

Main Idea: In Hebrews 1:1-4 we discover eight truths regarding the Matchless Son of Christmas that make Him unique and indeed a treasure worth giving your all to possess.

- I. God spoke through the prophets (1).
- II. God spoke ultimately through His Son (2-4).
  - A. The Son is the heir of all things.
  - B. The Son is the creator of all things.
  - C. The Son is the perfect expression of glory.
  - D. The Son is the exact representation of God.
  - E. The Son is the sustainer of all things.
  - F. The Son took care of the sin problem.
  - G. The Son took a seat in heaven.
  - H. The Son is superior to the angels.

Make It Personal: Since God has spoken...

1. Listen to His Son.
2. Let others know what He has said.

The songwriter asked an important question years ago, one we need to revisit. *What Child Is This?* So many don't know who it was who was born in that manger so long ago. And even those who do know have a tendency to minimize the greatness of the One who became a tiny baby.

To help us view Him rightly and then worship Him accordingly, we'll be looking at Hebrews 1:1-4 this morning.

Let's read the text, and then meditate on it together.

*Scripture Reading: Hebrews 1:1-4*

The fact of the matter is this. Many who observed the holiday called Christmas don't know the truth about Christ. If a person doesn't know who that baby was and is, then he or she will not appreciate fully the significance of the celebration of the incarnation.

Think of it this way. If you don't appreciate what you have, you'll constantly be looking for something else. If you don't appreciate your parents, you'll be longing for the day when you leave home. If you don't appreciate your spouse, you'll be on the lookout for someone else who can make you happy. The same is true for your job, your house, your car, and just about everything else in life.

*If you don't appreciate what you have, you'll be looking for something else.*

Beloved, I'm concerned that many of us don't fully appreciate what we have when it comes to the person of Christ. Oh, we believe in Christ. We believe that He was born in Bethlehem, lived in Galilee, died on Golgotha, raised from the dead and returned to heaven from a hillside outside of Jerusalem. We believe those *facts*, but if we're honest with ourselves those facts don't make they difference they ought.

One of the main problems is that we don't grasp the *who* behind the facts. If we don't know *who* it was that lay in that cradle and later hung on that cross, we won't appreciate the *what* He accomplished and *what* it is we have.

And if we don't appreciate what we have, we are in grave danger of looking for something else.

The problem is nothing new. It was happening in the first century. There were professing Christians who were considering turning away from Christ, and settling for something else. And the Spirit of God provided a book to address that problem. It's the book of Hebrews.

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For an earlier development of this passage, see a message preached in the Hebrews series 12/2/07.

You see, if you don't know *who Christ is*, you are in great danger. That's why we need to revisit the message of Hebrews today.

Hebrews is an amazing, Christ-exalting, brain-stretching, life-transforming book! Hebrews says, "If you've got the best, why would you settle for anything else?"

This morning we're going to take a close look at Hebrews 1:1-4. It's there that we discover eight truths regarding the Matchless Son, eight truths that make Him unique and indeed a treasure worth giving your all to possess.

We don't know who wrote Hebrews. The writer doesn't name himself in the book. But he certainly had a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament, possessed a keen mind and the ability to develop elaborate argumentation, knew Timothy (13:23), and knew some Italian believers (13:24). He apparently wrote the book some time before the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in A.D. 70, probably in the decade of the 60's.

Who were the first recipients of this letter? Again, we don't know for sure since the letter doesn't identify the recipients. Based on the content, the readers of this book must have been Jewish by background. Later comments in the book indicate they were facing persecution, and the frequent warnings in the book suggest the readers were wavering in their faith. Apparently, the original readers of the book of Hebrews were Jewish people who had made professions of faith in Messiah Jesus but were considering going back to their old beliefs and practices. They were in danger then of defection.

They needed a reminder of what, of *who*, they had.

And so the author gives it to them in Hebrews 1:1-4, a text we've looked at before and need to look at often. He begins by making a contrast involving God's speech.

### I. God spoke through the prophets (1).

Verse 1—"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways..."

The fact is, the Creator God is a revealing God. We would not know Him unless He took the initiative to make Himself known. And that's what He did.

God spoke *in the past*, and *through the prophets*. A prophet was a spokesman for God. God gave special revelation to His chosen servants who in turn passed that revelation on to His people. Verse 1 says He did this *at many times*. Furthermore, many of the prophets, as directed by the Holy Spirit, wrote down what God said, beginning with Moses around 1400 B.C. and ending with Malachi one thousand years later around 400 B.C. The result is what we call "the Old Testament."

