

Preaching the Uniqueness of Christ Today #3

1. Introduction.

- a. *We continue*: Biblical exposition → theological understanding/faithfulness.
Needed esp. in our day. We need faithful churches, who rightly expound the “whole counsel of God” with theological precision and worldview application.
- b. *Esp. the exposition/proclamation of Christ—Uniqueness, Exclusivity, Sufficiency.*
- c. Q: Why is Christ Unique? Because of *who* he is and *what* he does (=they go together).
 - i. *Who* is he? God the Son incarnate.
 - ii. *What* does he do? *He does something that no one else can do.* What is that?
 - 1. The most direct answer is that Christ alone accomplishes our eternal salvation.
 - 2. Angel says to Joseph: “Jesus will save his people *from their sins*” (Matt 1:21).
 - 3. This picks up the new covenant promise (Jer 31:34).
 - 4. Basic answer: Only Jesus—b/c of *who he is*—can save us *from our sins*.
 - 5. In fact, this is why the divine Son became incarnate. He identified with us *to act on our behalf and to do something we could never do, i.e., save us from our sins*
 - 6. The incarnation by itself cannot save us; although it is its prerequisite.
 - 7. But ultimately, the divine Son must become human to identify *with us* to die *for us* as our new covenant representative *and* substitute.
 - iii. So why is Jesus incomparable, exclusive, the one who alone can save us?
 - 1. B/c of *who* he is—he alone can do a work that no one else can do.
 - 2. Which, at its heart, deals with *the problem of sin before God* (=holy, just).
- d. These truths are taught in the entirety of Scripture (OT and NT).
But our focus today is on the book of Hebrews, specifically, *Hebrews 2:5-18*. Why?

2. Hebrews 2:5-18.

- a. Context of the Text (=also Hebrews as a book).
 - i. Entire book of Hebrews focuses on the majesty, supremacy, and glory of Christ.
 - ii. How? By expounding OT texts and by a series of contrasts with various OT figures.
 - iii. Why? *Audience: Struggling 1st C Jewish Xns—facing trials from without/within.*
 - 1. They are in danger of going back to the OT, forgetting Jesus is the OT fulfillment.
 - 2. So, the author *encourages* and *warns* by unpacking the glory of Christ.
 - iv. In fact, from the opening verses, he lays out thesis of the book (Heb 1:1-4).
 - v. Already in the opening thesis.
 - 1. Christ’s unique person and work is presented.
 - 2. Jesus is the unique/exclusive Lord/Savior—final/perfect self-disclosure of God, our great HP, and conquering King.
 - vi. After these opening verses, the author unpacks his thesis by a series of contrasts.
Before he discusses Moses, Joshua, HPs, Christ’s new covenant work, he begins by arguing Christ’s superiority over angels. He lays out his argument in two steps.
 - 1. First, ch 1: Jesus is better than angels b/c of *who* he is.
 - a. Jesus is the divine Son incarnate, having ushered in God’s rule/reign.
 - b. He has fulfilled all of God’s promises, esp. associated with David and the Davidic covenant (1:5-14, Ps 2, 45, 110).
 - c. *Contra angels*: Jesus has a better name/honor/status and existence/vocation.
Angels are only creatures/servants. Jesus is the divine Son!
 - 2. Second, after a warning (2:1-4), *argument continues but shifts to Christ’s work.*

