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THE GLORY OF CHRIST IN HEBREWS

Hebrews Review

By

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April 10, 2005

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Hebrews Lesson 59

The Glory of Christ in Hebrews Hebrews Review

I could have ended our series on Hebrews after the last message, but I sensed the need to do a wrap-up emphasizing the great theme of Hebrews, the glory of Jesus Christ. But as soon as I thought about doing that, I felt like a kindergarten artist trying to paint a replica of a Rembrandt masterpiece. How can I do justice to such a great theme as the glory of Jesus Christ? It is far beyond my ability!

If I had the eloquence of Spurgeon, maybe I could do a better job at this. I always feel in over my head when I preach, but today I feel ten times more inadequate than usual. So I can only cast myself on the Lord and ask Him to glorify His name. I want to do a review of the entire book, focusing on what it teaches about the person and work of our glorious Savior.

There is nothing more important in life than to gain a biblical, personal knowledge of Jesus Christ and of what He did for us on the cross. The apostle Paul put it this way (Phil. 3:8), "... I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ." Let go of status, reputation, worldly goods, earthly comforts, and everything else, but *know Jesus Christ!* He is *everything!* If you have Christ and lose everything else, you still have all that you need for time and eternity. If you gain the whole world without Christ, you have nothing!

The author of Hebrews was writing to a group of Jewish believers in Christ who were facing the impending threat of persecution. Some were turning away from Christ and going back to Judaism. The author knew that the only way his readers would stand firm even to the point of death was to have the proper view of Jesus Christ in all His glory, and to understand how Jesus is the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament pointed toward. Staying focused on the glory of Christ's person and His priesthood would give them the strength to endure any persecution by faith. We may sum up the theme of the entire Book of Hebrews:

Seeing the glory of Christ in His person and priesthood will strengthen us to endure trials by faith.

The Puritan John Owen wrote, "The glory of God comprehends both the holy properties of His nature and the counsels of His will; and the light of the knowledge of these things we have only in the face or person of Jesus Christ" (*The Glory of Christ*, ed. by Wilbur Smith [Moody Press], p. 55). (Read that again so that you grasp what he's saying.) Jesus Christ came to reveal to us God's holy nature and the counsels of His will. In Hebrews 10:7, the author cites Psalm 40:7 with reference to Jesus, "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.'"

To display God's absolute holiness, His justice and wrath in punishing all sin, but also His infinite mercy and love in providing the sacrifice that His justice demands, Jesus came to offer Himself on the cross in our place. In order for His sacrifice to be of value beyond Himself, He had to be God. In order for it to apply to us, He had to be man. Thus the author of Hebrews begins by showing us the person of Jesus Christ as God and man.

1. We should continually ask God to reveal to us Christ in His glorious person (Hebrews 1-4).

The author doesn't mess around. He gets right into his subject by showing us that...

A. Jesus Christ is God's final revelation to us (1:1-3).

"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 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. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

I devoted two sermons to these wonderful verses, but we could probably wallow in them for seven sermons! I remind you of the quote from John Calvin that I gave when we considered these verses. He is emphasizing that the author's point is not theological, but practical: "His purpose was really to build up our faith, so that we may learn that God is made known to us in no other way than

in Christ: for as to the essence of God, so immense is the brightness that it dazzles our eyes, except it shines on us in Christ" (*Calvin's Commentaries* [Baker reprint], on Hebrews 1:3, pp. 35-36). There are seven statements about Jesus here:

- (1) Jesus Christ is the heir of all things.
- (2) Through Him God made the world [ages].
- (3) He is the radiance of God's glory.
- (4) He is the exact representation of God's nature.
- (5) He upholds all things by the word of His power.
- (6) He has made purification for our sins.
- (7) He now sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

I cannot go over these phrases in detail here (I refer you to my message, "The Supremacy of the Son," 11/23/03). But I will say that I cannot understand how anyone can read those verses, not to mention the ones immediately following, without concluding that Jesus Christ is "very God of very God," as the Nicene Creed puts it. The author goes on to show that...

B. Jesus exceeds the angels in glory (1:4-14).

The Bible reveals, contrary to modern TV shows about angels, that the angels are glorious creatures. Daniel (10:6) describes his vision of an angel, "His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult." Daniel's response was (Dan. 10:8), "no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength." It wiped him out so that he fell into a deep sleep. When the angel awakened him, Daniel trembled on his hands and knees (10:9-10).

That was just an angel, but the author here shows that the Son of God is so superior to the angels that (Heb. 1:6), "when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, 'And let all the angels of God worship Him.'" In case we missed the point, the author contrasts the angels, who serve God as flames of fire (1:7) with the Son (1:8): "But of the Son He says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His [many manuscripts read, Your] kingdom.'"

As if that were not enough, he goes on (1:10-12) to cite from Psalm 102:25-27, applying to Jesus what the Old Testament clearly ascribes to God: "And, 'You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain; and they all will become old like a garment, and like a mantle You will roll them up; like a garment they will also be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.'" He cinches it up by asking (1:13), "But to which of the angels has He ever said, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet?'" To sit at God's right hand is too great a privilege for any created being. That honor belongs to the eternal Son of God alone!

