



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hebrews 1:1–4

“The Finality and Superiority of the Son of God”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee again for the word of God. We thank Thee for the way in which it speaks to us. We remember that this author that we are to study is one who told us that “the word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the joints and the marrow and of the soul and the spirit.” And we remember, too, that he has warned us, or admonished us, that it is with this word that we have to do. And we thank Thee for the privilege that is ours, when we think of so many thousands and millions who have never had the opportunity to ponder the things of the word of God as we have. And then when we think of the many who have a prejudice against it that has caused them to turn away from even the opportunities that may have been given to them. And when we remember the grace that Thou hast shown to us, we are truly thankful. We thank Thee for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and for all that he’s done for us. And we thank Thee that he is a great High Priest, who sits at the right hand of the majesty on high, and there ministers the great salvation that he has accomplished in his saving work. We ask, Lord, that Thou will be with us as we begin our study of this great Epistle to the Hebrews.

And we pray, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Well, really, it’s a great privilege to be able to turn to the Epistle to the Hebrews. There is no doubt but that it is one of the great writings of the word of God. It surely is one of the greatest of the New Testament works and ranks right at the top of the epistles that one reads in the New Testament. I think that individuals frequently turn to Paul’s writings and when they turn to the Epistle to the Romans they say, “This is Paul’s greatest epistle.” It may well be Paul’s greatest epistle because we don’t know the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. But one thing that we can say is that if it were known that Paul had written the Epistle to the Hebrews, there would be many arguments over which is the greatest of the epistles of Paul, and probably the debate would be between the Epistle to the Romans and the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Now, we’re going to begin our rather lengthy study of it, the Lord willing, if I live long enough and if you live long enough, too. We’re going to be a number of weeks on this great epistle. I’m looking forward to it because it’s one of my favorites, and I know that many of you if you follow along with me, you will be blessed as we study the epistle together. In fact, if you just didn’t listen to me at all, but read this epistle constantly, you would be tremendously blessed because it’s really one of the great writings of the word of God.

There are many unanswered questions about this grand epistle. There are those who have constructed rather intricate arguments for the authorship of various individuals. The Apostle Paul is one of the candidates, of course, and the last chapter of the epistle is one of the strengths of the argument that the Apostle wrote it. It was so far as the early Church is concerned, one of the early speculations that the Apostle wrote this Epistle. Strictly speaking, there is no real, decisive evidence of Paul’s writing this epistle. And those who read the epistle in the original text, almost to a man, feel that it could not have been the Apostle who wrote this epistle, for the simple reason that the style, the grammar, the vocabulary is so different.

Now, we know that a different subject will bring out a different vocabulary, sometimes even a different style, but some of the little common things that characterize our style are the things that differ when one looks at the Pauline letters and when one looks at the Epistle to the Hebrews. And

so, generally speaking, evangelical scholars, together with liberal scholars, have felt that it's difficult to support a Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Now, in the light of that, of course, there have been a number of speculations about who wrote it. For example, one of the speculations that has some support from Scripture, is that Barnabas wrote it. He was a Levite, you'll remember, and surely the individual who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews was well acquainted with the Levitical cultus, and some of the ceremonies, especially the Day of Atonement. And so, there is some justification for thinking that perhaps Barnabas wrote it. And when one adds to that the fact that he was called “a Son of Consolation,” and then, at the end of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the last few verses of the 13th chapter, the author makes a comment that causes others to think, well, it could possibly have been Barnabas. Because, we read here, in chapter 13 of the Epistle to the Hebrews these words, “And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words,” chapter 13 in verse 22. And that, of course, is the same word that is used in Acts to describe Barnabas as a “Son of Consolation” or a son of exhortation.

Modern scholars, since the day of Martin Luther, have largely followed the speculation that it was Apollos who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. He was an Alexandrian. He was very eloquent, Luke tells us. And whoever wrote this epistle was familiar with Alexandrian vocabulary and terminology, as is evident in these verses that we read here because some of the characteristic words of the epistle may be traced to Alexandria, as common expressions in the day of the apostles. In addition, Apollos, as I say, was an eloquent man, and “mighty in the Scriptures” we are told. And surely this author is one who is mighty in the Scriptures, mighty in the Old Testament Scriptures, because that was the Scripture for them, the Old Testament.