The author also states that God spoke *in various ways*. For instance, He once spoke to Moses out of a burning bush (Ex. 3:2-4), and later on Mount Sinai God wrote His words on two stone tablets (Ex. 32:16). To Elijah He spoke in a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12). He spoke to Daniel in dreams and visions (Dan. 7:1).<sup>2</sup> He spoke to Hosea through his marriage trouble (Hos. 1:2), and to Amos in a basket of summer fruit (Amos 8:1).

Two things were true of God's revelation through the prophets...

**A. What He said was good.** Don't miss God's grace in all this. Over and over again, when God gave His Word to the Israelites, it was a manifestation of His gracious character. Do you like it when someone gives you the silent treatment? God did not do so with His people. In the past, says the writer of Hebrews, *God spoke to our forefathers*. And His speech was a good gift to them. However...

**B. What He said anticipated something better.**

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<sup>2</sup> Observation by R. Gromacki, pp. 22-23.

And that something better came four hundred years after the last prophet, Malachi, spoke. Notice the word of contrast at the beginning of verse 2.

“But.” Verse 1 says, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, *but*.” But what?

Verse 2—“But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” So...

## II. God spoke ultimately through His Son (2-4).

Prior to the first century, the Jewish conception of history went like this. There was *the present age*, which would end when Messiah came and inaugurated *the age to come*. But what the Old Testament announced yet didn't make clear was that the Messiah would come, not once, but *twice*, the first time to suffer and die, and the second time to rule and reign. When the author of Hebrews speaks about “these last days,” he's talking about the last days of the present age that will give way to the age to come. And that's happened, he says. In these last days God has spoken to us by His Son. That means we actually are living between the two ages. In Hebrews 9:26 he puts it this way, “But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

Please realize that the Son mentioned in verse 2 is more than the last in a long line of prophets. He is the person who initiated a new age, the Messianic Age.

Just who is child of Christmas, this *Son*? In the Greek text there is no article or pronoun. It literally says that in these last days God has spoken to us “in Son” (*en huioi*). Robert Gromacki explains, “This grammatical feature stresses the quality or nature of His sonship. Stress is not only on what Christ said and did, but especially on what and who He is. The prophets spoke the word of God, but Christ *is* the word of God.”<sup>3</sup>

In the first four verses of Hebrews 1, the author informs his readers of eight truths regarding this Matchless Son. Remember, he's writing to people who were thinking of walking away from Christ. If you do that, this is who you would be leaving.

**A. The Son is the heir of all things.** Verse 2—“Whom he appointed heir of all things.” Look at the words carefully.

Whom—that's referring to the Son. He—that's referring to God, the antecedent mentioned in verse 1, God the Father to be precise. We're told that the Son of God is the God-appointed heir of everything.

Does this mean that the Father must die in order for the Son to receive His inheritance? Obviously not, for the eternal Father will never die. In what sense then is the Son the *heir*? And furthermore, what inheritance does the author have in mind here? We find a clue in verse 5. There the author quotes from an Old Testament passage which he does repeatedly in Hebrews. What passage? It's Psalm 2, so we know the writer has Psalm 2 in mind.

Here's what Psalm 2:7-9 says, “He said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.’”

You see, when God created Adam, the first man, He gave mankind dominion over the earth. But Adam sinned and tainted this dominion, turning it into self-seeking, self-promoting ends. So God appointed His Son heir. That is, the eternal Son of God entered the world as the second Adam. He became a man in order to restore what the first Adam ruined. He came to regain what Adam forfeited.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Gromacki, pp. 23-24.

How did the Son accomplish this restoration? By making a redemption payment. That is, He entered the world as a *Redeemer*, in obedience to His Father, and by giving His own life as a ransom payment He set free the very inheritance His Father had given Him to enjoy.

I'm grateful that the Lord has given gifted minds to His church to help us understand His Word. I'll be quoting from several throughout this message. Here's an observation by commentator, Philip Hughes: "The statement that the Son was *appointed heir of all things* is a statement, rather, concerning the mediatorial office of Christ...The heirship of Christ, then, is established within the perspective of redemption: his inheritance is the innumerable company of the redeemed and the universe renewed by virtue of his triumphant work of reconciliation."<sup>4</sup>

Allow me to make two important observations regarding the Son.