But it is important that we not only understand Jesus' deity, but also His perfect humanity. Thus after a practical exhortation (2:1-4), the author continues,

C. Jesus is not only fully God, but also fully human (2:5-18).

Here the author introduces the theme that is prominent later in the book, that Jesus came into this world to suffer and die for our sins. Jesus' death was not an accident. It was not an unexpected twist of fate that thwarted God's plan. Rather, the death of Jesus fulfilled God's plan to rescue us from the ravages of sin. The author makes the shocking statement (2:10), "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings."

By the phrases, "for whom are all things, and through whom are all things," the author is saying that *God is the first and final cause of all that is*, including the plan of salvation through the death of His Son. And, he is showing that *God actively governs His creation*, working "all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). So the death of Jesus on our behalf was *fitting* (what a word!) because it works for God's glory in accord with His eternal purpose. It was fitting because it displayed God's perfect attributes of righteousness, justice, power, wisdom, love, and grace. Jesus' death was fitting because it displayed His perfect humanity and it confirmed Him as the Captain (NASB, "author") of our salvation. Jesus' death triumphed over Satan and the power of death (2:14). Jesus is now our

“merciful and faithful high priest” (2:17), who “is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (2:18).

You would think that to portray Jesus as fully God, superior to the angels, and fully human, who offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins, would be enough. But the author was writing to Jews who regarded Moses as the greatest man who had ever lived. So he proceeds to show that...

D. Jesus is greater in glory than Moses (Hebrews 3).

The theme of the entire book is summed up in two words (3:1), “consider Jesus...” “Consider” means “to think about something by taking the time to observe it carefully.” Often our problem is that we do not take the time to consider Jesus as He is revealed in God’s Word. Moses went up into the mountain and spent forty days alone with God. When he came down, his face shone with the glory of God that he had seen up there. But Jesus came from heaven itself, from the very presence of God, to reveal God to us.

Jesus made the astonishing claim (Luke 10:22), “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” What a statement! If you want to know the living God, you must ask the Son to reveal Him to you, because you cannot know either the Father or the Son apart from divine revelation. After Peter made his confession about Jesus’ identity, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 16:16-17).

No mere man could make such claims! After His resurrection, Jesus told the disciples (Luke 24:44), “all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Those are the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible. Thus all Scripture points to Jesus, who was sent by God’s sovereign plan to reveal Him and accomplish His will. As such, Jesus is greater than Moses and all the prophets combined!

But what about the Old Testament promises about the Promised Land and the Sabbath? The author shows that...

- E. Jesus provides the eternal rest that Joshua could not provide (Hebrews 4).

As we saw, Hebrews 4 is not talking about experiencing inner peace or rest in the midst of trials. Rather, the author's concern was that his readers, like many in Israel in the wilderness, will be associated with God's people, but will miss God's salvation because of their unbelief. He shows that salvation has always been offered to God's people under the imagery of rest. Only Christ can provide true rest for our souls when we rest from our works and trust in His work completely. As Jesus promised (Matt. 11:28), "Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

In a similar way, the author concludes Hebrews 4 by telling us that Jesus is our high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses. He invites us (4:16) to "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

So in the first four chapters, the author extols the glorious person of Jesus Christ. As you read God's Word, ask Him to reveal more and more of Christ to your soul.

2. We should ask God to reveal to us Christ in His glorious priesthood (Hebrews 5:1-10:18).

Hebrews is the only book that presents Jesus Christ as our high priest. Modern readers may tend to find this extended section of Hebrews rather boring and irrelevant. But if you want to know the significance of this central theme of Hebrews (the priesthood of Christ), you must ask God for a clearer understanding of His absolute holiness and majesty. No Hebrew would have dared to go into the Holy of Holies and approach the altar, where God's glory was manifested. Also, ask Him for a deeper insight into your own sinfulness apart from Christ. This will lead you into a deeper appreciation of what Jesus did for you on the cross as the high priest who entered the holy place, not with the blood of bulls and goats, but with His own blood (9:11-14).

A deeper appreciation of God's holiness, your own sinfulness, and the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice is one of the most practical doctrines in the Bible, because it humbles your pride. Pride is at the root of every relational conflict and just about any sin that you can

name. So ask God to reveal to your heart Jesus Christ in His glorious priesthood. We can only trace some of the broad themes of this section.

A. Jesus our high priest is superior to Aaron and his priesthood (Hebrews 5-7).

In 5:1-10, he shows that Jesus is the kind of high priest that every sinner needs. From 5:11 through chapter 6, the author exhorts his readers to “press on to maturity” (6:1). After the severe warning of 6:4-8, he comforts them with the assurance that he is “convinced of better things” concerning them, namely, “things that accompany salvation” (6:9). He points to Jesus as the anchor for our souls, the forerunner who has entered beyond the veil as our high priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek (6:19-20). Chapter 7 is an explanation of why Jesus, as a priest after the order of Melchizedek, is superior to the Aaronic priests. Through Him, we can draw near to God and be assured of our salvation.

