



## **The God We Worship, Part 6: Jesus Christ, the Radiance of the Glory of God**

*Series: The Wonder of Worship*

Hebrews 1:1-3

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This text that we have before us this morning is one of the quintessential texts in the NT describing the uniqueness and supremacy of Jesus Christ. It stands with John 1 and with Colossians 1 as one of the classic texts about Jesus. It is text, and I say this with no exaggeration, which could be preached for a year – different aspects expounded upon and fleshed out, different trails followed – and after preaching it, it still would hold a wealth of spiritual truth yet untouched. So to distill the essence of this text in 50 minutes or so seems an impossible task. I can say that though I feel the weight of the task and my desperate need for God’s grace every week as I prepare to preach to you, I have felt my inadequacy as acutely this week as I ever have. This text is that weighty.

Now, over the last several weeks as we have been considering the character of the God whom we worship, we have been exclusively in the OT, haven’t we? We have moved from text to text gaining a greater and more complete picture of God with every passage studied. And as we have worked through these passages – a prophet’s vision, an historical narrative, a prophecy, and a couple of psalms – we have been constructing a mosaic of who God is. We have all seen mosaics haven’t we; pictures of people that are really a mosaic, a montage, of different scenes sort of pasted together to give us a picture of someone. When you see the picture up close, you see all the little pictures individually and the fullness of the mosaic is lost to you. But then you step back and you see the bigger picture that all of these individual pictures are creating. It is an earthly analogy, but that is sort of how the OT works in giving us a picture of the character and nature of God. It gives us individual pictures in different places that compose a whole.

But in Christ, we have the very portrait of God. We have a distinct, clear, focused, detailed, picture of the glory of God, the majesty of God, the greatness and wonder of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It isn’t something that we see on our own, not something that we can

comprehend with natural eyes, with natural perception. Indeed, Paul says that in order to really comprehend the fullness of God in Christ, we need God to give us spiritual light. “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6, ESV) Christ shines with the glory of God. He is worthy in every respect to be worshipped and praised and adored and we will see that truth paraded before our eyes in some of the most powerful words ever penned by a man in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This text that we are looking at today is really the introduction to a sermon, a sermon to Jewish Christians who needed to be strengthened and needed to be reminded of the glory and supremacy of Christ, the Son of God, the radiance of God’s glory. It is a sermon that I hope, by God’s will, to be able to preach all the way through at some point, but what we are going to look at today in only the introduction is just staggering to the soul. And it begins with the overwhelming declaration that God has spoken with finality in His Son. Jesus Christ is the final Word of Father God.

Jesus, the Final Word of Father God (1-2a) Look at these words with me: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” (Hebrews 1:1–2, ESV) The writer of Hebrews begins with what I have already alluded to in the introduction. God is God who speaks. He speaks so that He may be known and worshipped by His people. He wants us to know Him and throughout the redemptive history recorded for us in the OT, God has revealed Himself at various times and in various ways – the idea is through various portions and in various manners. God has spoken throughout history, revealing Himself and His glory with various methods. To some He spoke directly, such as with Abraham and Moses, others through dreams and visions, some through angels, He spoke through the wisdom literature, but most often God spoke through His prophets. But the revelation was fragmentary – here some and there some. He revealed some things to Abraham, some to Moses, some to Daniel, some to Isaiah, and others. And each of these men added to the pool of knowledge about God – another glimpse of His character and person building the mosaic of Who God is. This was all good and all true and all right, but the final and complete revelation of God was only accomplished through His Son. It is in Christ that all of the revelation of God is made complete.

It is not that there was a deficiency in the OT revelation. The writer of Hebrews is not belittling the OT revelation of God, it’s just that OT revelation has always been pointing to this one thing

– to the full revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ – in the life and character and acts of His Son. The OT finds its fulfillment in all of its teaching, in its redemptive history, in its prophecy, in its praise songs, in its revelation of the character and person of God in our Lord Jesus Christ. OT revelation was absolutely true, but it was progressive and incomplete. One prophet built upon another in anticipation of the full revelation of the Glory of God in the Messiah, Jesus Christ – the revelation of God in what the writer of Hebrews calls “these last days.” We have the blessing of living in these last days – in the era of God’s final revelation of Jesus Christ. And through the verb tense for “has spoken,” the writer of Hebrews shows that God’s revelation is complete and it is final in Christ.