1. *He doesn't promote Himself.* The text states that He was *appointed heir*.
2. *He exists in eternal submission to the Father.* The Son always does what the Father tells Him to do.

Philip Hughes offers an important caution, "The distinction between the Father and the Son in the Godhead is a deep mystery of revelation; but God is one and we must always beware of surrendering the divine unity by attempting to make the divine person conform to the limitations of our human situation."<sup>5</sup>

Who is the Son? First, He is the heir of all things. A second truth...

**B. The Son is the creator of all things.** Verse 2 continues, "And through whom he made the universe." *Whom* refers to the Son. *He* refers to God the Father. That would indicate that...

1. *The Father designed creation.* And...
2. *The Son accomplished the work of creation.* The Father gave the assignment of creating the universe to His Son, and the Son, again in perfect obedience, fulfilled the assignment. "He made the universe."

The writer actually uses the Greek word for 'ages' (*aiones*), rather than the usual word for 'worlds' (*kosmoi*). Guthrie explains, "The reason is that the word for 'ages' is more comprehensive, including within it the periods of time through which the created order exists."<sup>6</sup>

The point is, if something exists, it all came from the Son. He made everything. That's a staggering thought, if you'll ponder it carefully. The Son made the woman through whom He eventually was born into the world. He made the Galilean dirt upon which He walked for thirty-three years. He made the tree to which He was eventually nailed.

Let's check out a couple of other passages to gain a fuller understanding...

John 1:1-3 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*"

Colossians 1:16 "For *by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.*"

Sometimes I think we read statements like these and gloss right over them. So stop, and hear it again. "Through whom He made the universe." Think about how big the universe is...

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Hughes, pp. 38-9.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Hughes, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Guthrie, p. 65.

If you could bore a hole and hollow out the sun, you could fit over one million planet earths inside it, and still have room for over four million moons. The sun is 93 million away from earth. To put that in perspective, the moon is 211,453 miles away, and at a normal walking pace you could walk to it in twenty-seven years. The speed of light is 186,000 miles per second, so it would take a beam of light one-and-a-half seconds to reach the moon from earth. If we could travel at the speed of light, we would reach Venus in two minutes and eighteen seconds, because it's only 26 million miles away. After four-and-one-half minutes we would have passed Mercury, which is 50 million miles away. To get to Mars, again at the speed of light, it would take us four minutes and twenty-one seconds to cover the 34 million miles. Jupiter—that's 367 million miles away—would take thirty-five minutes. Saturn is twice as far as Jupiter (790 million miles from earth) and would take one hour and eleven seconds. If we kept going we would pass Uranus, Neptune, and finally Pluto which is 2.7 billion miles away—and we still haven't left our solar system! The nearest star is ten times further than the boundaries of our solar system—20 billion miles away. The North Star is 400 billion miles away. The star called Betelgeuse is 880 quadrillion miles from us and has a diameter greater than the earth's orbit (250 million miles)!

And where did all this originate? Someone made it, and Hebrews makes that clear that someone was the Son of God.<sup>7</sup>

Yes, the Bible clearly teaches both the pre-existence of the person Jesus Christ and His co-existence with the Father. The church father, Athanasius, explains, "When the sacred writers say that 'he is before all things' and that 'through him he created the world,' they proclaim the eternal and everlasting being of the Son and thereby designate him as God."<sup>8</sup>

You say, "My tiny mind can't fathom this." We're just getting started! Notice the third truth about the Son in verse 3, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory." The term 'radiance' is translated 'brightness' in the KJV and 'effulgence' in the ASV.

Think of what happens at dawn. The sun breaks the horizon and the rays of light penetrate and soon eliminate every element of darkness. So it was when the *Son* entered the world two thousand years ago...

**C. The Son is the perfect expression of glory.** Remember what happened on the mount of transfiguration? Matthew 17:2 states, "There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light."

But it wasn't just on that mountain that the Son revealed God's glory. Every aspect of His humanity was a demonstration of the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 4:6 explains, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

And here's a mind-boggler. John 12:41 says that Isaiah saw the preincarnate glory of the Son before the Son ever even entered the world, probably referring to his experience in the temple (Isaiah 6:1ff.).

**D. The Son is the exact representation of God.** Verse 3 continues, "And the exact representation of his being." The Greek term translated "exact representation" is *charakter*, from which we get the English word "character." It referred to an engraving tool, later to a die made by that tool, and finally to the mark made upon a coin by the die.<sup>9</sup>

It's like a stamp on a wax seal. The seal bears the same image as the stamp. There is an exact correspondence between the two.