Luther is the first to, as far as I remember, the first to make this guess. But modern scholars feel there may be something to it because of the things that I've mentioned to you.

There have even been some who have suggested that the epistle was written by a woman. You might expect that, too, in our day, in which there has been so much emphasis on feminism and

things that concern the women. This is still the Year of the Woman. We have a few more days in 1992, and it's called The Year of the Woman. And so, we are not surprised then that someone should make the suggestion that a woman wrote it, because it is an anonymous letter. And so, perhaps, and the reasoning back of it would be this; that the early church would not have accepted an epistle and would not have given it the authority of the other books of the word of God if it had been known to be written by a woman; and so, consequently, the woman who wrote it did not attach her name to it for just that particular reason. In fact, there have been, and there are many female scholars who would never make a mistake like this, but one teaching in one of the higher institutions of the United States did make it, for she wrote a paper on the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews contending that it was a woman who wrote it. The facts suggested that it was one of the women mentioned in the Book of Acts. But, it so happens that in verse 32 of chapter 11, the author writes, “And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak, and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets.”

Now, the word “me” in Greek may be masculine or feminine, but one of the requirements of an adjective or a participle, agreeing with a pronoun, is that it agree with it in gender. And it so happens that the participle, which agrees with the “me” in verse 32, is a masculine participle. It's translated here “to tell” but it is a participle in the original text. And so, the fact that the participle is a masculine makes it certain that the “me” is a male and not a female. So, while we do not know the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we've narrowed it down to men, to males [laughter] which is not much of a narrowing down, I know, but at least it gives us some certain information. It was an unknown man.

I've speculated about this a lot because I was required to teach The Epistle to the Hebrews for well, to over forty classes at theological seminary in the thirty years that I taught at one particular one because we had double classes some years. And, naturally, this was something that came up often. And you were asked the question, “Well, why is it that we do not know the human author? Would it not help us to know the human author?” And I've pondered about that and I do not have

any certain answer to the question, “Why is this Epistle an anonymous epistle?” After all, some of our gospels are anonymous, too, for that matter, although the tradition is much more reliable in the case of the gospel writings. I have thought that perhaps the reason for it is, and I say perhaps because I cannot prove this, that the author wished us to get the impression that this is a word from God and not from men. And by not giving his name and by a couple of other things that I’m going to mention right now, he got over the impression that this epistle is essentially and most specifically, we could underline it, a word from God.

Now, the reason that I think that that may be so and I say may, underline the may, is that he begins by saying, “God who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the Fathers by the prophets has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.” In other words, the thing that he wants us to remember as we read this epistle is that it is God who has spoken and he’s going to give an accounting of what he regards as God’s message to us.

Further, this author uses the Old Testament very fully. Perhaps, by page, he cites more from the Old Testament than anyone else in the New Testament. There is a little debate over whether the Apostle Paul in Romans may have used the Old Testament as much per page as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, but I think since there are over thirty citations from the Old Testament and there is just one long allusion to great parts of the Old Testament, that that accolade, if we can call it an accolade, using the Old Testament more than any other New Testament writer, belongs to the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

You’ll notice that in citing these many times from the Old Testament, I think, that there are about 30 specific citations, I didn’t recount them today, aside from the allusions, never once does the author use a human author in his citations. He never says, “Moses saith,” or “Isaiah says” or anything like that. Once, he mentions David in the 4th chapter, and the reason he mentions David in the 4th chapter is not to identify the Psalm, Psalm 95, as from David, but to refer to the section of the Scriptures, which had to do with David. That’s the force of the expression. Later on, we’ll talk about that, a few months from now, when we get to the 4th chapter.

But, at any rate, we have an author who cites often from the Old Testament, never mentions the human author. We have one who begins by saying that what he is telling us is something that God has spoken. Then, near the end of the epistle, in chapter 12 in verse 25, he has still the same mentality by admonishing the readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews, “See that you do not refuse Him who speaks, for if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks,” present tense, “who is speaking from Heaven.” And so, you get the impression that he thinks of the message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ as God’s message to us, and it’s a message that is still valid at the present time, and we should pay attention to it.

