

“THE SON’S SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS”

I. Introduction

- A. We saw last week that Hebrews begins by immediately getting to its main point.
1. The opening verses present Jesus Christ as the supreme mediator between God and man.
 2. This theme continues to be in view in the remainder of chapter 1, where the writer narrows in on one particular aspect of Christ’s superiority: his superiority over angels.
 3. Angels played an important role at several points in Old Testament history, most notably during the period of the exodus and conquest.
 4. While the Old Testament does not give us a lot of information about angels, the little that it does tell us makes it clear that they are impressive creatures.
 5. This is confirmed in the New Testament, especially in the book of Revelation, where on two occasions the apostle John is so overwhelmed by the sight of an angel that he falls down at his feet to worship him and is subsequently rebuked by the angel.
 6. By asserting Christ’s superiority over angels, the writer of Hebrews is putting Christ above the most impressive of all of God’s servants.
- B. Another notable aspect of this passage is that it marks the beginning of the writer’s extensive use of Old Testament quotations.
1. This text contains seven Old Testament citations, which the writer uses to support his assertion in verse 4 that Christ is

superior to angels.

2. By using these quotes in this way, the writer shows how he views the Old Testament.
 3. He sees the Old Testament as thoroughly Christ-centered.
 4. This is why the prospect of renouncing Christ to go back to Judaism -- which is what these Christians were considering -- is utterly unthinkable to him.
 5. To do so would be to go back to an empty shell of religion.
- C. In tonight's sermon, we will examine the writer's argument in three sections.
1. First, he has been enthroned as God's Son.
 2. Second, Jesus is superior to angels because he rules over an eternal kingdom.
 3. And third, Jesus is superior to angels because he has an eschatological kingdom.

II. Enthronement as God's Son (vv. 5-6)

- A. We begin by looking at the writer's first argument for why Christ is superior to angels: while angels are God's messengers, Jesus is enthroned as God's Son.
1. This point is made in verse 5 through the use of two Old Testament quotations.
 2. The first is taken from Psalm 2, where God says this to the Davidic king, his anointed one: "You are my Son, today I have begotten you."
 3. The second quote is from 2 Samuel 7, where God sets up a covenant with David and makes this promise about David's offspring: "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a

son.”

4. Both of these quotes connect Jesus’ identity as God’s Son with the Davidic kingship.
 5. This helps us to see what the writer has in mind when he speaks of Jesus as God’s Son in these verses.
 6. He is not referring to Jesus’ eternal Sonship as the second person of the Godhead.
 7. He certainly affirms Jesus’ full deity, as we see later in the passage, but this is not what he is saying here.
 8. Instead, the term “Son” is being used to describe Jesus’ royal anointing over the eternal kingdom that God promised to give to the righteous offspring of David, the one who would build a house for God’s name.
 9. In other words, “Son” is a messianic title here.
 10. Jesus was only declared to be God’s Son in this messianic sense after he showed himself to be God’s faithful covenant servant by fulfilling the commission that was entrusted to him.
 11. This is what Paul means in Romans 1:4 when he says that Jesus “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.”
 12. Though Jesus has always been the Son of God in his essential nature, he was only declared to be God’s Son in this messianic sense after he had completed his messianic mission.
- B. This theme of royal sonship continues in verse 6, where Jesus is referred to as “the firstborn.”

1. As with the name "Son" in verse 5, this is not being used in a biological sense but as a title of honor.
 2. The firstborn is the heir.
 3. God's bringing of Jesus into the world as firstborn did not take place at Jesus' birth but at the time of his resurrection and ascension.
 4. He was only appointed heir of all things when he completed his mediatorial work.
 5. And the fact that he has been exalted to the supreme place in all creation demonstrates that he is superior to angels.
- C. This leads to the Old Testament quotation in the second half of verse 7, where it says, "Let all God's angels worship him."
1. This is cited from Deuteronomy 32:43, although it is also similar to Psalm 97:7.
 2. The key thing to note here is that in the original context in Deuteronomy, Moses is summoning angels to worship God.
 3. The writer of Hebrews is taking that passage and applying it to Jesus.
 4. Jesus is entitled to receive the worship not just of men but also of angels.
 5. Clearly, he is no mere man.
 6. He is fully God as well as fully man.

III. An Eternal Kingdom (vv. 7-12)

- A. We turn now to verses 7 through 12, where the focus shifts to the fact that Jesus rules over an eternal kingdom.

1. The writer begins this line of argument by quoting Psalm 104:4, which says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire."
 2. This verse is taken from a psalm in which the Lord is being praised for how the created order displays his glory.
 3. Angels are a part of the created order.
 4. They are God's creatures.
 5. And the point that is being made about them in this verse is that they are mutable.
 6. Though they are not physical, they sometimes appear in human likeness.
 7. They can even be transformed into elemental forces like wind and fire at God's bidding.
- B. In verses 8 and 9, the writer shows us that Jesus stands in sharp contrast to this by quoting from another psalm.
1. He cites Psalm 45, where it says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."
 2. Psalm 45 was originally composed for the wedding of a Davidic king.
 3. In the verses that are cited, the king is the one who is being addressed.
 4. The reason why he is called "God" is because he reigned as the Lord's anointed.
 5. He is addressed as "God" because he served as a foreshadowing of Christ, ruling on his throne at a particular

point in history.

