

"WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?"

Hebrews 1:2b-2:4

January 28, 1996

To your way of thinking and living, who is Jesus?
Who is He to you?

Most of us have been around churches long enough to be able to give quick and correct answers to at least part of that question.

The part we can answer quickly is "who is Jesus?"

He is the Son of God

He is the Savior/Messiah

He is Lord

But when I ask, "Who is He to you?" - that requires more thought.

You see, it is one thing to give text-book answers to the question "who is Jesus?" but it is something else to answer "what difference does He make to me?"

For some Jesus is little more than remote historical figure.

A person who lived a long time ago, a long ways away, who spoke a different language, in a very different culture.

Like, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Julius Caesar, they know Jesus somehow impacted Western Civilization but its relevance to them and today is difficult to imagine.

They readily say his name in a service of worship but he's light-years away from their work, and entertainment and relationships..

He resides like an "insubstantial phantom on the edges of consciousness" (Dean, p15)

For some, even in our churches, Jesus is simply a moral teacher - a teacher of how to live happily.

He embodied in his life and teaching - what it means to be a good person - how to love, forgive, and treat others as you want to be treated.

He's the Jesus some learn of in Sunday School and in their bed-time stories.

This Jesus is simply part of a Christian orientation woven into their personalities by church-going parents - simply part of their culture - their rearing.

But a Jesus who is part of their lives and is important to their lives is unthought.

A.W. Tozer said it a little more sharply,
"God is treated as visiting royalty in a democratic country. (Interesting but irrelevant. Everyone takes His name upon his or her lips, and especially at certain seasons he is feted and celebrated and hymned.

"But behind all this flattery people hold firmly to their right of self-determination. As long as a person is allowed to play host he will honor God with his attention, but always God must remain a guest and never seek to be Lord.

"People will have it understood that this is their world; They will make its laws and decide how it shall be run. God is permitted to decide nothing. People bow to God and as they bow, they manage with difficulty to conceal the crown upon their own heads." (found in Dean, p17 no citation)

It is sometimes difficult to perceive as relevant a Jesus we can't see - a Jesus who isn't right in our faces day after day.

As we read the book of Hebrews, it seems the people to whom the author was writing were people having a difficult time living a Christian life.

There's reason to believe they were being ridiculed if not persecuted for being Christians.

And the tougher things got the more likely they were to question the relevance of being Christians.

Apparently they were particularly tempted to just go back to their former religion - or at least some form of it - and stop making such a big deal out of Jesus.

To get along you have to go along - that seemed wise.

The temptation is always there to just live life like normal people and not get all involved in these fanatical ideas about actually following Christ.

But look with me at Hebrews 2:1

Here the author is writing to say, "You can't just let Jesus slip out of your consciousness - you can't just push him out to the periphery of your life.

READ 2:1

Do you see the word "therefore" in the challenge?

What does the "therefore" refer to? - the preceding chapter.

The author is saying in essence, "based on what I have just told you about Jesus, certainly you will agree that we must pay more attention."

It's as if he has asked, "Have you forgotten or don't you realize who Jesus is?"

Let's go back to chapter 1 now and see what it is the author reminds his readers.

Last week as we looked at verses 1 and 2 we saw the author beginning the whole book, the whole sermon by an introduction of Jesus as superior to any previous ways God had used to communicate with human beings.

READ 1:1-2a

Now what he does through the remainder of this chapter is demonstrate by his own declarations and by quoting from the Old Testament just who Jesus is - thus proving his superiority over all others.

You need to be looking in your Bible at Hebrews 1 to most fully appreciate what I want you to see next.

Beginning at the middle of verse 2 and through verse 3 the author makes six statements about Jesus.

- 1 He is the Son of God and thus an heir
- 2 Jesus is the one who made the universe

- 3 Verse 3: Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's being.
- 4 He sustains all things by the power of his word.
- 5 He made purification for sins
- 6 He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

What I want you to see is that beginning at verse 5, the author picks up on and expands on four of those six statements.