So while there are many unanswered questions then about the authorship, I’m perfectly happy to think of this epistle as a special epistle in which the author is underlining the fact that it comes to us from God. The human author is insignificant. It’s the divine author that is the important thing here.

You may have heard other suggestions regarding the authorship. One of the intriguing ones was the suggestion that Arthur T. Pearson, a Presbyterian Minister of the earlier part of the 20th century, a very evangelical man, who when C. S. Spurgeon died filled the pulpit of the Metropolitan Tabernacle for a lengthy period of time and, in fact, they called him to be the pastor of that particular church, which is a very unusual thing. But, nevertheless, they did. He refused it. But he was a great expositor and he once made the suggestion that perhaps the Epistle to the Hebrews is, in essence, what our Lord told the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. And so what we have in the Epistle to the Hebrews is a kind of an unfolding of what Jesus did when he spoke on the way to Emmaus and unfolded the things that are found in the Old Testament. For example, we read in verse 44 of Luke 24.

“Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the

Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.’”

But even more significantly were the first words that he spoke to them when he said, “‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ [And now, verse 27] And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Well, of course, it could be that the author of this epistle was acquainted with an account of what our Lord told the Emmaus disciples. I’m sure that was passed around to a lot of people, the things that he said to them that remarkable day. And, Arthur T. Pearson’s speculation, just a speculation, was that we have here, perhaps, some of the things that our Lord said.

What makes that a little bit more interesting is the fact that modern scholarship at the present time is entranced with the idea that the Epistle to the Hebrews is not really a book, as we would say, the Book of Hebrews. And it’s not really an epistle in the official sense. But it probably was, originally, a sermon. In fact, the latest of the Evangelical commentaries on this epistle, and perhaps the most detailed one, written by William Lane, makes the suggestion and he’s written another little book in which he also has made that suggestion. It didn’t begin with him, it is speculation that goes all the way back to the early Church, that it was a sermon and then simply committed to writing.

Now, I must tell you, my friends, who are sitting out in front of me, I don’t think it was a sermon. If this had been preached in a Christian Church, any Christian Church, so far as I know, in the 20th Century, by the time the author got to the 4th chapter the average congregation would be wondering, “What in the world is this fellow talking about?” And when he started to talk about Melchizedek, then I must say, the audiences that I know, and I put myself in the midst of the

audiences, the audiences that I know would have gone to sleep long before the author ever finished this epistle. Now, not because it's not a great epistle but simply because we are not in our churches today very familiar with the Levitical cultus and the things that our author discusses. Maybe I'm wrong, perhaps, if we had some brilliant preacher then he might have been able to make an excellent sermon out of it. But, at any rate, I doubt it.

One thing you can be sure of, and that is that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews thought that with reference to the people to whom he wrote, there were things lacking. Now, again, we don't know to whom the epistle was written and we actually do not know from whence it was written. It may have been written from Rome to ones in the East. It may have been written from the East to those in Rome. It was known first in Rome and Clement in his first epistle makes reference to the first chapter, clearly citing a lengthy section from it.

So it may have been written in Rome or it may have been written to Rome. There are things in the 13th chapter that could support either of those speculations. But one thing our author did believe, and that was that the Christians of his day were lacking in something that he wanted to fill in. That is, he felt there were things lacking and he wanted to supply what would have been relevant to the Church as he understood it that was living in a status of dullness and deadness. And my, if there is anything that characterizes our church today, our evangelical church, it is deadness to the word of God. Dull, they are dull. They are not growing in the word of God. They are not interested in the exposition of the word of God. This is characteristic of evangelicalism, and evangelicalism is turning away gradually from the exposition of the word of God. I don't mean every church, of course. There are a number of churches over the country that are seeking to expound the Scriptures. But, many of them are not. And this author felt that there was something that the believers of his day needed, and he wanted to supply that lack. Do you know what it was? Well, it was the doctrine of the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. That's what he wanted to supply; that he felt might be the means by which the Church might be recovered from its slowness of life, deadness of life, dullness of spiritual thinking that led him to think that they were in danger of apostasy from the faith.

