



The Glory of the Son is the Strength of Our Souls

Series: Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul

Hebrews 1:1-4 (1-3)

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Let's review a little of what we said last week as we began this sermon series in Hebrews. This letter that we have is really a sermon, a sermon that was written in response to a crisis of faith that the Jewish Christians were experiencing in Rome and other parts of Italy. Because they had come to faith in Christ, because they had heard and believed the gospel and had been forgiven of their sins through faith in Christ and took the command to follow and obey Christ seriously, they were enduring some difficult trials, with more coming on the horizon. They had already endured an earlier round of government persecution under the Roman emperor Claudius – the seizing of property and lands, being thrown into prison, being treated unequally under the law, even being thrown out of Rome. Claudius was now dead, but the current emperor, Nero, was worse than Claudius ever could have been. Soon, under Nero, the Jewish Christians in Italy would be persecuted in a way that far exceeded what they had suffered so far. They would, some of them, be beheaded, torn by wild animals, burned alive, and crucified for their faith in Christ. This kind of persecution was just on the horizon.

These Jewish Christians were as well, the target of family rejection and shunning. Because of their faith in Jesus of Nazareth, the unbelieving members of their family who remained Orthodox Jews and who rejected Jesus as Lord, mocked and berated their faith, treated them as “dead to the family,” and viewed them as traitors to God and fools for following a man who claimed to be the Son of God and who had been rejected by the spiritual leaders of Israel as a fraud and a blasphemer and who was put to death by Roman authorities.

Society, their friends and acquaintances, those who worshipped the numerous gods of Rome, who followed the Greek philosophies and worldviews, and embraced false human wisdom and the moral relativism, that was the result, also rejected them. Because of the Jewish Christians insistence on Jesus as the only Son of God, as God in the flesh, and on His

words as the only measure of truth, faith and morality, they were treated as ignorant fools, as unenlightened, as intolerant and were marginalized and treated as moronic and completely lacking in wisdom or worth. They were systematically being excluded from society on every level.

Jesus said to His disciples when He was on the earth: **““Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:34–39, ESV)** The Hebrew Christians were living out these words in Italy. The cost of discipleship was becoming very real and so were the temptations to shrink back from faithfulness to Christ, to quit Jesus altogether, and to doubt the gospel and the Christ in which they had placed their faith. Following Jesus was not easy. Every day these Hebrews woke up to the questions, “What are you willing to endure for Jesus Christ? How far are you willing to take this faith in Christ? How much is Jesus really worth?” For some of them to go back to the old religion, for others to go back to the old worldviews, the old ways of living, the old philosophies that they once followed were very tempting. It would seem to solve so much. It would be better for their family life, for their social life, for their friendships if they just stopped taking Christ so seriously. It seemed so very inviting. The temptation to abandon Jesus Christ, or accommodate their faith to the moral relativism of the age, or to join the bandwagon of people who did not acknowledge any form of absolute truth was a very real danger to their souls. In that, these Hebrew Christians were not unlike us at all. We face this same thing.

To stand firm, to stay the course, they needed and we need more than what Jeff Spry calls, “a tiny Christ.” He says: **Indeed, the tragedy of modern worship is that we too often worship a “tiny Christ.” If this was not bad enough, we also tend to worship an “American Jesus.” Ever since Thomas Jefferson grabbed scissors to cut out parts of the Gospels, Americans have been on a quest for Jesus – and we have found him (or a reasonable facsimile) in the strangest of places. It also appears that in our quest to know Jesus, we find exactly what we are looking for. For the lonely, he is a “best friend.” For the oppressed, Jesus is the “defender of the weak.” For the heart- broken, He is the wise guru dispensing loving advice that could be found in fortune cookies. To countercultural rebels,**

Jesus is a crazed malcontent raging against the machine of the establishment. To the poor, Jesus is their ticket to wealth, health, and much more. For Johnny Cash, Jesus is “The Greatest Cowboy of them all.” This fondness for creating a Jesus in our own image has invaded our worship and our study of the Scriptures. Christian music has slowly morphed into repetitive choruses of mushiness derisively nicknamed “Jesus is my Boyfriend” music... The Word of God becomes a means to accomplish our own ends, whether it is saving the whales and redwoods or “taking America back.” Of course, the most damning evidence is the faddishness of Christianity over the past several years. We have moved from “Precious Moments” to “What Would Jesus Do?” to “The Prayer of Jabez” to “Left Behind” to “Veggie Tales” to “Jesus Action Figure” (see picture to right), complete with all the requisite bracelets, necklaces, paintings, temporary tattoos, books, Bible covers, school supplies, ashtrays, CDs, posters, bookmarks, t-shirts, statues, figurines, coffee mugs, and board games.

