
The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Hebrews 1:1-2

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

In his wonderful series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis portrays the experience of a truly growing Christian with an ever-enlarging Christ. One of the series' characters, Lucy, has an enlightening encounter with Aslan, the great Lion, who pictures Christ. Having not seen Aslan for sometime, she comes across Aslan at night, shining white and huge in the moonlight. With great delight and passion, Lucy rushes forth to Aslan, burying her face in the richness of His mane. Then Aslan rolls over, causing Lucy to fall, leaving her half-sitting and half-lying between his front paws. Aslan touches Lucy's nose with his tongue and breathes his warm breath all over her. With love and wonder, Lucy gazes up into the majestic face of Aslan—

"Welcome child," he said.

"Aslan," said Lucy, "you're bigger."

"That's because you are older, little one," answered he.

"Not because you are?" asked Lucy.

"I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger."

This little encounter teaches us an important truth that serves well as an introduction to the book of Hebrews and the truth is this – "Expanding souls encounter and expanding Christ."¹ If we are growing in Christ, Christ becomes year-by-year, day-by-day and even moment-by-moment greater, grander and ever-enlarging to us. In this respect, the book of Hebrews, when approached by a growing child of God, will cause us to find a bigger Christ.

Now there is nothing more exciting to me than getting to learn about and come to better know God. However, it seems to be one of the most difficult and time-consuming things to do – for there is always something else vying for my time, my thoughts and my devotion, but there is also nothing quite like engaging in an in-depth study of the things of God, to uncover some truth, some idea, some comprehension of God that had yet to be personally discovered. I myself have found great joy in preparing for this study of the Book of Hebrews and feel that even though I am several weeks up on you with regard to this study, I know that I have only but scratched the surface of the greatness, majesty and wonder of God as found in this book. I have come to learn how inadequate are our words to communicate the greatest of Christ. I wish I were more eloquent, more passionate, more devoted and better able to communicate the truths of God as we will encounter them in this book. I must humble myself and give myself wholly and totally unto God and pray with great earnestness and diligence that the Holy Spirit will illumine your hearts, open your eyes and deeply, richly impart the truths of this book to your souls and to your lives. I pray that our lives will be changed.

If I were to try to summarize the book of Hebrews down into a sentence, this would be my attempt: *In the book of Hebrews we learn that God wants to be known and that He wants to be known through the greatness and superiority of His Son Jesus Christ.* This book simply oozes with Jesus Christ. The opening words of this book are simply "God, after he spoke long

¹ Hughes, Kent R. *Hebrews* p. 17— the citation from C.S. Lewis and the idea of an "expanding Christ" are adapted from this work.

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ago...has spoken to us in His Son.” We learn from these words that God is not silent, as so many in the world imagine. No, our God has spoken in the past through creation and through the prophets who composed His Word, but He continues to speak to us today completely and finally in His Son – Jesus Christ. That this is important to the author of Hebrews is clear by how quickly he comes to the point, starting, if you will notice, with God, yet giving no proof for the existence of God but assumed such to be self-evident by virtue that God has spoken in the past and speaks now via His Son.

Why is this so important? It is important because *a silent God is an unknown God*. And, as one has rightly noted, “an unknown God can neither be trusted, served nor worshipped.”² But God, in the book of Hebrews wants to be known and is seen to be expressing and revealing Himself in the Person, Majesty and Splendor of Jesus Christ. The whole thrust of the book is that nothing and no one ought to or can limit Christ. The argument is that if there's such thing as too beautiful, if there's such things as too wonderful, if there's such thing as too marvelous, then all such things are bound up in the person of Jesus and we are to come to see Jesus in this light. That God wants to be known is not simply a book of Hebrews “concept” – for it is a clear message of the Bible and the examples are numerous, but turn with me to just a few such examples.

Exodus 6:7

Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Exodus 7:5

The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.”

Ezekiel 32:15

When I make the land of Egypt a desolation, And the land is destitute of that which filled it, When I smite all those who live in it, Then they shall know that I am the LORD.

John 17:19-21, 23

19 For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. 20 I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. . . .23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

The point is, my beloved, God wants to be known and the book of Hebrews not only teaches us this truth, but also gives to us the supreme method by which God has made Himself known and that is in the person of Jesus Christ. Let me illustrate to you the whole point and purpose of the Book of Hebrews another way. Turn with me if you would to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 9 and follow along with me beginning in verse 28ff:

² Packer, J.I. “The Attributes of God” chapter 1

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28 Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. 30 And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, 31 who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. 33 And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah” — not realizing what he was saying. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!” 36 And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.