So this epistle is wonderfully relevant to a church that is living in a kind of deadness and dullness, knowing little of the heavenly life that the High Priest wishes that his body should know and smug and slumbering in the pleasures of the world, the pleasures of the flesh, and the pleasures of the Devil. That’s why I think this epistle is so important for me and I believe, that it’s probably important for most of you.

Now, let’s look at the first three verses tonight. The apostle says, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.” That’s a marvelous rhetorical sentence. I wish we all knew Greek and knew it well because we’d recognize that this language is of a very high quality. It is a sonorous rhetorical sentence, worthy as someone has said of a spiritual Demosthenes. It’s almost as if a great thought demanded a great dress and this is a great dress because it’s great Greek. It’s remarkable and one of the great illustrations of the Greek of the New Testament. He talks first about the method of revelation. “God, who at various times and in various ways,” or as some of you have, “in many parts and in many ways.”

What does he mean by that? Well, he means the Old Testament, the Scriptures, as he understood them. The Scriptures were written by prophets. They were written by priests. They were written by kings. They had to do with prophets, they had to do with priest, they had to do with kings. There were many ways in which the authors of the Old Testament communicated. They communicated by prophecies, and so we have prophecies in the Old Testament. There were priestly communications. Moses, after all was such, remember? And there were kings. At least Moses belonged to the Levitical family. And there were kings.

And so in many parts and in many ways, God spoke by the prophecies, he spoke by visions, he spoke by events, such as the Exodus. He spoke by institutions such as the Tabernacle and, of course, the Temple. He spoke by dreams and visions, many ways in which God spoke in the Old Testament. And our author is underlining that. “Who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets.”

Now, the men of the revelation are also important here and, in fact, the great contrast is between the two. Notice, he says, “He spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets.” That’s literally, in the original text, “in the prophets.” But in these last days he has spoken to us by, literally, “in” Son, in a Son, or better, in such a person as a Son. In other words, this is a Son-wise revelation.

I was reading this afternoon, one of the authors, who has written a commentary on a number of the books of the Old Testament, an Old Testament scholar, and he commented this way. “Moreover the great fundamental difference between the two revelations is clearly indicated by the simple antithesis of “in the prophets” and in such a person as a son. The term prophets makes the relation or refers to a relation purely accidental and official, in other words, not by birth but accidental. That is, God acted in His sovereign way, calling a prophet to his task. And he stood as one of the officers or officials of the Old Testament. So the relationship is accidental and official. But, now, in the Son, the relationship is essential and necessary. The Lord Jesus is a Son of God, and so, how different is the revelation of the New Testament, a revelation by someone who is essentially God himself. God spoke in time past by the prophets, but in these last days has spoken to us by such a person as a Son.

Now, if he is a son, then the revelation is a Son-wise revelation. And, in fact, the revelation, the speaking, the message is the Son himself. It’s Jesus Christ who is the message, Jesus Christ in all that he is. So he has spoken to us in such a person as a Son. Now, mind you, not any son, but in this case, since it is God who is speaking, it’s in such a person as the Son of God. Should you and I pay attention to a message from the Son of God? One who has essentially the nature of God?

I love a statement that Marcus Dodd, one of the Scottish commentators made. He said, “A son who can be characteristically designated a son, carries in himself the father’s nature and does not need to be instructed in purposes, which are also and already his own, nor to be officially commissioned and empowered to do what he cannot help doing.” Now, the prophets were different. This message is a Son-wise revelation. How important this is for us to pay attention to such a message? God has spoken in His Son.

You look at the many centuries of the Old Testament and reflect upon it, you realize that partially and piecemeally, God was giving people instruction down through that period of time. You might wonder why He didn't just give them everything at the beginning? Well, there is an unfolding of divine revelation through history. We've been looking at some of that. And we have evidence that our author would have underlined as being correct, basically, the idea that God has spoken over a lengthy period of time and, as a matter of fact, He's going to finish his speaking, ultimately, in the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus and the Kingdom that follows. But, at any rate, the revelation partial and piecemeal, but it became in once sense final, when the Son of God, the object of the prophecies of the Old Testament came in his incarnation.

