

“The Uniqueness of Christ”

Heb. 1:2-3

- INTRO. - The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is well-documented by the apologists. Someone once wrote these words: “Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, He shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of schools, He spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, He set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise, than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times.”

- But (no doubt) the greatest treatise on the uniqueness of Christ was penned by an unknown human author – the book we call The Book of Hebrews. Ultimately the source of this book is the HS of God, and in our text this morning we have a summary of the superiority and uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

- We know from Scripture that it is the role of the HS to exalt Christ. Jesus said (in John 15:26), “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me...”

- In John 16 Jesus said, “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose *it* to you.”

- Although we do *not* know who the *human* author of Hebrews is, we know who the *divine* author is – and in this first section we see where the HS is fulfilling His role as the One who exalts the Lord Jesus Christ.

- In the first two verses (as we saw last week) the author provides a sharp contrast between the revelation of the OT and the revelation of the NT. And even though the Spirit of God was the source of inspiration for both, the former was partial and incomplete, while the latter was final and complete.

- In the former days of “long ago” (the days of promise) God spoke “to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways.” But in these “last days” (the days of fulfillment) He has spoken to us in His Son.

- Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God to man – and the account of His life and work (as recorded in the NT) is the complete and sufficient Word of God. This final word of revelation is superior to that of the old, not because the old was *not* equally inspired, but because

God chose to reserve His full and complete revelation to be made through His Son.

- And the primary theme of the Book of Hebrews is that this revelation is superior because Jesus Christ is superior in every way. He is exalted above every person and every thing. In fact, in these two brief verses (that we will be looking at today) we are told that Jesus is the beginning of all things, the middle of all things, and the end of all things.

- There is often debate among men as to who Jesus really is. In fact, in Matt. 16:13 Jesus even asked His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” There were all kinds of opinions that day – and there are all kinds of opinions today.

- Some think Jesus was a great teacher, some think He was a prophet who taught good moral principles, some think He was an imposter, some think He was a political revolutionary who died as a martyr.

- There are all kinds of opinions, but the opinions of men do *not* matter. The only thing that matters is what God Himself says, and here (in this passage) we have the divine description of His Person and work.

- In fact, in just a verse and a half we see seven truths about Christ that show His unquestionable superiority. These truths show that He is much more than a mere man. They show that He is unique – like none other. Taken

together, these truths show why the revelation given in Him is the highest (and greatest) that God can give.

- As I’m sure you know, in the Bible the number 7 is the perfect number (the divine number), and here we see 7 excellencies of Christ that fully demonstrate His uniqueness.

- These excellencies will be more fully developed throughout this book, but I want to tell you up front that we will *not* hurry through these. I might take two weeks on these 7 excellencies. We are in no hurry. We will go as far as we can today, and then we’ll pick up where we leave off next time.

- And even though we are only going to be focusing on the second half of v. 2 and v. 3, we need to remember that (in the Greek) vv. 1-4 are all one complete sentence. This is a very complex sentence, and (according to one author) it contains no less than 10 weighty topics that span from heaven to earth, and from eternity past to eternity future.

- In fact, he says, “the list of themes reads like part of the table of contents in a systematic theology textbook.” So if you think we are going to just breeze right through this quickly, you are mistaken. I’ll go as quick as I can, but it is going to take some time.

- Now, one thing that I think is helpful, is to understand what the author is trying to accomplish in his introduction. Hopefully you remember that we are

treating this book as an early NT sermon. Most sermons begin with an introduction, and the introduction has a specific purpose.

- Many introductions are designed to grab the attention of the audience, and to explain the primary theme of the sermon. The author of this book was trained (apparently) in the rhetorical methods of his day, and here we find a common element of Jewish homiletics, which was called the “exordium.”

- The main purpose for this kind of introduction was to rivet the attention of the audience by presenting the main topics that will be addressed in the sermon. It was to alert the reader to the foundational propositions of the book – and that is exactly what the author does here.