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<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, *Hebrews 1-2*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>8</sup> Quote taken from Hughes, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Gromacki, pp. 27-8.

There is no difference between the nature of God and the nature of the Son of God. Donald Guthrie comments, “The writer has rapidly plunged his readers into profound theology, but he does not tarry to discuss it. He assumes that his readers will accept this view of Jesus Christ without question.”<sup>10</sup>

Do we find this teaching elsewhere in Scripture? Indeed, we do. Jesus Himself said in John 14:9, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” The apostle Paul had this to say about the Son in Colossians 1:15, “He is the image of the invisible God.” And in Colossians 1:19, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.” And in Colossians 2:9, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”<sup>11</sup>

God is one God, yet He exists eternally as three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They are equal in essence yet distinct in function. It’s called the doctrine of the Trinity.

Some today say that Jesus wasn’t equal with God since the Bible calls Him “the Son of God.” That’s what Jehovah’s Witnesses assert, for instance. But that misses the biblical point of what *Son* means. Here we’re told that the Son is the *exact representation* of God.

In the fourth century A.D. a great battle took place in the church over the identity of Christ. Why did they fight over such minute points? Hughes hits the nail on the head, explaining, “Athanasius and those who stood with him in the fourth century so clearly perceived that a false doctrine of the person of Christ must inevitably result in a false doctrine of the work of Christ and consequently undermine the whole system of the gospel.”<sup>12</sup>

You say, “But I can’t explain the Trinity.” Then you’re in good company! My hunch is you probably can’t explain gravity either, but you believe it (which is why you don’t jump off of the roof of your house when you’re done cleaning your gutters).

Ponder these words by Philip Hughes, “The real problem...is that of terminology: human language is inadequate to describe transcendental truth with precision. ‘Since language is incapable of speaking worthily of God and the intellect unable to comprehend him...for that very reason, when speech and understanding fail in the description of God, then all the more we ought to glorify God, for we have such a God as transcends both intellect and perception.’”<sup>13</sup>

**E. The Son is the sustainer of all things.** Verse 3—“Sustaining all things by his powerful word.” The word “sustaining” (‘upholding’ in the KJV, from the Greek *pheron*) means more than just keep something going. It carries the sense of holding and taking something forward towards a goal. In other words, don’t picture Atlas holding the dead weight of the world on his shoulders. That’s not this word. This word implies, as Hughes puts it, “the motion of carrying something from one place to another.”<sup>14</sup>

That’s what the Son does, and He does this by His powerful word. That’s right...

1. *His word is the means by which He works.* And...
2. *His word is powerful.*

The Deist compares God to a watchmaker who makes the watch, winds it, and then lets it go, and moves on to other tasks. Not so, says the Bible. The God who created the universe is dynamically involved in its continuing care. And more specifically, the Son who created is the Son who sustains.

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<sup>10</sup> Donald Guthrie, p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> See also 2 Corinthians 4:4

<sup>12</sup> Quote taken from Philip Hughes, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Hughes, p. 41.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Hughes, p. 45.

Just think what would happen if Christ stopped His sustaining work for even a second. The sun has a surface temperature of 12,000 degrees Fahrenheit. If it were any closer to the earth, we'd burn up. If any further away, we'd freeze. Our globe is tilted on an exact angle of 23 degrees, which is why we have four seasons. If it weren't tilted, vapors from the ocean would move north and south, eventually piling up monstrous continents of ice. If the moon didn't remain at its specified distance from the earth, the ocean tide would completely inundate the land twice a day.<sup>15</sup>

The old spiritual said it well:

*He's got the whole world in his hands,  
He's got you and me, brother, in his hands,  
He's got the tiny little baby in his hands,  
He's got the whole world in his hands.*

But there's more! Verse 3 continues, "After he had provided purification for sins." Intrinsic to man is the desire to get rid of his sins. We know that we have done wrong. We know that we have violated a divine standard—our conscience screams at us. And so we devise means to remove the sin barrier and reconnect with God. That's what *religion* is, man's attempt to bridge the gap with God. And that's why there are so many religions in the world, for man is continually coming up with new systems designed to deal with the sin problem and reach God.

But here we're told something amazing...

**F. The Son took care of the sin problem.** That's right. The Son took care of *our* sin problem! He provided purification for sins. How He did it we're not told in this verse. The author of Hebrews will devote much of the book to that question.

