

The Name Above Every Name

Series: The Supremacy Of The Son

by Steve Zeisler

The neighboring communities around us are now making cable television lines available to our citizenry which are capable of sending scores of channels into our televisions. As a result, numerous television stations will now be taking advantage of these channels to vie for our attention. Every one of them will seek to influence our thinking.

At the same time, computers are spinning away someplace with our names and addresses, targeting us for direct mail to influence us politically or to urge us to buy something. Sophisticated technology is being aimed at every one of us to make us listen, and to persuade us of various ideas. There will always be a rivalry for our thinking as various fleshly and worldly organizations and individuals seek to win our minds and hearts.

Among the rivals for your attention is Jesus Christ. The book of Hebrews opens with a thundering beginning: God has spoken to man. God himself, the Master and Creator of everything and the one to whom we owe our very breath, has reached out and taken the initiative to speak to us through the prophets and by various means. Supremely, he has spoken to us in Christ. Jesus Christ is the speech of God that we might know what he is like. Through him we can understand the creation, the glory and the exact nature of God, and the forgiveness of our sins.

God spoke to us in Christ. Yet that speech will always have its rivals. What God wants us to hear and know must always compete with other messages. The book of Hebrews presents a series of arguments for the superiority of Christ over various rivals. The contemporaries of the author of Hebrews had problems listening to Jesus just as we do today. They tended to have their attention siphoned off in other directions, being pressured, tempted and frightened into listening to other voices and serving other masters.

Thus, the wisdom of the writer of this book is shared with us to help us put Jesus back in the center so that the Word of God is once again supremely the one to whom we listen. What the Lord says about life and eternity and about what is important is what we must hear.

Angels are the first alternative to Christ mentioned in Hebrews. Though this subject may seem unimportant to us in the modern world, first century believers had a well-- developed theology of angels. Particularly people coming to Christ from a Jewish heritage had a strong sense of the presence of angels. In fact, they were convinced that the Law had been mediated to people from God through angels. The law of Moses and indeed all of the Pentateuch was believed to have come from God by means of the angels.

Thus, they were aware of these invisible, spiritual beings and saw them as powerful and important. They knew that there were two camps, those who served God and those who rebelled against him. And they knew that these beings affected the affairs of nations and of individuals, being capable of doing the unpredictable. Knowing all of this, these people began to pay an inordinant amount of attention to the angels. Thus, the rivalry involved whether they would listen to Jesus Christ or listen to these other majestic beings.

We will make some connections between awareness of angels and our own lives before we are done, but first look at this argument as it is presented. This exposition focuses on some wonderful truth about Jesus. First, the writer tells us that Jesus is superior to the angels because he has a superior name. Second, he has a superior destiny. For these two reasons, we ought to listen to Christ rather than the invisible creatures of power and might, the angels.

Verse 4 of chapter 1, talking about Jesus, ends the long introductory sentence of the book. Look at verses 4 thr

ough 7:

... having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say,

"Thou art My Son,
Today I have begotten Thee"
And again,
"I will be a Father to Him,
And He shall be a Son to Me"?

And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says,

"And let all the angels of God worship Him."
And of the angels He says,
"Who makes His angels winds,

And His ministers a flame of fire."

Jesus is greater than the angels because he has a superior name. His name is Son-- Son of his Father in heaven, Son of God. The angels are merely called servants (ministers, v. 7), those sent on the errands of God.

Most of us do not view names with the same seriousness and depth as the people did in Biblical times. Someone has noted that we would almost do as well to number our children as to name them. When I was growing up, my sister who did not have a middle name felt it was her duty to give herself one. Almost every month she would change it, depending upon which actress was in the ascendancy or which friend. You could usually tell who her best friend was by the middle name she had that month. But she enjoyed playing with her name.

In Biblical times and among the Hebrew people especially, naming was not playful, but rather an important undertaking. It was a way of identifying the person, summarizing his character and saying something significant about him. This is why the changing of names throughout Scripture should grab our attention. When Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, he was making a significant statement about how he wanted to use Peter. He said, "Upon this rock (Pete), I will build my church."