Now, notice, too, that there is a unity and continuity in this revelation, for the same God who spoke all through the centuries of the Old Testament is the God who speaks in the Son. So the same God speaking gives a unity to the revelation and a continuity, also. So there is unity and continuity reflected in our word of God; the man who opens up the Book of Genesis and reads through the Bible and lays down his Bible, finishing the Book of Revelation, knows that there is a unity in the message that the word of God contains, even though there are sixty-six different books written by numerous authors.

Now, when Jesus Christ came, the many messages of the Old Testament merged in Him. If you look at the prophets, for example, you can think of Amos, Amos is a prophecy in which Amos acts as God's messenger with a cry for social justice in Israel; not simply social justice, but that's a major part of his message. Social justice in the situation in which Israel found itself; this is the prophet who tells Israel, and I know that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews if he were living today would say something of the same thing in the meetings of our congregation because Amos, you'll remember said, "I hate your feasts." That's as if we should have a message from the Lord God today who would say, "I hate your baptisms and your Lord's Suppers," when Christ is not vital in them. And that's what was happening in Israel. There is Isaiah, the prophet of God's holiness. And there is Hosea, we've expounded Hosea here. I have, maybe others have, too. I believe, also, we've

had other expositions of Hosea here through the years. Hosea is the prophet of God’s unconditional love, that is, the determining love of God that sets its love, his love, upon an individual sovereignly. And that, of course, is one of the great features of the word of God, finds its theological explanation in the doctrine of foreordination and election, predestination; all of those things bound up, ultimately, in the unconditional love of God.

So you can see the prophets of the Old Testament coming with their messages; known for one thing, primarily. I’ve often used the illustration that was suggested to me by one of the writers that I have read but it struck home particularly to me because I grew up in Charleston, South Carolina, in my high school and college days and my family still lives there. My father was a South Carolinian and we went back there when I was thirteen years of age. And we lived in the old part of Charleston, in the historic area, where the cathedrals, what you would look at today and call them cathedrals, of Saint Michael’s and Saint Phillips, great churches with spires that go up to the skies, and George Whitfield preached in one of them. And there’s a whole lot of history there. And they still had clocks and sounded those clocks and you could hear those clocks all over that part of Charleston. So if you awakened during the night at two or three o’clock, and wondered what time it was, well, you would hear the clocks sound on the hour, you would hear them sound on the fifteen minutes, the thirty minutes, the forty-five minutes. But, if you happened to wake up at five minutes after one of those hours, you wouldn’t know what time it was until finally they reached the hour and struck the hour.

Well, the prophets were something like that. That is, they received messages from the Lord God, but they really did not know what the ultimate would be. They were like individuals listening to a clock striking, but you even after you come to the hour hand, and the clock begins to strike on, bong, well, it’s at least one o’clock. Bong. Two o’clock. Three o’clock. You never know until finally the clock stops. And so the men of the Old Testament were just like individuals listening to a clock striking. They did not know when the fulfillment would come. But, when the Lord Jesus came, that was the last striking of the clock for the incarnate Son of God appeared.

Now, the author, at this point, having said that, “He has spoken to us by His Son,” does something that you might expect him to do. And he wants to answer a question because your question would be something like this. What right does he have to speak to us? Now, if you just brushed all of your Christian knowledge out of your mind and were listening to this for the first time, you might say, “What right? What is the authority that this individual, called the Son, has to address us in a divine kind of way?” Well, our author tells us some of the reasons why he has authority to speak to us. Notice them. There are actually seven of them; and they elucidate the greatness of the Son of God.

First of all, he says, “Whom He has appointed heir of all things.”

Perhaps I should note one thing, before we go much further. That is, that these seven things begin with, kind of, the glory of God; that is, God has appointed him heir of all things, moved through the incarnation when we read, “He had by himself purged our sins” on to the majesty of the Son of God who has now sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. But, at any rate, these are the things that qualify the Son of God to speak to us. He possesses the Father’s nature. He possesses the Father’s nature.

Now, we are Trinitarians, in Christianity. We believe in one God, just like Muslims. One God. Just like the Jews. One God. But we believe the one God subsists in three persons. Now, the three persons we know as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The great historic creeds of the Christian Church affirm this. This is what Christians believe; one God, who subsists in three persons. So this individual possesses the nature of the Father; one divine nature in our Godhead, but he’s a different person, has a different personality.