In verse 5 and continuing through v 9 he writes about Jesus' relationship to the Father - He is a Son, an heir - He is deity.

In verse 10 he camps again on the issue of Jesus as creator.

In verses 11-12 he writes of Jesus unchanging eternal nature.

And in Verse 13 he addresses again the issue of Jesus as King.

Only then does he come to the issue, that we looked at first, at the beginning of chapter 2, of how seriously we take Jesus.

But let's go back to his description of Jesus in chapter 1.

You have probably noticed the author's reference to angels several times in the context.

Steven in the book of ACTS and Paul in the book of Galatians tell us something about how the Law of God was given to Moses in the O.T. that is not mentioned in the O.T.:

That is that ANGELS were used by God to give the Law to Moses. God gave the law but he did so through his angels.

Most of the O.T. descriptions of people meeting angels are so awe inspiring that it would be easy to think of angels as almost god-like.

And if God chose angels, those awesome creatures, to give the Law to Moses then angels are very special.

And it was tempting to think that angels were more special than Jesus - after all, Jesus was merely a human being.

It's not that these Christians were necessarily tempted to worship angels but more likely that they were exaggerating the role of angels and minimizing the role of Jesus.

They were more enamored of angels than of Jesus.

What the author will do is set the record straight about Jesus so that such foolishness doesn't continue.

(Incidentally, next week I would like to digress a bit, and spend the morning talking about angels.

There seems to be a great deal of emphasis in the popular literature, even Christian literature, on the subject and so I think in light of the author's repeated reference to them, we will take the time, next week, to see what the Bible says about angels.)

But for now, what does it say about Jesus?

I >

In verse 2 and in verses 5-9 Jesus is declared to be the Son of God and the Heir of all things.

Quoting from the very O.T. these Jewish Christians would have been reading, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the author establishes who Jesus is.

If you are impressed with angels, and you have every right to be, then you ought to be even more impressed with Jesus.

Verse 5. Has any angel ever been called the Son of God? NO.

Verse 6. In fact, what are the angels to do in relationship to Jesus? Worship him.

Jesus' relationship to the Father/God is different than any human being's relationship to the Father, and even different than any spiritual being's relationship to the Father.

Verse 2 says that the Son has been appointed heir of all things.

Verse 6 calls Jesus the "firstborn".

The "firstborn" in that culture was the "heir" to the father's wealth.

The point is that Jesus rightly rules over every created thing.

Or as He put it himself in Matt 28: "All authority in heaven and earth has been give to me."

No one and no thing is superior to Him.

Something might be a bit confusing about the language that is used in these verses.

Did you notice it says Jesus "was appointed" heir?

Or that the Father says, "Today I have become your father"?

Or "I will be your Father"?

Doesn't that sound like there may have been a time when Jesus wasn't those things? Almost as if there was a time when Jesus wasn't the Son of God - When Jesus didn't exist and then came into being?

In a few minutes you are going to see that the author establishes that Jesus is not only superior to the angels and everything else but that He is God, very God - nothing less than fully God.

In fact he does that even in this context in verse 8 when God refers to the Son, Jesus, as "GOD".

Now if Jesus is fully God, then these verses about being "appointed" an heir cannot be referring to Jesus' being but only to his action as Messiah.

What it means is that in the eternal council of God the Trinity, it was determined that the second person of the Godhead (or the Trinity), the Son, would be the one who would come to earth to bring salvation and thus as the sovereign God/man he would be the rightful owner of every created thing.

II>

And if Jesus supremacy as the Son of God and heir of all things wasn't enough for the readers to make them listen to Jesus and follow Him, and to take him seriously, the author goes on to say not only is Jesus heir of all things but He created everything.

Verse 2 says it is through the Son that God made the universe.

Verse 10 quoting again from the O.T. repeats that truth - READ

Please look in your Bible at Genesis 1.

I'm not just trying to be cute with language when I say what I say next.