Beloved, we need more than that. The writer of Hebrews was faced with a serious dilemma that a “tiny Christ” could not answer – how to bolster and revitalize flagging faith, how to shore up sagging souls, how to encourage and exhort these brothers and sisters to remain faithful and to **“run with endurance the race that (was) set before (them),** and he knew that the only way that they could do that – the only way – was to turn their eyes **“to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.”** (cf. Hebrews 12:1–2, ESV) They needed more than empty clichés, spiritual platitudes, or exhortations to “suck it up and hang in there.” That’s just simply not enough, nor is it soul inspiring. They needed a true vision of the Christ in whom they had placed their faith, to whom they had surrendered their lives, and in whom they had pledged their hope in life and death. They needed to have their minds and hearts refocused on Jesus. The writer of Hebrews knew that if he could just paint for them a fresh vision of the supremacy of Jesus Christ, the marvel of His person and character as God’s Son, our Savior, and the unrivaled King of the universe, then rather than doubting or shrinking back, they would instead be emboldened and encouraged, strengthened in their faith and resolve. And that is just what they got, and it is what we have, in this sermon. This is not simply a finely crafted picture of Jesus; it is a picture with a purpose! And it begins with the overwhelming declaration that God has spoken with finality in His Son. Jesus Christ is God’s last and best word to man.

Jesus -- God’s Last, Best Word (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 doesn’t pussyfoot

around. He makes two statements that he doesn't try to prove but accepts as reality – God speaks and God has spoken with finality in His Son, Jesus Christ.

God is a 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. 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. It was all good and true and 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, 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 our Lord Jesus Christ. Period. OT revelation was absolutely true, but it was progressive and incomplete, all of it given in anticipation of what the writer of Hebrews calls “these last days.” And the preacher wants his hearers and us to know 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. And that's why we need to know Him as He is.

Do you see the encouragement here? The writer of Hebrews is saying in effect, “These critics – whether it is you family or your friends – no matter how persuasive they sound, are operating in ignorance. Whether it’s the Jews who refuse to see Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT, or the Greeks who reason their way to God and spirituality, since they are refusing to see Christ for who He is, all of their arguments and all of their imagined spirituality is worthless. They are speaking out of ignorance. Do be intimidated by them or their emotional arguments or high sounding words. They don’t know what they are talking about. Their unbelief is not a matter of them being smarter than you – it is a matter of sin that has made them deaf to the truth. But you have heard God speaking; you have heard him with finality in Jesus. You know the truth and they are the ones who make themselves fools by rejecting the truth of Christ, not you.” They were right to hear and to believe Jesus Christ. And then, in a way that sets the foundation for the rest of his sermon, the preacher of Hebrews uses seven phrases of exaltation, seven statements that set Jesus in a class by Himself.

Sevenfold Exaltation of Christ (v2b-3) The preacher of Hebrews says of the Christ 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 and trustworthiness of Christ and His truth. It’s amazing and perfect. He heaps phrase upon phrase, slowly building to a climax that will leave the Hebrews to whom he is writing, and us, with unshakeable confidence in trusting Jesus alone.

First, he begins with the statement that the Father has **appointed** Jesus **the heir of all things**. Remember that God the Father has made Him the heir of all things. Now what does that mean? This Jesus, in whom you have believed, God has made heir of all things, the possessor of creation, of earth, sky, sea and all that is in them, possessor of your life, your family, your neighbors, 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.

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. Everything belongs to the Son of God so, it is wise to **"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. The writer of Hebrews is saying: "That is the right response! You are doing well to trust in Jesus."

The writer of Hebrews continues saying, **Through whom also he** (God the Father) **created the world...** here again 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, 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. 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 are 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. And it was Jesus who created mankind. 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. He is heir of all things and He is creator of all things.

So, now what is the encouragement here for the Hebrews and for us? It is simply this: If Jesus is heir and creator of all things and He is my Savior, then He can create in me a clean heart, can create in me a right spirit, can make me a new creation, can create in my heart faith and strength greater than the doubts or trials I face and He owns me. His words define reality. His truth is Truth with a capital T. There is nothing in our lives beyond His authority or creative power. That's awesome, but there is more.