So we read, “He, the Father, has appointed Him heir of all things.” Heirship rests upon sonship. We know that. Only a son is an heir. Individuals who are not in the family can receive bequests, but heirship and sonship go together. And, later on in the epistle he will make that very plain. All things are eternally His, because the Father, the first person of the Trinity, has appointed

him heir of all things, heir of all things. So heirship is the property of the Son of God, all things are eternally his.

There was a marvelous passage back in Matthew chapter 11 in verse 27, in which the author makes the statement that sounds very much like the Gospel of John, but it's one of those statements that, I think, is one of the truly great ones of the Bible. Matthew 11:27, reads this way. Our Lord is speaking, “All things have been delivered to Me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” No one ever knows God who has not be “willed” to be the reception of that knowledge by the Son of God, himself, the sovereign Son, appointed heir of all things.

One of the great Old Testament, or rather Church historians, of Germany, in the last century, early part of last century, I believe, Professor Karl von Hauser, who was one of the ancestors of one of the very prominent theologians of the time of the 2nd World War, made the statement, with reference to that passage in Matthew, that “That is a bolt from the Johannine blue.” And what he meant by it was the language sounds like the Gospel of John, but is found in the Gospel of Matthew. It's not surprising because there's a unity in the Bible that appears from time to time, even in different authors who have different characteristics. British people have said, “It's a media from the Johannine sky.” But, at any rate, that's a magnificent text. And this passage is in harmony with it. “The Son has been appointed heir of all things.”

Secondly, he has made the ages. He's the Lord of history. So the one who has authored the progress of divine revelation is the Lord Jesus Christ, himself. He's the Lord of history. That's why our Lord is able to explain things that happened in the Old Testament and give an explanation that is inspired of the Lord God.

Third thing is he possesses the “brightness of His glory.” The un-borrowed truths are expressed here in borrowed terms, very similar to terms that were common in Alexandria. But what he says is that the Son of God flashes forth the glory of God. He is the brightness of His glory. Brightness and glory go together. In other words, when he says, the brightness of the glory, he's

saying, in effect, that he is an eternal Son or an eternal being. “Who does not see?” asks Athanasius, “That the brightness cannot be separated from the light, but that it is by nature proper to it and coexistent with it and is not produced after it.” We don’t think of the sun as having been created and then given light later on, light belongs to the sun. It’s part of its being.

“Think not,” Ambrose admonishes, “that there ever was a moment of time when light existed without radiance.” And we read here that the Son of God is the brightness of the glory of God. There never was a time in which the glory of God did not have brightness. And our Lord possesses that.

“The express image of His person.” The exact replica of his essence, no dwarfed and elfin theology expressed by our author; this is characteristic Christian theology. This is the answer to the question, “What manner of man is this that winds and waves obey him?” Why, it’s not surprising that when the Lord Jesus speaks in the midst of the storm there should be an immediate calm, because he is the brightness of the glory of God, the express image of his person.

And then, fifthly, “He upholds all things by the word of His power.” He is the Lord of prophecy; he’s carrying all things along to their certain conclusion. Everything proceeds according to the will of God the Son, upholding all things by the word of his power.

You know, when you read this in the Authorized Version, you think of an Atlas with the World on his shoulders, and holding up the World. But this upholding is the word that Moses used, with reference to the children of Israel, in which he spoke to God about the fact that he had the responsibility of carrying these people through the wilderness, which he didn’t like very much. It’s kind of the word that a pastoral shepherd might use of the people that God has called him to minister to because he’s responsible in his teaching to guide them and to bring them along. And anybody who has ever taught the word of God and sits before and preaches before a class of people who don’t pay him any attention goes home feeling awfully discouraged from time to time. I’ve been discouraged once. [Chuckles] No, I’ve been discouraged often. It’s characteristic of teachers and preachers to be discouraged because look whom we have to speak to. I’m sorry Dan. I sit Sunday

morning there, and I hope I don't discourage you. But we so often have congregations that are not very encouraging to us; they get too used to us, I guess.