Does it matter what a person's name is? It certainly did to these people. Thus, the writer of Hebrews emphasizes, "Jesus has a superior name to the angels. His name is Son. Their name is servant." He also gives us some helpful facts in his quotations from the Old Testament. The argument being advanced is skillfully supported by these verses, using the authority of Scripture to validate his point.

In verse 5, God addresses Jesus, "Thou art My Son. This day I have begotten Thee." There is a relationship of father to son that exists between these two because Jesus was begotten of the Father. That same relationship exists between every father and son. There are fathers today who have never seen their children, who do not even know anything about them, yet they remain fathers to those children because they have begotten them. And God said of his Son, "You are from me, begotten of me. Therefore, you are my son."

But God further adds, "I will be a Father to Him, and He shall be a Son to Me." Not only did God acknowledge formally that he was Jesus' father, he chose to act like his father. Thus, we hear the voice of God the heavenly Father saying, "I will care for my son. I will be a father to him and he will grow up as a son to me. I will listen to him and communicate my heart to him. I will teach him and provide for him throughout life." One of the great crises of our day is the dearth of healthy fathering. There is a sad loss of the role of the father in the family. Children are growing up without learning of themselves in the shadow of a strong and loving father figure. But God the Father said Jesus was not only his son because he was begotten of him, he also said he would be a father to him. To which of the angels did God ever say that?

I have a friend who works in a small family business. He is good at what he does, and he works alongside another young man who works just as hard. But there is no question about the destiny of the two, for the other

young man is the son of the owner. Thus, one will be a servant all of his life, and one will become president of the company. My friend's relationship to his boss is that of a worker, but the son stands to inherit the company and is being groomed for its presidency precisely because he is the son. He has a greater name as far as the future of that company is concerned.

Jesus' name is Son. The angels are servants. They are temporary in their impact. In fact, they are described as "winds" and "flames of fire." Winds can be powerful at times, but they pass by and are gone. They do not last forever. Flickering flames can also be powerful, but they too are transient. Remember the western folk song: "Way out here they got a name for rain and wind and fire . . . They call the wind Maria." We have no difficulty giving names and personality to these transient forces of nature. But they are not the same as the Son of God. He has a greater name than they. Therefore, we should pay more attention to him.

Secondly, beginning in verse 8 we hear of the greater destiny of the Son. Not only is his name greater, his destiny is greater:

**But of the Son He says,
"Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever,
[In this quote Jesus is being addressed as God.]**

**And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.
Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
Therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee
With the oil of gladness above Thy companions."**

**And, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth,
And the heavens are the works of Thy hands;
They will perish, but Thou remainest;
And they all will become old as a garment,
And as a mantle Thou wilt roll them up;
As a garment they will also be changed.
But Thou art the same, And Thy years will not come to an end."**

**But to which of the angels has He ever said,
"Sit at My right hand,
Until I make Thine enemies
A footstool for Thy feet"?**

**Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who
will inherit salvation?**

The destiny of the Son is to remain immutable forever, unchanging. The cosmos will grow old, and like an old garment that is threadbare and tattered, it will wear out. Then it will be rolled up and thrust aside to be changed for something else. Even the enemies of Christ will be placed under his feet, utterly defeated and subservient to him. The universe will wear out and wickedness will be defeated, but the Son will be the same forever and ever. The Son to whom we should listen is superior in his destiny because he will be the magnificent ruler at the center of everything forever.

Further, we are told that the scepter of his kingdom is righteousness. Indeed, he is praised because he has loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Thus, we are reminded that the righteous things -- what are true and beautiful and pure and valuable--will last forever because he rules with a righteous scepter. But everything that is crooked and ugly will pass away.

Eternity, righteousness and joy ("Therefore, God thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of joy above thy companions.") are highlighted in this passage. What a great triumvirate! We see that our Lord will last forever, that righteousness is intrinsically superior to wickedness, and that there will be an abundance of joy surrounding it all. The joy of the Christian faith will last forever. Righteousness and joy will attend him as he rules.