What the writer means for us to see here is that the Lord Jesus Christ is not one of many revelations, not like the revelations of God to His prophets. He is THE revelation of the invisible God. He is not one of many words. He is THE Word of God. Immediately it makes us think of the words of John when he wrote: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” (John 1:1-2, 14, 18, ESV) We cannot see God, cannot know God, cannot hear God, cannot come near to God, cannot worship God except by Christ who is God, Who is the Word of God. Do you see it? Jesus does not merely share the message of God; He Himself is the message because He Himself is God. The Word, Jesus Christ, who is God is God the Father’s final revelation to the world and the revelation of God in Christ is amazing – that is what the writer of Hebrews wants us to see. He wants to set Christ apart as glorious and watch how he does this. With seven phrases he magnificently exalts Christ as the final word from God.

Seven Phrases of Exaltation (v2b-3) The preacher of Hebrews says of the Son that He is the One “whom he (the Father) 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,” (Hebrews 1:2–3, ESV) Now I want you to see the way in which the preacher of Hebrews establishes the majesty of Christ. It is pretty amazing the way that he does this. He heaps phrase upon phrase, slowly building to a climax, slowly building to an apex and then he leaves us with a glorious reality and future anticipation.

First, he begins with the statement that the Father has appointed Jesus the heir of all things. The first thing that you need to know about Jesus, the writer of Hebrews says, is that God the Father has made Him the heir of all things. Now what does that mean? God the Father, as the Head of the Trinity, is the One to whom all things belong. And as the Father and owner of all things, it has pleased the Father to give it all to Christ. Jesus the Son has been appointed by God as the possessor of the whole of creation. By divine decree, by virtue of His infinite and glorious righteousness, the Father has given all of creation to the Son. We see this echoed in the words of Psalm 2. "I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 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." (Psalm 2:7–12, ESV)

This is the first declaration of the supremacy of Jesus – God has appointed Him heir of all things. By rightful and lawful possession, God has made Him heir of all things, possessor of creation, of earth, sky, sea and all that is in them, possessor of your life, your family, your neighbor, your city, your nation. He has the absolute right to do exactly what He will with all things. Everything on this earth, in the universe, all power, all authority belongs to Him. Everything belongs to the Son of God so "Kiss the Son," lest the Lord be angry with you. Honor Him as you should; worship Him as you should. He owns you and everything you can and cannot see. And it is only right that He should for it is by Jesus Christ, the Son...

Through whom also he (God the Father) created the world...here we hear the echoes of the Apostle John when he wrote: "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:3, ESV) The preacher of Hebrews is picking up steam...do you see it? The Son is not only the heir of all things, He is the agent of creation. God the Father made everything through Him. This is Who Jesus is. Look at the sun and the moon and the stars. Look at the galaxies through a telescope. The measurements of the universe were laid down by Christ, the power of our sun and the brilliance of stars, some of them 450 quadrillion times brighter than it is, energized by His sovereign, irresistible, almighty power. The great creatures of the earth and of the sea, Jesus made them. Jesus established the mountain peaks; formed the rivers, carpeted the earth with grass and flowers and plants and trees. It was Jesus that made the fish, the reptiles, the insects, the birds, the flocks and the herds. And it was Jesus who created man. He made man in the image and after the likeness of God, creating the

very flesh that He would take to Himself at the appointed time to accomplish the salvation of His people.

