

Eastwood Baptist (10AM, 7/1/'18) **IT IS ALL ABOUT HIM** (Hebrews 1:1-4)

Introduction Christianity is all about Jesus. This is what the writer to the Hebrews wanted to make clear at the beginning of his letter. One reason for this beginning, and for this emphasis throughout his sermon, is that his readers particularly needed to hear this. They were Jewish Christians who were faced with the temptation to turn back from faith in Jesus, probably back to Judaism without Jesus as Messiah. But another reason is that all Christians need to hear that their faith is all about Jesus, and to hear it repeatedly. So let's look at what the first words of Hebrews had to say then, and what they continue to say to us.

The Climax of God's Speaking (Hebrews 1:1-2b) *Read 1:1-2b.* The very first word among these first words is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the climax of God's speaking, the One toward whom God's speaking through the Old Testament prophets had always led. For these Jewish Christians in the first century, it was essential that they grasped firmly the strong connection between the Scriptures which had been passed down by their ancestors and the new message about Jesus. They needed to grasp that they could not now honour those Scriptures without honouring the One to whom they pointed. They needed to realise that their faith was now all about Jesus, and they needed to hold firmly to Him. So what about us? For us, I believe, there are two implications. The first is quite different from what these Jewish Christians needed to hear. For them, the Old Testament Scriptures were obviously of fundamental importance. They did not need to be told to value them, or study them. But we do. We need to recognise that our Jesus Christ our Lord is the fulfilment and climax of the Old Testament revelation. And therefore we need to recognise that we can only properly honour Jesus if we honour Him in the light of all the Scriptures, Old Testament as well as New Testament. We need to know the whole biblical story about Jesus in order to appreciate Him fully, and honour Him properly. We need to study the Old Testament as well as the New. The second implication for us is much more like what the original audience needed to hear. They needed to understand that Judaism without Jesus was no longer satisfactory, that Jesus was indispensable. Our first reaction might be that we don't need to hear this any more. But I believe that we do. We live in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society, a society in which we are rightly told quite often that we should respect the beliefs of others. But sometimes a right demand for mutual respect becomes a wrong demand to blur all differences. A demand to treat all differences, including religious differences, as unimportant, even when the main difference is Jesus himself. These words at the beginning of Hebrews demand that we do not relativise or minimise the importance of Jesus, who is the climax of God's revelation and the way to God for all people.

Jesus' Unique Greatness (Hebrews 1:2-3) **Read 1:2-3.** How would these words have been heard by the original audience? They would have been heard, I am confident, as making enormous claims for Jesus as the Son of God. They would not have come to these words with an easy familiarity; they would have pondered them carefully, and been deeply impressed by them. So what would have impressed them? Let's look at the words: "whom he appointed heir of all things" - this uses language taken from Psalm 2:8, and both identifies Jesus as Messiah King, and attributes to him the key role at the end of history; "through whom also he made the universe" - this declares Jesus Christ the Son to have been God the Father's agent in creation, so He enjoyed pre-eminence at the Beginning just as He will at the End; "the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" - the being of God and the glory of God are perfectly expressed through the Son; "sustaining all things by his powerful word" - his role in creation is a continuing role, as he exercises the divine function of upholding all created things in continuing existence; "after he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" - Jesus has also carried out God's work of salvation and, having done so, shares the heavenly majesty of God. Would the original audience of Hebrews have been impressed? Yes, certainly. Are we impressed? Not nearly so much, I think. So why not? In part, because we have a very high view of Jesus, so that none of these statements about Jesus surprises us. And that is good. But I suspect that there is often another reason. That is, that we have got used to such great statements about Jesus, but have not fully digested their significance. We have admitted such language into our heads, but not taken hold of its meaning with our hearts. We need to ask ourselves individually, "Do I live as someone who has such a Saviour and Lord?" We need to ask ourselves collectively, "Do we live together as people who share such a Saviour and Lord?" When we are half-hearted in our personal discipleship, don't we individually give a negative answer by our behaviour? When our church life is marked by division and disharmony, don't we collectively give a negative answer? Wouldn't all Christian churches be much healthier and more effective if Christians consistently remembered the greatness of Jesus, and therefore the overwhelming importance of what binds us together?

Much Superior to the Angels (Hebrews 1:4) This seems almost an anti-climax after what has preceded it. It seems clear again that this must have been something that the original audience needed to hear. Especially when we read on, and find that the rest of first chapter reinforces and supports this declaration. What is not clear is why this was so. Was it simply that they saw the high dignity of the Old Covenant as established by its having been mediated by angels? So they had to see that the New Covenant was mediated by the Son, who is much superior to the angels. Or did they exaggerate the importance of angels in some

way? Did they even worship them? We can't be sure. But we can be sure that Jesus is much superior to the angels. And we need to hear this in our own context. We can hear it first in a straightforward fashion. There is evidence in recent times, both within the church and outside the church, of a renewed interest in angels. So it is helpful to be reminded that angels are God's created servants, who themselves worship the Son of God (vv.6-7). An interest in angels must never rival our emphasis on Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But for many of us there is no real threat in this quarter. So it is appropriate to think also of other created servants of God. Repeatedly in Christian history, there have been those who have acknowledged Jesus as "Lord", but whose primary allegiance in practice has been to a human servant of Jesus, or to a group of human servants. Some Christians have relied more upon a Pastor or writer, or even just a trusted Christian friend, than upon Jesus Christ himself. Some Christians have given in to the temptation to encourage others to treat them in this way. So we need to remember that Christianity is all about Jesus. We need to remember it constantly, so that our focus on Jesus governs all our words and all our actions.