still remains, Jesus Christ.

This message is equally strong today. Forces and influences abound that rise up to challenge the superiority of Jesus. Secular humanism, hedonism, materialism, intellectualism, and a host of new age ideologies combine to make that challenge. But the message of Hebrews is wonderfully reassuring — Jesus is always better. He is the incomparable Christ.

I doubt there has ever been a time when the pressure has been so intense against the affections of the devout. From every side comes the message that modern life is too complex and demanding for the simplistic tenets of biblical faith. Moderns want to push faith aside as superstition and empty idealism. However, from Hebrews we're told: Put the gospel up against any force, ideology, religious system, or institution of man, and it will show itself to be better by far.

The writer's gift of persuasion arrests the reader. Repeatedly, he states the hypothesis, develops the argument, and then draws the irresistible conclusion: Jesus Christ is the incomparable and exalted One. In fact, the reader is left with the sense that all options of reason and illustration have been fully exhausted. The last word has been spoken. Say it any way you like — Jesus is still better.

In planning for this introductory message, define as carefully as possible how you want the message to be targeted. Exactly what is the Holy Spirit wanting to accomplish in each heart? How will the listeners' conduct be altered and their lives changed? What will be the essence of the altar call? Prayerfully consider the kind of challenge that will sensitize people to the competitive forces at work in their lives to move Jesus away from His deserved place of superiority. Or an invitational question: What is drawing you away from wholehearted devotion to Jesus?

A Compelling Communication

We worship and serve a talking God whose speech has gone out into all the world. In more ways than we may know, He is reaching out to communicate with us. His voice is as big as the thunder that shakes the mountains and as small as the slight whisper in the human heart.

The psalmist expressed it well: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge, There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard" (Psalm 19:1–3).

Here, however, the writer was more defining and precise. He stated that in the past (the Old Testament period) God spoke to the patriarchs and forefathers through His prophets, but in the last days (the New Testament period to our day) He has spoken to us by His Son. Here then is the sharp contrast between natural and special revelation. Not only is God's voice echoed through the created heavens and is discernible on earth, but it is also the specific voice of the prophets and the words of Jesus.

The thought expressed here is devotionally rich. Challenge your people to listen for God. In fact, remind them that "at times" and "in various ways" His voice may still be heard. God calls loudly. Dramatically. Forcefully. Only the intentionally deaf will miss His voice. And most dramatic is Jesus' call. His voice in these last days is the most arresting of all.

A Participatory Work

This is one of the richest passages in the New Testament on Christology (the study of Christ). The writer began by characterizing the cooperative work of Jesus in conjunction with the Father. The Father has appointed the Son as Heir of all things and through whom the universe was created. It is a statement that focuses on the cooperative and eternal work of the Father and the Son.

It will be helpful to remind people that Jesus' identity is under attack today. Who is He? What is His

relationship with the Father? But the writer was clear: Jesus is eternally one with the Father. He is Head of all and Creator of all. His full deity is unquestionable.

Count on it: Someone close at hand will agree with you up to the point where you declare that Jesus is indeed God come in the flesh. They will agree that He is a good man, a gifted teacher, and even the Son of God, But “God in flesh”? That will offend their intellect. But the writer of Hebrews was insistent that He is.

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The Past	The Last Days	Preaching Outline
<p>In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets 1) at many times and 2) in various ways,</p>	<p>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, 1) whom he appointed heir of all things, and 2) through whom he made the universe. [The Son described] The Son is 1. the radiance of God’s glory and 2. the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. [The position of the Son] After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at right hand of the Majesty in heaven.</p>	<p>A compelling communication</p> <p>A participatory work</p> <p>A defining identity</p> <p>A shared exaltation</p>

Significant Words

“at many times” *polumeros*
Lit.: “many allotments, sharings”

“in various ways” *polutropos*
Lit.: “many modes, styles”

“radiance” *apaugasma*
“radiance, effulgence, reflection”

“exact representation” *charakter*
“impress, reproduction, representation”

“being” *hupostasis*
“substantial nature, essence. actual being,
reality”

“word” *rhema*
While used interchangeably with *logos*, some
have seen in *rhema* a special quality of divine
expression intended to produce faith.

A Defining Identity

Here the relationship is expressed more precisely: Jesus is the effulgence and reflection of God — the very impression, reproduction, and representation of the Father. But more, He is a full participant in the essence, actual being, and reality of God. Could it be expressed more clearly? I doubt it. Jesus is God.

The disclosure of God in Christ is the greatest miracle of all time — that God himself should be clothed in flesh and dwell with men, that the One who was born of woman should be the very impression and reproduction of God and share with Him the very same essence and being. No truth could be greater.

There is another dimension to this defined identity. The writer ascribed to Jesus the ministry of perpetuity and continuity — “sustaining all things by his powerful word.” That is, the continued existence of all that is rests on the Word (*rhema*) of Jesus Christ. Rightly, the writer calls this Word powerful. Here is the energy that generates gravity, holds molecular structures in place, assures the repetition of patterns and forms, and is the sustaining power of all life and existence.

Rightly, the writer used the word *rhema* rather than the more common word *logos*. While some may make too much of the distinction, for the two words are used interchangeably, it is also apparent from the context of Scripture that *rhema* reflects a more concentrated focus on the faith-producing Word of God (Romans 10:8). You will be on safe ground if you reflect this heightened focus but stop short of building a theology of faith upon it.

A Shared Exaltation

Jesus has provided purification for sins — good news for every sinner — for all of us. It is good news just to be reminded that Jesus has provided a cure for sin. Friends will be listening to you who desperately need to hear this life-giving word. Help them to experience the cleansing work of Jesus in their lives. There could be no greater joy than for them to leave the service feeling absolutely clean inside. This life-changing message is the preacher's joy. Proclaim it with power, and believe for great results.

Now to the final declaration: "He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." But wait. Does this suggest repose? Has Christ retired to heaven? Is there a sigh of relief in these words? No! Jesus is indeed seated with the Father, but in that exalted position He carries on His ministry of intercession and will soon rise to return for His bride, the Church.

People will move quickly to the altar in response to your faithful proclamation of these incredibly wonderful truths.

He is the incomparable Christ.

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