- He is going to come back to each one of these and develop them more fully later on. But go back to v. 2. Here’s what it says, “in these last days has spoken to us in *His* Son...” As soon as he mentions the “Son,” he launches into these 7 truths describing the Person and work of Christ. These all show His uniqueness, and the first one we see is:

I. THE UNIQUENESS OF HIS APPOINTMENT (v. 2b)

- Verse 2 continues, “...whom He appointed heir of all things...” Interestingly, he starts with the *end* of things rather than the *beginning*. He begins with the future

rather than the past. Jesus Christ is the appointed heir of all things.

- Of course, an heir is one who receives an inheritance from another – and since Jesus is the Son of God, He is to receive all that the Father possesses.

- This is a clear fulfillment of Psalm 2. There we read (in vv. 6-7), “But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain. I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee.’”

- In v. 8 we read, “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, and the *very* ends of the earth as Thy possession.” As we saw when we went through this Psalm recently, this will be consummated at the Second coming of Christ.

- Or (as John MacArthur puts it), “God’s destined kingdom will in the last days be given fully and eternally to Jesus Christ.” And this is pictured in the Book of Revelation, as the title deed to the earth is opened by the only One who is worthy. That which has been forfeited will be restored forever.

- Rev. 11:15 speaks of that day when all the “The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (NKJV)

- So the author begins with this future reality. And we need to understand that the inheritance of the Son of God is *not* limited to the earth – it includes the entire universe. The phrase “all things” (there in v. 2) applies to everything that exists.

- As one author put it, “This refers to every single part of the universe from atoms to solar systems.” It applies to everything on this earth, and to everything in the heavens above. He is heir of *all* things.

- Now, even though this awaits its ultimate consummation at the second advent of Christ, there is a sense in which this is already true of Christ now. For example, in Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost (in Acts 2) he said, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified.” (That’s v. 36)

- At His ascension He was exalted and given a name which is above every name. He is already Lord of all. As John MacArthur puts it, “This carpenter who died nailed to a cross is, in fact, the King of kings and Lord of lords.” That is already a present reality.

- That’s why we must live (right now, in the present) in light of that ultimate truth. We should think of the fact that Christ is appointed the heir of all things any time we lose possessions in this world for Christ’s sake.

- My friend, the truth of the matter is, that we could lose everything we own and still be wealthier than anyone alive – because the Bible declares that we are joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

- We saw that in Rom. 8:16-17, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* in order that we may also be glorified with *Him*.”

- Our suffering with Him is *nothing* compared to the glory we will inherit as His joint-heirs. So this first truth has great relevance to us. He is heir of all things – and we are joint heirs with Him by faith. That’s why there is nothing that we could ever suffer or lose (here in this life) that compares to that. It is that eternal perspective that enables us to suffer for His name’s sake. (Pause) But *not only* do we see the uniqueness of His appointment – secondly, we see:

II. THE UNIQUENESS OF HIS AGENCY (v. 2c)

- *Not only* the end, but also the beginning. Go back to v. 2 again, “through whom also He made the world.” Jesus Christ is the *agent*, through whom God the Father created the world. This is one of the main reasons why He is heir of all things – because He *made* it all to begin with.

- The word “through” (there, in the NASB) is the Greek word “dia.” It means that God’s creative activity was accomplished by the Son as the intermediate Agent.

- This is absolutely clear in the NT. In John 1:3 it says, “All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” In Col. 1:16 it says, “For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him.”

- And yet, you would be surprised how many Christians do *not* know that Jesus Christ created all things. This is, in fact, one of the greatest claims to His deity and His equality with God the Father. God the Father created the world, but He did it through the *agency* of the Son.

- In 1 Cor. 8:6 Paul wrote, “...yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.”

- Notice that Paul makes a clear distinction between the role of the Father and the role of the Son – and yet *both* are included in the work of creation. This verse makes it clear that the Son is the agent of the Father in creation.

- This makes Him absolutely unique. What other religious leader could ever say, “I made the world”? Only Jesus

can say that! Mohammed can’t say that. Buddha can’t say that. Confucius can’t say that. Only Jesus.

- Now, the Greek word for “world” (in v. 2) is the word “aion,” which literally means “ages.” But (as F. F. Bruce explains) “its meaning cannot be restricted to ‘ages’ either here or in 11:3 where it reappears in a similar context.”