But, at any rate, he upholds all things by the word of his power. He is one who bears all things along, that's the meaning of the Greek word. He's the Lord not only of history, but of prophecy. He's no arrogant diviner. He's not a speculator like the people who write books about what's going to happen in the future when they don't really know a whole lot about the prophetic word. We have a whole lot of that going on today. And if you read some of the prophecies of the things that were going to happen, twenty-five years later, you realize that they were speaking as men and not as prophets. He's no groping philosopher, he's the Son of God, and he carries all things along to their conclusion.

Now, all of that would be futile, if we didn't know him as redeemer. And so, we read, sixthly, “purged our sins.” Wouldn't it be true that we wouldn't have any hope if we knew all of these marvelous things about the Son of God, but we did not know that he had purged our sins? This is the fundamental saving work of the Lord Jesus. He has purged our sins. He's made us free from the bondage of sin, dying for our sins, bearing the penalty and through the Holy Spirit covenanting with us to ultimately free us entirely from bondage to sin.

Later on, we'll talk about the importance of the priestly ministry with reference to that. That's the thing this author wants to stress. But this is the purgatory of the word of God, the only purgatory of the word of God. He has purged our sins and he has done it, at one point in time, when he cried out, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” and died spiritually and then physically, carrying out his atoning work, he purged our sins.

And then, seventhly, “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Think of it! The Son of God, all of these marvelous things about him, seven marvelous things, the last of which, “He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Now, purging of sins is a priestly work. That's what the priests did, typically, in the Old Testament; they purged sins. On the Day of Atonement, when Aaron went in and sprinkled the

blood on the mercy seat, he purged sin for Israel for one more year. That is in the covenant. They were, after that particular annual sacrifice, the covenant was valid for one more year, for Israel.

So the Lord Jesus purged our sins, once and for all, our author will tell us later on, and He has sat down. What do we have then? Well, we have a transcendent person, we have someone who possesses all of these qualities and, in addition, has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. We have a transcendent person, and in him we see the finality of Christianity, in the fact that the redemption of the Lord Jesus is a once and for all religion.

Now, I must confess, I taught the Epistle of the Hebrews a number of years before I realized this. One of the nicest things about the word of God is, the more you study the word of God the more you learn; and you never reach the place where you really know everything about any part of the Bible, it seems to me, and so, I still learn. I'm looking forward to learning more from the Epistle to the Hebrews as I'm going through it. But it wasn't but a few years back, maybe five or six that I finally made a connection that has meant a lot to me since. I knew, if someone had asked me, “Is “better” one of the common words of the Epistle to the Hebrews?” I would have said, “Why, of course, yes.” And I might have been able to call off five or six places where “better” is mentioned. For example, “better than the angels,” we have right here in this chapter. We have “a better hope” later on. “A better covenant.” “Better promises.” “Better sacrifices.” As a matter of fact, we even have a statement made of “better things” with reference to Abel. But then, there's another common word, too, and if you had asked me, “Is ‘eternal and everlasting’ a common word in the Epistle to the Hebrews?” I would have said, “Well, yes, I can think of some eternal and everlastings.” There is “eternal salvation,” chapter 5, verse 9. “Eternal redemption,” chapter 9, verse 12. “Eternal spirit,” is mentioned in 9:14. “Eternal inheritance,” in 9:15. “Eternal covenant.” But, what I had not done was to make the connection; the connection between “better” and “eternal.” And when it dawned on me, I've enjoyed it ever since.

Look, Christianity has all of these things that are better. It's better than the angels. Christ is better than the angels. There is a better hope we have. There is a better covenant; that above

promises. But look, if it's just better, that's not final because there may come along something else that's better than these “betters.” Isn't that true? Why, of course it is. You know that better is a comparative. It's not “best.” It's better. You know that, don't you?

Now, if you add to it “eternal,” what are you saying? You're saying that these better things are the final things. There's not going to come along a better covenant than our better covenant. Or better inheritance than our better inheritance. Or a better hope than our better hope. In other words, put those two together; better and eternal, you have the transcendent finality of Christianity and the incomparable transcendence and finality of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Well, our author, in the fourth verse will tell us the supremacy of the revealer, but he will do it by comparing Him now with angels. He says, “Having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”

Well, we're going to save that for next week. And I'd just like to say a few words in conclusion.