You have probably experienced waking up from a nightmare and being relieved to find that it was not true. Perhaps, you were desperately running from some awful dragon with no possibility of escape. All the time you assumed that what you were experiencing in the dream was real! But when you awake, you find yourself safe in bed, and the dream is gone.

The history of the cosmos is like that. There are terrible elements to the nightmare now. Crazy people with guns can walk into post offices and irrationally kill innocent people. Plans can be laid by men and women in authority to do destructive things to the environment and to human beings. Nations rise up in ugly selfishness against one another. Many things about the current state of affairs are frightening and awful. The righteous scepter does not seem to be ruling at all. Rather the scepter of evil and wickedness seems to reign. But this will not last! A time will come when the garment will be rolled up and cast aside. What lasts forever is the Son of God at the center, ruling joyfully and righteously.

Yesterday I was privileged to officiate at two weddings. What a hypocrite I would have been if I did not believe what is said in this passage! How could I have said that love can conquer selfishness, that real intimacy is possible and that the risks are worth taking? What a hypocrite I would have been if only the social statistics and what is visible were true. There are going to be tremendous pressures on both of the couples, and there are no guarantees apart from the faithfulness of God. But we prayed and laughed, and we read the words of God. I am convinced that it is appropriate to do this because I am convinced of the rule of Christ. These young people can trust their Lord to give them everything he intends for them. I did not feel the slightest bit hypocritical while speaking of the greatness of God and of what is possible for them, for the destiny of the universe is to be ruled forever by Christ with righteousness and joy.

I noted earlier that speaking about angels may sound peculiar for most of us. I also mentioned that in the first century there was a well--developed theology among the Jews concerning angels. In fact, they paid tremendous attention to angels.

Most Christians are aware that the Bible teaches there are unseen beings created by God who do unpredictable things in the affairs of men and of nations. Not everything that happens can be predicted even if you know the psychology, sociology and physics of the moment.

Some of the angels have rebelled against God and are horribly wicked. Some serve him faithfully and are powerfully good. But both continue to influence men and women. And Scriptures tell us that we are not to be ignorant as to the schemes of these unseen beings. Even so, angels are not a part of daily discussion for most of us.

And yet there is an almost universal regard for the unseen world among believers and non-believers alike--even if we don't often speak or examine these things. Everybody in some part of themselves, whether they will admit it or not, believes that there is something out there and that what you see is not entirely what you get. Tough--minded scientists, many of them without any faith at all, are some of the greatest lovers of science fiction in all the world. They are drawn to read about or see depicted on the screen powerful alien creatures who defy the laws of physics in performing extraordinary feats. They are drawn to these things because they know within themselves that there is something out there beyond the probe of their instruments.

Virtually every culture that has ever existed has promoted stories of genies, leprechauns or some other peculiar entity which has had unpredictable personal involvement in the affairs of men. Even today, there are many people who follow the advice of horoscopes even though they are embarrassed to admit it. When I was in school, I knew people who dropped LSD for enlightenment. They took chemicals into their bodies anticipating a mental experience that would enlighten them, opening up something of the irrational, unpredictable world.

There are men and women today who believe in the power of love and romance. In effect, they worship the ancient goddess Venus. They see romantic love as a force and wisdom with power to strike anyone at any time for no apparent reason. People worship it, hoping that some day romantic love will attend to them. They are admitting that there is something out there beyond what the five senses can detect. And they are right!

Venus, leprechauns and genies may be the wrong answer, but the notion that the force could be with you and that there is something else out there is almost universally held.

The Scriptures tell us that these beings exist as good and bad angels, and they deserve a certain amount of respect. Listen to what Jude wrote about angelic majesties in verses 8 through 10 of his epistle:

Yet in the same manner these men also by dreaming defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.