- He says, “The whole created universe of space and time is meant, and the affirmation that God brought this universe into being by the agency of his Son is in line with the statements of other New Testament writers...”

- Since this Greek term is used for both temporal and spatial realms, it clearly refers to the fact that Jesus is the agent through whom God the Father created the universe (at a specific point in time) but also the fact that He is the Lord of the ages. He is Lord of the unfolding of human history. He has charted the course for the ages.

- The word “aoin” includes everything in both time and space. This means that He *not only* created the material universe, but He is also in control of the ages. MacArthur says, “Jesus Christ is responsible *not only* for the physical earth; He is also responsible for creating time, space, energy, and matter.”

- Jay Adams writes, “[Jesus] is not a Person who is stuck in time and space (though as man, He was a truly historical figure). In His deity Jesus is the One who made

the ages. Time itself is the product of His creative work. He knows just when everything should happen—indeed, He is in sovereign control of how time and the events that occur in time progress.”

- Listen, history of *not* some sort of accidental plot. Our universe is *not* haphazard and coincidental. There is a divine purpose for everything that happens – and Jesus Christ is Lord of that.

- This means that any kind of tragedy, or any kind of suffering or persecution, is *not* by accident. It is all working through time to bring about the Lord’s eternal purpose.

- That also means the *world* did *not* come about by accident. In the same way that it is insanity to believe that a car (or a bus or an airplane) just happened all by itself (without a designer), so it is insanity to believe that this world is all the result of chance.

- It is strange logic to deny a Master designer, and yet it happens every single day. There are millions of people that are completely insane in this regard. Things don’t just happen by accident (especially something as complex as this created order).

- In his commentary John MacArthur quotes a Nobel laureate in neurophysiology, that said the odds against the right combination of circumstances to have evolved intelligent life on earth are about 400 thousand trillion,

trillion, trillion, trillion to one. Now, I don’t really know how he came up with that number, but the point is obvious – it simply means it is next to impossible.

- But the amazing thing is, he went on to say that he believes this is how it happened (but that it could never happen again on any other planet or in any other solar system). How insane can you get?

- That is *not* the testimony of the Word of God! God declares that He created it all through the agency of His Son. Our world is no accident. It was created by God through the agency of His Son.

- And, by the way, the Bible also tells us that Jesus is the *reason* for the creation of the world. Col. 1:17 says that “all things were created by Him and for Him.” They were created to become His inheritance. (Pause) So we see the uniqueness of Christ in His appointment and in His agency, but thirdly we see:

III. THE UNIQUENESS OF HIS APPEARANCE (v. 3a)

- Now, some Bible teachers take these next two together (because they are similar) but I think there is enough distinction to take them separately. Look at the very first part of v. 3, “And He is the radiance of His glory...”

- The word used for “radiance” is a word that means “to shine forth” or “to send forth light.” It is an off-flash or

effulgence. It carries the idea of splendor or intense brightness. This is the only place in the NT where this word appears. However, the *idea* is common in the both the old and new testaments.

- The concept of God's glory is often connected (in the Bible) with light. In biblical literature the word "glory" refers to the luminous manifestation of God's Person. It was seen on Mount Sinai as God gave the Law with fire and smoke and great sounds of thunder.

- It was seen in the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day, that led the Israelites through the wilderness. It was seen by Moses in the burning bush. It was seen descending into the camp of the Israelites and hovering over the mercy seat in the Tabernacle.

- And the message (here) is that Jesus Christ is the manifestation of the glory of God on earth. He is the light of God that came to shine in the darkness of our world. In fact, He is the full and final manifestation of God's glory.

- This (specifically) has to do with His incarnation. Before Jesus came into the world, we really did *not* know God. But with the first advent of Christ we were able to see the light of God. We never would have been able to do that if it had *not* been for the incarnation of Christ.