Then look at the intricacies of all of life and nature through the most powerful microscope. Every microorganism, the microcosm we cannot see, the DNA code that orders everything about us, all of it bears His signature. All the laws of physics and of nature – really the laws of God -- gravity, inertia, combustion, mass, velocity, time, motion – Christ created them all in perfect concert with one another, in perfect working relationship, all at the same time. There is nothing that exists that does not owe its ultimate existence to Him. It was all made by Him. All things were made through Him. But that’s not all. Listen to Paul’s testimony in Colossians 1: “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:16–17, ESV)

All things in earth, all things in the heavenlies – angels, dominions, rulers, authorities – all created by Him and for Him. And it not just that He created it – it all holds together in Him. John Gill says: He “bears up the pillars of the universe, preserves every creature in its being, and supports it and supplies it with all the necessities of life; rules and governs all, and providentially orders and disposes of all things in the world, and that by his all-powerful will; which makes it manifest that he is truly and properly God.” How does Christ do all this – effortlessly, he upholds the universe by the word of his power. He does it by the word of His power – with a word, easily with no exertion. This is tremendous power with which we are dealing. The same word with which He creates He sustains – but that phrase—upholds the universe by the word of His power--- as we will see in a moment, means even more.

So what has the writer of Hebrews been telling us? Jesus is the final word from God, the final revelation of God, the Son is the final word from God and we should pay attention, first, because Jesus is the heir of everything. Everything was made through Him and so He has absolute and sovereign dominion over it all – all things great and small, in heaven and earth, down to your very soul. You need to hear Him and behold Him and if these reasons were not enough, you need to honor Him because of what the writer of Hebrews says in these next two phrases that we need to take together...

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...Here is where the words of the writer of Hebrews come to their stunning climax, to their pinnacle, to their apex. He uses two words here, two words in connection, to drive home the truth of who Jesus is, radiance and imprint. Let's take radiance first. He is the radiance of God. That word radiance is a word that means "the shining forth" of something, like the rays from the sun. God's glory, all of the wonders of His divine person – His holiness, His love, His grace, His mercy, His wisdom, His knowledge, His power, His justice, His holiness, His immutability, His compassion, His omniscience, omnipotence, His anger, His wrath, His kindness, His patience, all of His attributes – shine forth to be seen in all of their glorious fullness in Christ. All you need to know about God, all God wants to disclose about Himself, all the beauty of His character, all His attributes, all His saving purpose, all His ability to supply everything we could ever need, all things necessary to save us, all things necessary to empower us, all things necessary to comfort us and give us hope, all things necessary to equip us, all things necessary to prepare us for service and for glory, everything we need is unveiled in one place, in one person, Jesus Christ. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. Jesus said "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9, ESV)

And it is oh so true. In His birth in humble circumstances we see the intrinsic glory of God in Christ, found not in external trappings but in His person alone, a glory sung by the angels. When He is worshipped by the shepherds and later by the magi, we see His sovereign kingship on display. In the temple as a 12 year old, confounding the teachers by His questions we see God's wisdom radiating forth. When He endures such temptation at the hands of Satan in the wilderness, and every day in which he lived upon this earth, never sinning in thought or deed, what does that proclaim but the righteousness and purity of God? When He feeds five thousand, stills the winds and the waves, casts out devils and heals the sick we see God's power, His providence, His mercy and His compassion. When he clears the temple and outwits the religious leaders, when he condemns sin and hypocrisy, the justice of God burns brightly. When we see Him teach, preach, tell parables and speak to the multitudes, there shines forth the truth and authority of God. Never man spoke like this Man. When we watch Him love His disciples, bearing with them, laboring for their souls, we behold the brightness of God's hesed, His steadfast and patient love. When we see Him receiving sinners, forgiving sins and binding up the brokenhearted, giving freedom to the oppressed and conflicted, what is this but the illumination of God's grace? When He raised the dead, we see before our eyes, shining brightly, the power of life that is in God alone. When we see Him, altogether different in essence, in character, in power in purity, in mercy, in authority and all the rest –what does that do but radiate the very holiness, the glorious otherness, of God?