B. Jesus our high priest is superior to the old covenant (Hebrews 8:1-10:18).

I can only give a bare summary of this important section:

- (1) Jesus offers better promises than the old covenant did (8:1-13).
- (2) Jesus offers a better tabernacle than the old covenant did (9:1-14).
- (3) Jesus offers a better sacrifice than the old covenant did (9:15-10:18).

The final section of the book shows how we should apply these great truths about Christ’s glorious person and priesthood:

3. Seeing the glory of Christ in His person and priesthood will strengthen us to endure trials by faith (10:19-13:25).

After the severe warning at the end of chapter 10, chapter 11 points us to those who endured by faith, looking ahead to God’s promises in Christ, which we have received. The author exhorts us to submit to God’s discipline, which He brings so that we will share His holiness (12:1-13). He concludes chapter 12 by contrasting God’s revelation at Mount Sinai with the glorious kingdom at Mount Zion, which we receive by coming to Jesus and the new

covenant in His blood. Therefore, we must endure by faith, even if it means suffering and reproach, because we are seeking that heavenly city which is to come (13:14).

Conclusion

So the message of Hebrews is that the way to endure any kind of severe trial by faith is to see the glory of Christ in His matchless person and His glory as our high priest.

I want to conclude by playing a brief tape of an invocation given by a Pastor Lockwood. I don't know the man, but as you will hear, he can certainly preach Christ! (I include the transcript here, but to do it justice, you need to hear it. In a couple of places I could not make out his exact wording. These are in brackets with a question mark.) Here is Pastor Lockwood:

"The Bible says my king is a seven way king. He's the king of the Jews, that's a racial king. He's the king of Israel, that's a national king. He's the king of righteousness. He's the king of the ages. He's the king of heaven. He's the king of glory. He's the King of kings. And He is the Lord of lords. That's my king. Well, I wonder do you know Him?

"David said the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork. My king is a sovereign king. No means of measure can define His limitless love. No farseeing telescope can bring into visibility the [coastline of his surely supplies?]. No barrier can hinder him from pouring out his blessings. He's enduringly strong. He's entirely sincere. He's eternally steadfast. He's immortally graceful. He's imperially powerful. He's impartially merciful. Do you know Him?

"He's the greatest phenomenon that has ever crossed the horizon of this world. He's God's Son. He's the sinner's Savior. He's the centerpiece of civilization. He stands in the solitude of Himself. He's august and he's unique. He's unparalleled. He's unprecedented. He is the loftiest idea in literature. He is the highest personality in philosophy. He is the supreme problem in higher criticism. He is the fundamental doctrine of true theology. He is the [kernel?], the necessity for spiritual religion. He's the miracle of the age. He's is the superlative of everything good that you choose to

call Him. He's the only one who's qualified to be an all-sufficient Savior. I wonder if you know Him today?

"He supplies strength for the weak. He's available for the tempted and the tried. He sympathizes and he saves. He strengthens and sustains. He guards and he guides. He heals the sick. He cleansed the lepers. He forgives sinners. He discharges debtors. He delivers the captives. He defends the feeble. He blesses the young. He serves the unfortunate. He regards the aged. He rewards the diligent. And He beautifies the meek. I wonder if you know Him?"

"Well, my king, He is a key. He's the key to knowledge. He's a well-spring of wisdom. He's a doorway of deliverance. He's the pathway of peace. He's the roadway of righteousness. He's the highway of holiness. He's the gateway of glory. Do you know Him?"

"Well, his office is manifold. His promise is sure. His life is matchless. His goodness is limitless. His mercy is everlasting. His love never changes. His word is enough. His grace is sufficient. His reign is righteous and His yoke is easy and His burden is light. I wish I could describe Him to you, yeah, but He is indescribable. Yes, He is, good God, He's indescribable, yes He's indescribable. He's incomprehensible. He's invincible. He's irresistible.

"Well, you can't get Him out of your mind. You can't get Him off of your hand. You can't outlive Him and you can't live without Him. Well, the Pharisees couldn't stand Him, but they found out they couldn't stop Him. Pilate couldn't find any fault in Him. The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree. Herod couldn't kill Him. Death couldn't handle Him. And the grave couldn't hold Him. Yeah! That's my king! That's my king! And Thine is the kingdom and the power and glory forever, and ever and ever and ever—how long is that—and ever and ever and when you get through with all of the forevers, then Amen."

Discussion Questions

1. Apart from prayer and the Word, how can we gain a clearer knowledge of the glory of Christ? See John 14:21.
2. Can a person deny either the deity of Jesus or His humanity and be saved? Consider 1 John 2:22-23; 4:15; 5:20; 2 John 7, 9.
3. How does the doctrine of Christ's priesthood apply practically to every person?
4. Someone asks you, "How can I have stronger faith?" Based on the message of Hebrews, how would you answer?

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