- And (of course) in John's Gospel we see that theme developed. In the very first chapter of John we read, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the

light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." (vv. 4-5)

- Verse 9 says, "There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." Verse 14, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

- Later on, Jesus would stand in the Temple and proclaim, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life." (That's 8:12)

- As the radiance of God's glory, Jesus Christ can transmit the light of God into your life in such a way that you will no longer be in darkness. That (of course) is a reference to the spiritual regeneration of the believer, but the analogy is seen all throughout the Scriptures.

- And perhaps the best way to understand this concept is to think about the sun. When you look up at the sun, do you really see the sun, or do you see the rays of the sun? The truth of the matter is, although those are two separate things, you really can't separate them practically. To see the sun is to see the *brightness* of the sun.

- As one author wrote, "One cannot separate the experience of looking at the brightness of a light from seeing the light itself because they are too closely

associated.” It is light that cannot be separated from its source.

- So, in the very same way, to see the Son of God is to see God. To see the radiance of His glory is to see Him. We can know God because we can see Him in His Son.

- Just as the sun is never without (and cannot be separated from) its brightness, so God can never be separated from the glory of Christ. As we all know, the brightness of the sun is *not* the sun itself, but it can never be separated from it in practical terms. To see one is to see the other.

- So it is with Jesus. In John 10:30 He declared, “I and the Father are one.” In other words, “if you have seen Me you have seen the Father.” To see God’s glory is to see Him – and Jesus Christ is the embodiment of His glory.

- Do you remember the account of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana? Well, in connection with that miracle, John wrote (in John 2:11), “This beginning of *His* signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.” You could say, “He radiated the nature and character of God in His signs.”

- And, by the way, go back to v. 2 for a moment. Do you see the word “is”? It says, “...He **is** the radiance of His glory...” That translates the Greek word “eimi.” In the KJV it is translated “being.” And the point is, that it is describing His essential being.

- He did *not* become the radiance of God’s glory. He always has been that. The word “became” (ginomai) is used in v. 4, but it is *not* used here because this is something that has always been eternally true of Christ.

- The Bible is clear about this. In His high priestly prayer (in John 17) Jesus prayed, “And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.” (v. 5)

- Scholars for centuries have debated whether this is an inherent glory of a reflected glory, and this is why I believe we have to say the former. He is (and always has been) the radiance of God’s glory.

- We don’t need to split hairs (here) theologically, the point is, Jesus Christ (in His incarnation) was the Shekinah glory of God among men. He is the perfect revelation of God because He is fully God.

- But now, how does this apply to us? Well, the Bible declares that we also share in that glory. Through salvation (and spiritual regeneration) the light of Christ radiates through us as well.

- F. F. Bruce has written, “Just as the radiance of the sun reaches this earth, so in Christ the glorious light of God shines into the hearts of men and women.”

- Paul said (in 2 Thess. 2:14), “And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus *not only* proclaimed that *He* was the light of the world, but He also told His disciples, *you* are the light of the world.

- With Christ in us, we can radiate His light to this dark world. And oh, it is a dark world indeed! It is world that is filled with evil and injustice and hatred. It is a world filled with moral depravity and spiritual blindness.

- But into this dark world, His bright light has shined, and it continues to shine through those who belong to Him. Without the light of the Son of God, there would be nothing but darkness.

- And (of course) the great tragedy of this world is that most men do not want God’s light. Men love darkness rather than light. Paul explained that “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Cor. 4:4)

- Many do *not* want the light, (they want to remain in their darkness), but it is only the light of Christ that leads to life. And those who *do* receive His light can say (as Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 4:6), “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

- By God’s grace He has allowed us to see the true light in Christ. As the hymn write put it, “Come to the light, ‘tis shining for thee; sweetly the light has dawned upon me.” What a wonderful thing to understand (by God’s grace) that Jesus Christ is the true light, the full expression of God in human history, and that He can come into our lives and give us the ability to see and know Him.

- Now, we’re going to stop *here* for today, but the most amazing thing (to me) about all this, is that there are so many who reject that light. It is incredible to me that Jesus Christ is heir of all things, and creator of all things, and the radiance of the very glory of God – yet still men reject Him.

- He is all that and more (as we will see). The question is, “Have you acknowledged Him (and received Him) as Who He is?” (expound)

- MAKE APPEAL

- PRAYER