All that God is — the measureless sum of his eternal and eternally rich attributes — shines forth in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son. Jesus is supremely radiant. But we have to make sure that we do not make the mistake of interchanging the word "radiance" with "reflection." "Radiance" does not mean reflection. He is not like the moon. When we look at full moon, it seems like it shines brightly but that is just an appearance. The truth is that the moon has no ability to shine at all. It is a dead ball of dusty rock. Its brightness is only a reflection of the sun's light. Christ is not a reflection of God's glory, as the moon reflects the sun, but He is the radiance of God's glory, as the light and energy waves bring the power of the sun to us. Without rays of the sun, which are part and parcel of the sun, we could not see the sun or feel its heat. The same is true here: without Jesus Christ, we could not see God. And just so we never make that mistake, so we never confuse radiance with reflection, the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the exact imprint of his nature.

The words "exact imprint" refer to minted coins that bear the image of a die or a press used to make them. It refers to a precise reproduction of the original. The point that the writer of Hebrews is making, with the limited nature of the words available to him to describe eternal realities, is that the Son is completely the same in being as the Father. Different in person, but exactly alike in essence. The word "imprint" might throw us off track, as though it means something less than the original. But the writer wants us to see the distinctness of the Son in his person compared with the Father. The Father is God and the Son is God. You can see this in the word "nature." "Nature" translates a term that means "something which stands underneath" or "foundation." It refers to the real nature of God that underlies the person of Jesus Christ. Whatever the divine essence is, Jesus is the perfect expression of it because He is God. And here is the thing. The One who is the visible, glorious manifestation of the attributes of God and who is distinctly God in nature, yet also distinctly man — that he would die for us to purify us from our sins through the agony of the cross and His resurrection from the dead is the greatest display of all of the glory of God.

That the personal radiance of God's glory, that God in the flesh would make "purification for sins", that He would save His people and once and for all, that He would, by His own sacrifice, by the shedding of His holy blood, make a full and complete salvation for His people — in this the radiance of God's glory most fully seen. I like how DA Carson says it: "His whole life manifested the glory of God, but his dying was the most spectacular display of God's glory...." He's right. To see Jesus on the cross is to see the shining forth of all of God's attributes in the work of redemption. It is in the work of the cross that we see Jesus, in all that He did, supremely radiating the glory of God while He was on this earth.

It is in the cross that we see the holy otherness of God displayed. Who else but God would offer up His Son, the perfection of God incarnate, as the sinners' substitute that God would be pleased to forgive sinners through the sacrifice of His Son? None would conceive of this but God. Who else but God the Son would offer Himself, "for the joy that was set before him (of redeeming sinners like us) enduring the cross, despising the shame?" (cf. Hebrews 12:2, ESV) There is no one like God. Where else do we see more clearly the burning righteousness of God against sin than when He crushes His Son as the sinners' substitute, God's infinite and relentless righteousness pursuing His vindication by unleashing all His rightful and just wrath upon the Substitute for all that is evil, wicked and filthy? In the cross we see God's righteousness supremely demonstrated and vindicated.

Where else do we see the love of God more manifest than in this, that "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8, ESV) Where do we see the love Christ more clearly illuminated than in His willingness to suffer in our place, to purchase, redeem and reconcile the very ones who, by their sins, nailed Him to the cross. Herein is love, that "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:2, ESV) The cross tells us that God, at once, is both just and merciful. Where else do we see the sovereign initiative of God to save us radiating more brightly in that Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." (Acts 2:23, ESV)

Where else do we see the grace, the mercy, the wisdom, the compassion, the kindness – all of His character so clearly displayed – in that Christ and because of His display of God's glory on the cross has provided for us a place for us to be washed; hidden; accepted; adopted, a place of favor; forgiveness, and sonship so that we may find God to be our God and our greatest treasure and delight. In Jesus, on the cross, shines most brightly the glory of God. And that is to say nothing of the life creating, death destroying power of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. What else can we do but tremble with reverence and awe at the demands of holiness answered by the unfathomable love and grace of Calvary? This is the radiant One that the writer of Hebrews wants us to see!