This is the account of the Transfiguration of Jesus, an event in the life of Christ whereby a few of His disciples saw a glimpse of His pre-incarnate glory. In this account, the disciples saw Jesus with the two *absolutely greatest* of the prophets of Israel, that is Moses and Elijah. These two men were *national and spiritual heroes* to the people of Israel. No doubt that when Peter, James and John saw this sight, they were not only overwhelmed, but also considered themselves to be very blessed – as *they were in the presence of greatness*. But according to the account, about the time that Peter thought he ought to do something – like build some tents, verse 34 tells us that “*a cloud formed and began to overshadow them.*” This cloud is very reminiscent of the Shekinah Glory of God – the pillar of fire and cloud which led the Israelites through the wilderness and which rested over the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle.

What was happening here? God was making Himself known to Peter, James and John and they were about to learn a valuable lesson, one which we must also learn, and one which is expressed in the book of Hebrews. For from out of this cloud came a voice which said, “*This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!*” Now look closely at verse 36 for this is easy to miss, “*And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.*” Jesus was found alone – in the light of the glory of Christ, even the greatest prophets of Israel’s history paled and faded in comparison. I submit to you that the book of Hebrews picks up this very idea, *that Jesus is found alone in comparison to all other things*. That Jesus is supreme and superior to all that seems wonderful – to all that seems spectacular – to all that seems important – to all that seems spiritual – all things, no matter how divinely given, be they the prophets, the angels, the priesthood or the entire Old Testament fails to compare to the power, majesty and work of Jesus Christ. Such a thought begs a practical question – “For what things am I seeking to “build a tent or house” in order to store them, to revere them, and to count them as “great” right along side of Christ when in fact *I must come to see Jesus alone?*”

At a time when there were many in the audience of the book of Hebrews who were tempted to replace Christ with lesser things or to simply abandon Christ for thought that the old ways, the old traditions, the old habits were better, God speaks and reminds them of the vast superiority of Christ over all such things. In word then, the book of Hebrews is simply a book of comparisons and the author of Hebrews presents these comparisons in a variety of ways. Let us consider some of these ways now.

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1. “Superior”

First, as we have been noting, Christ is presented in the book of Hebrews as Superior to all other persons and things and the idea of Christ’s superiority serves as a type of outline to the book. For we learn - - -

1. That Christ is superior to the prophets (1:1-3)
2. That Christ is superior to the angels (1:4-14)
3. That Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-19)
4. That Christ is superior to Joshua (4:1-23)
5. That Christ is superior to Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood (5:14-7:18)
6. That Christ is superior to all of Judaism (7:19-10:39)
7. That Christ is superior to all of the Old Testament Saints (11:1-12:3)

2. “Better”

Second, not only is Christ seen as superior in this book, the author of Hebrews also reveals to us that all of what Christ brings with Himself is “better” – “better” being a key word in this book. For we learn - - -

1. That Christ is better than the angels (1:4)
2. That we are to be persuaded toward a better end – to things that accompany salvation (6:9)
3. That Christ brings a better hope (7:19)
4. That Christ is the Guarantor and Mediator of a better covenant (7:22; 8:6)
5. That Christ is the Enactor of better promises (8:6)
6. That Christ is the bringer of better sacrifices (9:23)
7. That because of Christ we have a better possession (future) (10:34)
8. That because of Christ, God is preparing for us a better country (11:16)
9. That because of Christ, we look forward to a better resurrection (11:35)
10. That because of Christ, God has provided something better for us (11:40)
11. That Christ is the provider of better blood by which we are made righteous and perfect (12:24)

3. “Greater”

Now my desire is not to simply give you a laundry list of thoughts here, but to show you the overwhelming heart of the author of Hebrews as he wants us to be immersed and nearly drown in the splendor and wonder of Christ. And so, even ideas and words like superior and better are not enough as the author also uses a third concept, wanting us to see the greatness of Christ and His provisions. For we see in the book of Hebrews - - -

1. A great salvation (2:3)
2. A great High Priest (4:14, 10:21)
3. A great King (7:1-4)
4. A great conflict of sufferings (by which our better future is confirmed) (10:32)
5. A great reward (for steadfastness and endurance in the faith) (10:35)
6. A great cloud of witnesses (the faithful of chapter 11 who has gone before us) (12:1)
7. A great Shepherd of the sheep (13:20)

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It is as if the author of Hebrews is seeking to exhaust every possible means of showing his readers the depth and riches of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The first audience of this letter were predominately Jewish Christians, those who had followed the Law of Moses and the traditions handed down from the Fathers, all of which had been given to them by God. But now, in Christ, they were being instructed that Christianity had superceded Judaism. Christianity had replaced the older and previous customs, traditions and ways of thinking. We can hardly imagine what it would be like for these Jewish Christians. For unlike most Gentile believers, who had no true knowledge of God apart from Christ, the Jewish people had a divinely instituted religion and a divinely appointed place to worship – the Temple.