But on the authority of Hebrews 1, John 1 and Colossians I can read Genesis 1 this way: "In the beginning Jesus created the heavens and the earth".

V3 "And Jesus said, "Let their be light"

V6 "And Jesus said, "Let there be separation between earth and sky.

V 9 "and Jesus said, Let there be dry land
ETC.

That baby born in a Bethlehem manger was the one who created our galaxy.

The galaxy in which our earth resides is made up of over one hundred thousand million stars. Our galaxy is 100,000 light-years across - about 600 trillion miles. He made it all.

That Jesus who sat on the ground by Lake Galilee talking to hundreds of people is the one who created not only our Galaxy but the one hundred, thousand, million other galaxies that we know about.

And each galaxy is 3 million light years apart from each other.

And turn the telescope around and make it into a microscope and we find that inner space is as awesome as outer space.

Quarks, and leptons, and Neutrinos too small to measure.

The Jesus whose name you sing and speak is the one who made it all. How can we consider doing anything other than following, obeying, and serving the one who is Creator?

III >

But not only is he heir of all things and creator of everything but he is, according to verse 3, the "radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being".

All analogies are limited but Jesus is not like the moon to the sun - a reflection of the light, but He is the light itself.

He is the very radiance or glory of God's glory.

And if that doesn't make the point that Jesus is God then the next phrase should: "the exact representation of his being".

It is not that Jesus just acts like God but that God's very being exists in Jesus - He is God as much as the Father is God.

And if that doesn't make the point then verses 11 and 12 add more:
Everything else perishes because it is perishable but the Son will remain - he is unchangeable.

Everything else ends but the Son's years will never end.
He is eternal.

Who is Jesus: He is the glory of God, the being of God, the immutability of God and the eternity of God.

Who then must he be? GOD.

IV>

But the author goes on to stack up yet another proof of Jesus supremacy- another reason why we can't ignore him:

Verse 3 "he sustains all things by his powerful word"

Several weeks ago we looked very carefully at the subject of God's providence as taught in the book of Ruth.

God's providence has to do with his controlling all things, not only the forces of nature, but the events of history, to his desired ends.

What this text teaches me is that God the son is the one who is doing that.

Jesus is today superintending all history, all events to bring everything out exactly as he determined.

Jesus is not an ignorant, powerless king, standing around wringing his hands, wondering what is going to happen.

He is sustaining all things, upholding all things, guiding all things - even our lives - and it is because he loves us.

Stop and think about it!

It is not some far off, unknown force that is guiding your life but Jesus. He is the one who is working every detail of your life.

If that is true, can you imagine ignoring him?

V> In the middle of verse 3 the author points out the next thing about Jesus to show his supremacy.

This is a point which the author is going to make much of in the rest of the letter so he only mentions it here.

Just as the Jewish High Priest would go into the Temple and make a sacrifice for the sins of the people so God the Son went to the cross both as the Priest who offered the sacrifice and the sacrifice itself.

For only the infinite and perfect Son of God could actually fully pay the penalty of the law of God against our sins.

Jesus actually met the requirements of the law and made it possible for us to be purified, cleansed, forgiven of our sins.

How could we ignore such a savior?

VI>

And lastly the author points out at the end of verse 3 that Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

In verse 13, quoting again from the O.T. the author reiterates that point - Jesus is in the unique position of authority.

Using a word picture fitting for that and prior cultures - we have the picture of Jesus seated in honor and all his enemies bowing before him - or Jesus standing victoriously and his feet on the necks of those who opposed or ignored him.

Look please at Rev 19

This Hebrews picture is similar to the one given in Rev 19:11-16

READ Rev 19:11-16

If this is who Jesus is, then how can we ignore him?

And that is exactly the Author's point when we come full circle to where we began - chapter 2 verses 1-3 READ

Oh, this is a timely warning.

Be careful! Don't drift away!

That word drift is like a boat drifting, imperceptibly, little by little unnoticed, - but moving nonetheless - until its occupants are in

danger.