6. This is the reason why the writer can say that this king's throne is "forever and ever."
 7. No human king has a throne that is forever and ever, but Jesus does because he himself is eternal.
- C. Another thing that is in view in this quote from Psalm 45 is the morality of Jesus' kingdom.
1. He rules with the scepter of uprightness.
 2. He loves righteousness and hates wickedness.
 3. More precisely, the text says, "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness."
 4. In other words, Jesus has perfectly fulfilled God's law.
 5. It is because of his perfect devotion to righteousness that God has anointed him over all things.
- D. We turn now to verses 10 through 12, where the writer quotes Psalm 102:25-27.
1. The interesting thing about this quote is that the writer takes words that were originally addressed to Yahweh and makes them refer to Christ.
 2. He is saying that Jesus laid the foundation of the earth.
 3. Jesus is the Creator.
 4. This is another clear assertion of Jesus's deity.
 5. The point that is being made in this quote is the contrast between the created order and its Creator.

6. This world is subject to change and decay.
 7. It will all wear out like a garment.
 8. Think of all the clothes you have had over the years.
 9. No matter how you care for them, they wear out.
 10. That is what the world is like.
 11. On the last day, Christ will roll it up like a robe.
- E. Set in sharp contrast to this is the fact that Jesus always remains the same.
1. His years will have no end.
 2. His kingdom will endure forever and ever.
 3. What a comfort this is for us as we live in such an unstable and ever-changing world.
 4. We belong to the changeless One, the Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. An Eschatological Kingdom (vv. 13-14)

- A. This brings us to the last two verses of the chapter, where the writer focuses upon the fact that Christ's kingdom is an eschatological kingdom.
1. The term 'eschatological' means 'pertaining to the last things.'
 2. In other words, Jesus' kingdom is the final goal towards which all of history is moving.
 3. This kingdom has already been inaugurated, but it has not yet reached its consummated state.

4. This is why the writer can say in verse 2 that God's revelation in Christ has been given "in these last days."
- B. In verse 13, the writer points to the eschatological nature of Christ's kingdom by quoting Psalm 110:1, where God says to the Son: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."
1. God has never said such a thing to any of the angels.
 2. This is something that is unique to the Son.
 3. When Jesus ascended back into heaven, he was seated in glory at God's right hand, and he remains there while his kingdom expands throughout the earth.
 4. In his commentary on this passage, Calvin points out that this citation from Psalm 110 shows us two important things.
 5. First, it shows us "that the kingdom of Christ shall never in this world be at rest, but that there will be many enemies by whom it will be disturbed;"
 6. "secondly, [it shows us] that whatever its enemies may do, they shall never prevail, for the session of Christ at God's right hand will not be for a time, but to the end of the world, and that on this account all who will not submit to his authority shall be laid prostrate and trodden under his feet."
 7. As we observe the many troubling things that are happening in the world around us, it is important for us to remember that Jesus Christ is presently reigning over all.
 8. Even though his glory as king is not yet manifest to all, he remains seated at God's right hand.
- C. In both Reformed and Lutheran theology, this truth is explained by distinguishing between Christ's reign in grace and his reign in glory.

1. Jesus is presently reigning over all, but this is the era of grace, the era when he is subduing his people to his gracious rule.
 2. At present, he is reigning in grace.
 3. When he returns, he will reign in glory.
 4. Michael Horton explains it this way: “In its present phase, the kingdom is like its King before he was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father. It can only appear weak and foolish to the world, even though this kingdom is more extensive in its global reach and more intensive in its redemptive power than any earthly empire in history... The claim ‘Jesus is Lord’ is not simply a confession of his deity. It is that and more. The important eschatological point that this claim makes is that in Jesus Christ the threats to God’s promises being fulfilled have been conquered objectively and will be realized fully in the age to come. There are no powers, authorities, thrones, or dominions that can thwart his purposes, although they may present fierce opposition until they are finally destroyed.” [*The Christian Faith*, 524, 527]
- D. As we come to the last verse in our passage, we find an interesting statement about angels.
1. Unlike Jesus, no angel is reigning on God’s throne.
 2. Angels are servants that God sends into the world to do his bidding.
 3. And verse 14 tells us that God sends his angels into the world “to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.”
 4. In other words, God sends his angels into the world for our benefit.

- E. People like to think about angels serving as man's helpers.
1. Angels remain popular even when God is not.
 2. I noticed that the Laconia Adult Education program has a class on angels this year entitled, "Angel Cards for Guidance."
 3. In the popular thinking about angels, they function as supernatural agents who help people attain this-worldly goals.
 4. But this is not what verse 14 is telling us about angels.
 5. Angels are at work in our world, but their function is to advance God's saving purposes in the lives of the elect.
- F. The Bible does not tell us a lot about angels, but the things that it does tell us have been given for our benefit.
1. Of course, we need to be careful not to speculate about angelic activity.
 2. But we can certainly take comfort in the fact that we belong to a Savior who has the hosts of heaven at his command.
 3. In Psalm 91, the psalmist has this to say about the one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High: "he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways." (Ps. 91:11)