Now they were being called upon to forsake such things, things which had been honored and blessed by God in the past. And, as they sought to or did forsake such things, they were not met with glad adoration on the part of their fellow Jews or on the part of the unbelieving masses of pagan Gentiles. Rather, they were met with, as Hebrews 10:32 records, “*great conflicts of sufferings*”...“*being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations*” and having “*accepted joyfully the seizure of [their] property.*” Unlike what many think and so many teach today, there is no earthly advantage to being a Christian! For these, the temptation to go back to the old ways or even to try to blend the old ways with the new so as to lessen the conflict was ever present. As we read through Hebrews we find many, who because of the difficulty of being a Christian, sought either compromise or complete apostasy, that is a falling away.

4. “Heavenly”

And so, the author of Hebrews, wanting his readers to be reminded of what awaits those who are steadfast and those who persevere, uses another key word to draw their attention away from the earthly and up toward that which is heavenly. For in the book of Hebrews we have - - -

1. A heavenly Christ (1:3)
2. A heavenly calling (3:1)
3. A heavenly gift (6:4)
4. Earthly copies of heavenly things (8:5)
5. A heavenly country (11:16)
6. A heavenly Jerusalem (12:22)
7. The church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven (12:23)

Truly one of the lessons of the book of Hebrews is to focus our attention, our thoughts, our hopes and our dreams upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith (12:2), just as the apostle Paul reminds us so eloquently of in Colossians 3:1-2;

1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

This is the heart of the author of Hebrews, that our minds would be set on the eternal and heavenly matters rather than upon that which is merely temporal and earthly. This tells me that the book of Hebrews has much to say to us, who live in a most temporally and

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materially oriented culture. In a world that wants us to grow materially, we need to be reminded that only by growing in Christ will we not only be satisfied, but also encounter the ever-enlarging Christ.

5. The “Warning” Passages

Now this then brings me to a final thought regarding the introduction of this book to you. Another of the emphasized themes of this book is, as we have noted, the steadfastness and persevering nature of genuine believers. Just like there are today, within the first century Church of Jesus Christ were not only true believers, but also others who participated with the church, but either by ignorance or willful disobedience, did not really belong to the church. The author of Hebrews has a passion to call all who may reveal themselves disingenuous to the Christian faith to repent. For within this book there are no less than seven of what have been called warning passages. These passages of Hebrews serve to awaken the potentially slothful, sleepy and separated soul to fully embrace and fully experience the greatness of Christ. Let me identify both the place and purpose of these warnings - - -

1. A warning against drifting from the truth (2:1-4)

Hebrews 2:1

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

2. A warning against a disbelieving heart (3:7-14)

Hebrews 3:12

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

3. A warning against a disobedient life (4:1-13)

Hebrews 4:1

Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

4. A warning against degenerating teaching (5:11-6:8)

Hebrews 6:1-2

1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

5. A warning against despising the Son of God (10:26-39)

Hebrews 10:26

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

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6. A warning against devaluing the grace of God (12:15-17)

Hebrews 12:15

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

7. A warning against defying the voice of God (12:25-27)

Hebrews 12:25

See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.

These serve to call us to a living and vital manifestation of true Christianity. These are calls to live the faith, to walk in a manner worth of the gospel to which we have been called. For we are being taught of the greatness, the grandness, the superiority of Christ over all things. What is there that compares to Him? The book of Hebrews is like the mighty call of God who said, *“To whom then will you liken Me that I would be his equal? says the Holy One (Isaiah 40:25). May our hearts be filled with the cry of the psalmist saying, “Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.” (Psalm 73:25). May we come to desire nothing but the Lord through the book of Hebrews. May we truly come to be like Lucy*

- - -

“Lord...you’re bigger.”

“This is because you’ve grown my child.”

“Not because you are?”

“I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.”

May we come to see Christ as bigger – as our all in all. May we want to see this so badly for ourselves and for others that nothing will stand in our way. And may the God of our salvation prime and prepare us to receive and apply the great truths of this great book. So, as the songwriter has put it, may this be our continual prayer as we study the book of Hebrews - - -

***Speak to me Lord
For your child is here listening
Speak to me Lord
For your child is here waiting on you
Unveil my eyes let me see... see you
Unveil my heart let me know... know you***

Rebecca St. James

Soli Deo Gloria

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Introduction
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