There are personalities out there that deserve respect. I have absolutely no intention of ever playing with occult objects--ouija boards, tarot cards, etc.--because I believe there are dark forces that can destroy the people who invite their attention. If the archangel Michael would not rebuke the devil, but appealed to God for the rebuke, I am certainly not going to imagine myself sufficiently able to toy with the forces of evil. The city of Sodom was foolish indeed to treat the good angels of God with disrespect because they invited awful judgment upon themselves.

C.S. Lewis may have done the best job of any contemporary person in making the world of angels sensible to people. I suggest you read his space trilogy, especially the last book *That Hideous Strength*. At the end, the awful monument to the rebellion of man which has been created in England attempts to toy with the angels. Mars, Mercury and others come down to join in the battle. The title of one of the last chapters is "They Have Pulled Down Deep Heaven on Their Heads."

There is something out there with power attendant to it and respect deserved by it. But having said all that, the force of the argument of this passage is, "Don't pay more attention to angels than you do to Christ. He is superior for he is the Son. They are only servants." In fact, they exist to serve us, the elect. They do the bidding of God or suffer his wrath. If we listen to anyone, we should listen to the Son, for he is superior in every way.

This brings us to the warning which grows from the announcement of Jesus' superiority to angels, in chapter 2, verses 1 through 4:

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

The first chapter of Hebrews, verses 4 through 14, presented an argument to Christians based upon the quotation of Scripture and the announcements of the Old Testament. Now the argument is being advanced by logic. What are the logical conclusions to what we have said?

Two points are made here. The first one is the logical argument that if the lesser is true certainly the greater is supremely true. Secondly, the writer of Hebrews reminds us that we have no excuse. We cannot say we have not heard these things, for they were announced by the Lord and confirmed by those who heard. They have even been witnessed to by God the Father through miracles. If the lesser is true, the greater is true, and we cannot claim that we were not told these things.

Listen to the argument dealing with the lesser and greater. The word spoken through angels, the law of the Old Testament, is unalterable. Even Jesus confirmed this fact when he said, "not an inkstroke will pass away." If the law is unalterable and every transgression is recompensed (even to the nation of God being banished to Babylon for its rebellion and failure, for example), then God takes his law seriously. If this is true, how much

more seriously will he take the message of his Son? Therefore, we ought to pay attention to this message.

In this passage, we are threatened with the possibility of drifting away. The Greek word "drift" was used in ancient literature for boats that were not properly moored to a dock. When a storm came or excessive wind blew, the boats drifted away, were damaged or lost. We can choose to stop paying attention to Christ and let ourselves listen to other messages. We can find our thinking drawn to something else. But eventually, we will find ourselves going days and weeks without prayer or thought of Christ as we drift further and further away. With this warning, we must pay even closer attention to what we have heard lest we drift away from it.

The other word he uses is "neglect." He says, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" This is when we treat the message as if it does not weigh much or is not worth much. We have a routine of neglect for the voice of God.

There are many rivals for our thinking, and our attention. Among them is the rivalry for our attention that comes from the unseen world of powerful figures known as angels. And there are rivals in the media and elsewhere who want us to hear their speeches, trust their words, and think their thoughts.

We must pay closer attention to the speech of God which is in Christ. He spoke ages ago in the prophets. In these last days, he has supremely spoken to us in his Son. We must listen and re-orient ourselves around the message of the purpose and love of God in Christ. And we must not let ourselves drift because of the dangers involved. The dangers are very great indeed.

I want to close with a quote from Ray Stedman's book on Hebrews considering these verses:

To the Christian, the writer is saying it is not enough that we know Jesus Christ: We must use the resources we have in Him. We can lose so much, even knowing Him, unless there is a day--by--day walk with Him. We lose peace and freedom and joy and achievement. We are subjected to temptation, frustration, bewilderment, bafflement and barrenness without Him. And if we do not go on as Christians, if we do not grow, a serious question is raised: Have we ever really begun the Christian life? Or is this but a self-deceptive fraud, attempted in order to meet outward standards but without any inward change in the heart? He leaves the question hanging in the air, haunting, unavoidable. And that is where we shall leave it. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? Answer that in the loneliness of your own heart.

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