He upholds the universe by the word of his power. John Gill explains this well: 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 – the writer of Hebrews says, effortlessly, **he upholds the universe by the word of his power.** He does it by the word of His power. By Him all things hold together and Christ does it with a word, easily with no exertion. He doesn’t even break a sweat.

What does this mean for the Hebrews and for us? How does this encourage our souls when we are tempted to fall away or be ashamed of our faith? If the word of His power upholds the heavens and the earth, surely He will uphold our troubled and struggling souls, if we will simply trust Him! Surely He will give the confidence and strength we need. Surely He will empower me to stand in the day of testing. The same power that upholds the universe upholds His people no matter what we face. But there’s more.

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 to a dizzying pinnacle, to a startling climax. He uses two words here, two words in connection, to drive home the truth of who Jesus really 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 nature 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. He is the inescapable necessity of life. 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)** Jesus shines like the radiance of the sun. Without the 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.

Moreover, he says, 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 essence as the Father. Different in person, but exactly alike in essence. He is not less than God; He is God. No matter what people may ignorantly say of Jesus, this is who He is.

And just when you think you have reached the top, and you can't climb any higher – you hear this: It is this Jesus, very God of very God, who has made for us **“purification for sins.”** That is easily said, but it ought to blow us away. That Jesus, who is God in the flesh, the Son of God, would save sinners like us, 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 is breathtaking when you think about it. What Jesus did for His people, for sinners, on Calvary's cross is jaw-dropping: There He forever, finally, completely, totally, and eternally purged His people of all the stain and guilt of sin, bearing the consequences of our rebellion, cancelling the debt we owed, putting sin's penalty and power away forever, taking away God's rightful wrath against our sins and opening the new and living way to God so that we can approach Him in confidence with our consciences clean before God. And listen, He did it personally, out of love. 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, Here is love, that **“Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”** (Ephesians 5:2, ESV) He did it. He accomplished salvation. It is finished –IN HIM!

Here's how the writer of Hebrews means for us and for the Hebrew Christians in Italy to be encouraged in this. Jesus is not just an idea, or a tradition, or a religion, or a means to an end, that you can leave for a better option and that you can accept or reject without consequences. He is person, a living person, God's Son and our Savior, who has made purification for sin and who demands to be known, trusted, loved, followed, worshipped and enjoyed. You cannot turn away from this Jesus!

Let me return for a moment to a phrase I mentioned earlier, because it is applicable here. **He upholds the universe by the word of his power...** 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.” In other words, Jesus is guiding this universe to its divinely ordained destiny. And what is that destiny? The destiny of the ages is 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. In other words, he is saying to the Hebrews, you may be mocked now for your faith in Christ, you may be suffering loss and treated as foolish and worthless, but the day is coming when the truth will be revealed. When you faith in Jesus will be seen not as foolishness but as the wisdom of God. Stay faithful.

Then, ***after making purification for sins***, he says, ***he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high***. Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father. We will work this out more in few weeks when we see Jesus as greater than the priests, but for now I want us to see that He sits at the place of highest honor and glory, having finished His work of being the final word of God's revelation to man, of revealing God 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 to take us as His own. And here is the encouragement to the Hebrews and to us -- Jesus ***will*** have the reward of His suffering on the cross. He will have His people. His kingdom will be revealed. If we belong to Him, we will endure to the end and we will be with Him forever. He has redeemed His loved ones and He will have all those whom He has purchased by His blood. We are His treasure. We have value beyond what can be seen with our eyes, beyond what anyone else may think of us.

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.” He's right. And it is this glory of the Son that is the strength of our souls. It is this Jesus, not the Americanized, plastic Jesus – the real Christ we need.

This is the Jesus who is and this is the Jesus you and I need. The Jesus you and I need to behold, the Jesus who speaks the truth and is the truth, the Jesus who is heir and creator of

all, the Jesus who is the image of God, the Jesus who made purification for sins, the Jesus who sits enthroned at the right hand of the Father, the Jesus who demands faith and obedience, the Jesus we need to trust, the Jesus to whom we need to surrender, the Jesus we need to follow, the Jesus we need to worship, the Jesus we need to love, the Jesus who is the answer to our souls' greatest needs, the Jesus who loves sinners and saves rebels, who gives eternal life and who give strength for living faithfully for Him now. Jesus is who and what all people most desperately need. You and I may desire other things, crave other things, but nothing can satisfy our deep need of Jesus Christ, salvation by His precious blood, and His Kingship over our lives. This is the Jesus who comes to you says: ***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*** (John 14:6, **ESV**) This is the Jesus we need.

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