I know how dangerous drift can be.

2 1/2 years ago we were vacationing on a houseboat on Lake Powell. We tied up and began to dive into the deep water at the back of the boat. What we didn't notice was the boat drifting.

It drifted into shallow water and I dove into a rock breaking my skull in five places.

Most people in life don't set out to deliberately dive into a rock.

But they do drift until it happens.

They neglect their relationship to the Son of God until it's too late.

In a little book entitled A Church at Risk, William Dean discusses two kinds of neglect.

He writes about the neglect of complacency.

This is like two guys drifting down a river in a canoe and thoughtlessly not paying attention to all the map markings and signs that warn of a falls.

Thinking they have plenty of time and that the paddling is easy they decide to float on past some of those warnings.

Only when the current was too strong and the paddling did no good did they realize they had to get out - but too late.

We go through so much of life assuming our current lifestyle, attitudes and conduct won't hurt us.

We don't want to get fanatical about Christianity.

We live saying we believe in Jesus but live largely oblivious to Him because we are so busy with so much else.

But William Dean wrote of another neglect - the neglect of contempt.

In verses 2 and 3 the author of Hebrews does an "if-then" argument to get our attention.

I'm paraphrasing but you watch the text:

"For IF the message, the law of God given to Moses by angels was binding and every violation and disobedience against God and His law received its just punishment -

THEN how shall we escape the just punishment if we ignore such a

great salvation as has come to us through the Lord Jesus - the Son of God who is fully and wholly God?"

To "ignore" here I believe means to deliberately disregard.

I'm not making this up just to fit here in the sermon - but just within the last couple of weeks I again heard of another person who had the nerve to say "I'm a Christian but I don't want to think about following Christ right now - I'll come back later to do that."

Whenever I hear that, it frightens me greatly.

How can someone say, I know Jesus is Heir of all things, the Creator and sustainer of all nature and all history, the savior who died for me, the one who will reign supreme over all and who is God himself AND walk away saying - I'll come back later?

But whether it is the neglect of complacency or the neglect of contempt - it ends up in the same place.

Do we take Jesus seriously?

I'm troubled by the movies and television shows we, the people of Southern Gables Church, watch.

So many of them are scripted off of one or more of the seven deadly sins - greed, vengeance, lust, etc.

We feed our minds and our children's minds on that which is the very antithesis of what Jesus told us to feed on.

(Do we take Jesus seriously?)

I'm troubled by the gambling I hear goes on in little and big ways.

The Lottery, Lotto, and LasVegas only work because it feeds on our greed - and worse yet if we win, we have taken money for nothing from people who got nothing for it. It is not only a "stupid" tax, it is an evil tax.

I'm troubled by the immorality that is ruining so many marriages, so many

young lives, and is laughed about in television sit-coms and in our off-color jokes.

(Do we take Jesus seriously?)

We have scores of people who are doing nothing for the Kingdom of God and giving nothing to the Kingdom of God.

I don't know who they are but over 500 families in this church who gave less than \$500 to the ministry of the church.

We have nursery and elementary classes of children that we can't get adults to love, teach and lead - while scores of adults sit idly by not investing one minute in anyone else other than themselves or their own family.

(Do we take Jesus seriously?)

Later in Chapter 2 the author will stress the humanity of Jesus but here in this first chapter he emphasizes the deity of Christ.

This is God we are talking about!

And he says to us in 2:1 "We must pay more careful attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away."

How do we pay more careful attention?

Ladies and gentlemen we have to get with Jesus.

We must have times, many times, probably daily times, when we come into his presence, read and listen to his word, pray to and mediate on his presence.

Are you meeting with Jesus?

Do you need help? Do you need someone to hold you accountable?
Do you need help getting into a Bible Study group or a Sunday School class?

Contact one of our pastors

Maybe, this morning, you need to make a decision - you need to ask God's forgiveness for ignoring Him.

You need to invite his grace to enable you to get serious about your relationship to Jesus Christ.