Don't miss the change in verb tense here. The Son continually is the radiance of God's glory, and the Son continually sustains the universe. *But...* the Son provided cleansing for sins—that's an aorist tense participle meaning it happened in the past and it happened one time. The Son went to the cross once. There's only one Good Friday, and on that day the Son of God took care of the sin problem in totality. His work that day is a finished work.

**G. The Son took a seat in heaven.** Verse 3 concludes, "He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."

To say that the Son is seated in heaven doesn't mean that He is *inactive* now. He may be seated in heaven but He is still at work, sustaining the universe, ruling over history and subduing enemies (1 Cor. 15:25), and interceding for His people (Heb. 7:25), and dispensing mercy and grace for their needs (Heb. 4:16).

Why is He seated then? Please realize that there were no chairs in the tabernacle nor temple. The priests never sat down there for their work was never done. Yet after taking care of our sin problem, the Son sat down! That statement indicates three things to us...

1. *That indicates He completed His task.*<sup>16</sup> Remember what Stephen said just before the rocks snuffed out his life? Acts 7:56 records, "'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'"

2. *That indicates He possesses intrinsic worth.* He sat down where? At the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. To sit in the presence of Majesty means the Son Himself is majestic and possesses inherent worth.

3. *That indicates He deserves honor and obedience.* We read this in the messianic Psalm 110:1, "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"

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<sup>15</sup> Observations by John MacArthur, p. 37.

<sup>16</sup> See Hebrews 9:26

**H. The Son is superior to the angels.** Verse 4—“So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.”

We see the Son’s superiority over the angels explained more fully in the rest of chapter one, but the question is, why? Why is the author emphasizing this point anyway? Apparently, there was common teaching that elevated angels to rival Christ. In Colossians 2:18 Paul refers to the “worship of angels.”

Robert Gromacki offers this explanation, “The Dead Sea Scrolls have indicated that the Qumran sect believed in the advent to two messiahs, that the kingly messiah would be subordinate to the priestly messiah, that both messiahs would be under Michael the archangel, and that angels would be over men in the kingdom.”<sup>17</sup>

Not so, says the writer to the Hebrews. The Son is superior to the angels in two ways.

1. *He assumed a superior position.* And...

2. *He inherited a superior name.* What name does He possess that’s better? The verse seems to be saying that it’s better to be called a “Son” than an “angel” (which means ‘messenger’). More about that next time.

So there’s the identity of the Son. He’s the heir of all things, the creator of all things, the perfect expression of glory, the exact representation of God, the sustainer of all things, the one who took care of our sin problem, who took a seat in heaven, and is superior to the angels.

Here then is the question. Why would you settle for anything less? We’ve learned today that God has spoken finally and completely in His Son, the matchless child of Christmas. So how should we respond?

#### Make It Personal: Since God has spoken...

Two responses are in order...

1. *Listen to His Son.* Again, God has spoken through His Son. Are you listening to Him? I’ll say it again. God has spoken. *Are you listening?*

Does the evidence of your life show that you are listening to God’s Son?

Recently I listened to Lee Strobel’s audiobook, *The Case for a Creator*. He tells the story of an interview he did with Charles Templeton, a friend of Billy Graham in his early years of ministry, in fact, former minister himself who became an agnostic. Strobel tells what happened when he asked the eighty-plus year old who walked away from his faith what he now thought of Jesus.

“Abruptly, Templeton cut short his thoughts. There was a brief pause, almost as if he was uncertain whether he should continue.

‘Uh ... but ... no,’ he said slowly, ‘he’s the most ...’ He stopped, then started again. ‘In my view,’ he declared, ‘he is the most important human being who ever existed.’ That’s when Templeton uttered the words I never expected to hear from him.

‘And if I may put it this way,’ he said in a voice that began to crack, ‘I ... miss ... him!’

With that tears flooded his eyes. He turned his head and looked downward, raising his left hand to shield his face from me. His shoulders bobbed as he wept.” Are you listening to the Son? You say, “I have doubts.” Then face them. There are answers. Get help. God so loved the world that He gave His Son. So accept God’s love gift and listen to His Son. Let Him guide your life.

2. *Let others know what He has said.* Many people all around us don’t know what we’ve learned today about the Son. Who will tell them? Will you? I urge you this week to talk to someone about the Matchless Son.

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Gromacki, p. 30.