God has spoken to us in such a person as a Son, our author says. That's the message that you have received; that's the message that I have received. Speech is the vehicle of fellowship. Isn't that right? Martha and I wouldn't be married if we had not spoken. In fact, there had to be some pleading. [Laughter] Well, not pleading exactly, but some asking, definitely.

Communication is important. Speech is the vehicle of fellowship. Now, when we read that God has spoken to us in His Son, what does that say to us? Well, in the first place, it says that we are capable of fellowship with him because he can speak to us, and we can understand him, not finally and fully yet, maybe never since he's infinite, probably never, in that fullest of all senses. But, it says that we are capable of fellowship. It says, also, that he longs to enjoy it with us because he's gone out of his way to speak to us. And, just think, we have in the word of God the words of God which he wishes to speak to us because he wants to have fellowship with us.

The words of God, who can express what they ought to be worth to us? We usually measure the importance of words by the importance of the speaker, don't we? If someone comes to

me who doesn't know anything about the word of God and makes some observation concerning the word of God, I hope I have the humility to listen to him and hear what he has to say. Sometimes some surprising things come from children, as you know, children in the word of God. But if someone that I know is an accomplished student of the word of God, if he speaks, I give him comparable attention, don't I? Don't you? You do. In your profession, that's what you would do, you businessmen and you ladies, similarly, in your interests.

Well, now, if that's true, then O, how we ought to measure and treasure the words of God that He has spoken to us. And, notice, we don't read in the Bible that Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden said, “O, that the Lord God would come and speak to us?” As a matter of fact, after they sinned, they hid from him. They didn't want to hear his words.

The divine initiative is taken by the Lord in speaking to us. We don't call upon him to speak to us because we're sinners. We don't respond to divine truth. We flee from divine truth. It's too condemning. But God has spoken in his divine initiative, stooping in love to our frailty, our darkness, our yearnings, that he has implanted there.

And what's the message? Well, to put it very simply; all Christ's work is God's word to us. And it's in two parts, here; he'll expand it later on. But the two parts are this: one of these works is done on earth, everything leading up to the purging of our sins. The other, is done in Heaven. He has sat down and there ministers as our great High Priest. And there he is to dispense the Heavenly Light, maintaining it forever, in his saints, by his divine power.

Three times the Lord God spoke during, I say the Lord God, I meant the Father, our Lord can be called the Lord God, too, the first person of the Trinity spoke during the earthly life of our Lord, and each time he glorified the son. In Matthew, chapter 3 in verse 15, at the baptism, we read these words. Verse 15, Jesus said, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” And then, suddenly, verse 17, “A voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

And then, in chapter 17 in verse 5, at the Transfiguration, God spoke again. And there we read. Did I say chapter 17, in verse 5, “While he was yet speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”

And then, in John, chapter 12 in verse 28, there is the third time that the Father spoke from heaven, and this time we read these words, near our Lord’s sacrifice on Calvary’s Cross. The Father speaking, in verse 28, I should say. “Father, glorify Your name.” The Lord Jesus said. “Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.”

Three times the Father spoke during the earthly life of our Lord and each time he glorified the Son of God. O, may he plant a longing in our hearts to intimately know him. May he give us an intimate desire to hear his word; to listen to him, to study this voice that he has spoken to us. And, may we also come to experience what our author will tell us later on, that the veil of the temple has been “rent in twain,” and believing Christians are invited to enter into the holiest, and worship, and know him in a rich way.

Well, that’s a lot to talk about, but this is a magnificent book. Be glad you’re here. I hope you will continue to study the Epistle. I would love for you, if you would do one thing; if you would read this Epistle. And you’re welcome to come up afterwards and ask me questions, if you’d like about things that puzzle you.

Next week, the Lord willing, we’re going to look at verse 4, verse 5, and verse 6, and we’ll treat a couple of the Old Testament quotations that are used there, and one that’s most unusual, and one that the Qumran discoveries have had some significance for. So we look forward to seeing you next week, the Lord willing.

Let’s bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these magnificent words spoken to us by this unknown author to whom Thou hath spoken so deeply. May the concerns that he had for the

“The Finality and Superiority of the Son of God” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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Christian church of his day, be concerns for us individually, that we might know the Son and hear the divine voice to us about him.

We pray in his name. Amen.