Christ truly is the glory of the One who is Glory! Therefore, he rightfully claims worship, honor, and glory from men and angels. He is God, in all the fullness of Godhood; and he is the glory of God, the brightness of the glory of God. It's too much for my finite brain to comprehend. And



as the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of His nature, the writer of Hebrews says – and here is the glorious reality I was speaking of earlier --

He upholds the universe by the word of his power...Now like I said before, this phrase can refer to the way in which Jesus holds all things together, but there is a deeper meaning of this phrase that I want for us to see. That word “uphold” means “to carry or bear something forward to its predestined and intended consummation.” And that is exactly the idea here. John Brown wrote: The whole universe hangs on His arm; His unsearchable wisdom and boundless power are manifested in governing and directing their complicated movements of animate and inanimate, rational and irrational beings, to the attainment of His own great and holy purposes; and He does this by the word of His power, or by His powerful word. All this is done without effort or difficulty. He speaks, and it is done; He commends, and it stands fast.” He guides this universe to its divinely ordained destiny.

And what is that destiny toward which Jesus is shepherding the creation? The full manifestation of God's glory in a new heavens and a new earth, before a new creation, before the faces of the holy angels and the company of the redeemed – this is the end to which the ages are heading. From the beginning, the Godhead made the world in order to manifest the glory of God for eternity and it is to this end that Christ is moving all things. And so:

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father. He sits at the place of highest honor and glory, having finished His work of radiating forth in the earth the glory of God, of being the final word of God's revelation to man, having fully paid the sinners' debt and redeeming worshippers for God, having fully accomplished all that the Father had given Him to do, He sits now at the Father's right hand, now interceding for redeemed sinners and keeping them secure in their salvation, and ruling over the ages of the earth until the day – here is the future anticipation of all that we have beheld in Christ -- when He returns in majesty and splendor, the day “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed...” (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10, ESV) This is the plan of God the Father has for the Son.

As Paul writes in Philippians 2:9-11, “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9–11, ESV) This is where all of creation is heading – the confession of Christ as Lord over all to the glory of God the Father. Nothing pleases the Father more. The great mystery of the Trinity is that when the Son is glorified, the Father is glorified. Perfect glory and honor given to the Son is perfect honor and glory given to the Father.

In all of this, I agree with Charles Spurgeon who said: “In our Lord Jesus we see the Glory of God in the wondrous blending of the attributes. Behold His mercy, for He dies for sinners! But see His justice, for He sits as Judge of the quick and the dead. Observe His Immutability, for He is the same yesterday, today, and forever! And see His power, for His voice shakes not only earth but also Heaven. See how infinite is His love, for He espouses His chosen, but how terrible His wrath, for He consumes His adversaries. All the attributes of Deity are in Him—power that can lull the tempest—and tenderness that can embrace little children. The Character of Christ is a wonderful combination of all perfection’s making up one perfection and so we see the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, for this is God’s Glory, that in Him nothing is excessive and nothing is deficient. He is all that is good and great—in Him is light and no darkness at all.”

Amen and amen. The glory of God, radiating forth from Jesus Christ, the Son of God, make Him the radiant wonder of the universe – the clearest manifestation of God to man – the object of supreme adoration, admiration and love. To see and savor His glory is to be saved.

Do You See His Glory?

Do you see His glory? Do you see the glory shining from Christ? If you do, thank God for it, “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6, ESV) When I think of the glory of Christ, the more I am convinced that His sacrifice was sufficient for my sins. The more I know that if Jesus is the very radiance of God, how acceptable in God’s sight are those of us who have been dressed in His very righteousness. The more that I am convinced that Jesus

is the radiance of the glory of God, the more I want to behold Him, the more I want to worship Him, the more I want to reflect Him, the more I want to be changed. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18, ESV) The more I am convinced that Christ is the very glory of God, that I must make Him known. How does His glory affect you?

Let us exalt Christ in our hearts; believing Him, loving Him, and adoring Him. We cannot raise Him higher than He is in Heaven, but we can exalt Him in our hearts. Let us exalt Him with our lips, praise Him, pray to Him, sing of Him and speak of Him. Let us exalt Him in our lives, living holy lives that magnify Him, that reflect a life worthy of Him as Lord. Let us exalt Christ so that others are drawn to Him through our exaltation and worshipful lives.

He is truly incomparable. Jesus Christ is the radiance of the glory of God – He is chief among ten thousand – He is altogether beautiful.

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