- a. Jesus is superior to angels b/c he does *what* no angel can do.
 - b. Esp. he can do this work b/c of *who* he is as the *incarnate* Son.
 - c. *There is an accent on the incarnation and its necessity, and the Bible's explanation of why Jesus alone can save us and do what no angel could do.*
- vii. What reasons does the author give? 4 reasons. Jesus is better than angels b/c by his incarnation he can do something they could never do. What?
 - 1. To fulfill and restore God's creation intent for humans (5-9).
 - 2. To bring many sons (i.e., his people) to glory (10-13).
 - 3. To destroy the power of death and Satan (14-16).
 - 4. To satisfy God's wrath against our sin by becoming our great high priest (17-18).
- b. **1st: Jesus is better b/c by his incarnation he can do what angels can't do: To fulfill/restore God's creation intention for humans (5-9).**
 - i. Where am I getting this reason from? Answer: Use of Psalm 8.
 - ii. Mention of the "world to come" prompts citation of Psalm 8.
 - iii. Let's explain the author's use of Psalm in 2 steps: (1) Unpacking significance of the OT quote from Psalm 8 which unfolds for us God's creation intention for humans; (2) Explain how Jesus fulfills it.
 - iv. NT quotations of the OT are never random.
 - 1. Instead, the author assumes you know where the text is located in the OT.
 - 2. Given that Scripture is a progressive revelation, we must locate texts properly.
 - 3. Psalm 8 is in the Psalter. It looks *backward* and *forward*.
 - v. Original context. Psalm celebrates the exalted position of humans in God's creation (=reflection on Genesis 1-2). Adam (=image of God; role of Adam as little vice-regent, subdue earth). Adam as a representative figure.
 - vi. But something went wrong.
 - 1. We cannot read Gen 1-2 without Gen 3. See 2:8 where the author assumes this.
 - 2. What happened? Sin (Gen 3). Adam, as federal/covenant head of humans, plunged humanity into sin. Because of Adam, we have miserably failed. Because of Adam's sin/rebellion – man who was created to be God's steward, has become the rebel and in turn we have failed to fulfill God's creation intention for us. Theological point: Must unpack Adam, covenants, Adam-Christ.
 - vii. But Psalm 8 positioned later in the Psalter holds out hope (=it looks *forward*).
 - 1. It builds off Gen 3:15 → God's plan *through the covenants*.
 - 2. *Role of Adam as covenant head*. Obedience demanded of Adam.
 - 3. Sin's entrance into humanity (=original sin).
 - 4. God's purpose for creation/image-bearers is not lost.
 - 5. *As traced out in the OT → through the covenants*, the Prophets look for God to save through a promised and coming Deliverer/Redeemer.
 - 6. Thus, David speaks prophetically – anticipates a day when we will be restored to God's creation intention for us, but restored, not through ourselves, but through a Savior/Messiah. Already in OT – relation of Yahweh to the Davidic king (Son).
 - a. Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7. Isaiah 11; 42, 49, 53, 61, etc.
 - b. Ezek 34. Promise of a new covenant.
 - viii. Psalm 8 fulfilled in Christ. See Hebrews 2:5-9.
 - 1. Christological Point:

c. **2nd: Jesus is better b/c by his incarnation he can do what angels can't do: To bring many sons (i.e., God's people) to glory (10-13).**

- i. *Glory* is a term picked up from Psalm 8 (see 2:7) tied to new creation, our restoration.
- ii. 'Author' – Better: *pioneer/trail blazer* and *champion*. 2 ideas together.
- iii. Imagery: Jesus is the first man of the "new creation." Like the LORD led Israel out of Egypt in the first exodus to make them his prized possession, so Jesus has brought about a new exodus for us.
 1. By assuming our humanity, Jesus opens the door to our salvation.
 2. He wins our victory (=champion). He restores us to the purpose of our creation (=covenant relationship with God).
- iv. But note: He *doesn't* do so by incarnation alone.
 1. He does so through suffering (=cross).
 2. He is "perfected" by it. Priestly term. *He became fully equipped for his work first by incarnation, then by suffering.*
 3. Incarnation/cross. The only way to become our representative/substitute.
- v. Christological point: This requires Christ's obedience (=active and passive).
 1. This is a Christological point, specifically the "Will" issue.
 2. Dyothelitism (Constantinople, 681).
- vi. Did you notice 1 crucial accomplishment of his work; what he secured?
 1. *Sonship*. He came to make people who were rebels, dead in sins – now sons.
 2. *Author stresses this fact in vv 11-13*. 3 OT texts (=Ps 22; Isa 8).
 3. One who is far superior to angels, God's Son, is not ashamed to call his people, whom he has redeemed, his brothers/sisters!
 4. Also crucial to note in the context: Apart from divine Son becoming incarnate and dying for us, there would be no salvation for God's people or the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. He alone can do it b/c of *who* he is and *what* he does.

d. **3rd: Jesus is better b/c by his incarnation he can do what angels can't do: To destroy the power of death and Satan (14-16).**

- i. Link: v14: 'Since children have flesh/blood, he too shared in their humanity, so that.'
- ii. *Christus Victor* theme. *Picture*. Devil as a tyrant whose power we cannot break free of. Devil as holding death over heads of humans, due to sin. Humans as slaves unable to free ourselves from power of death/devil. Humans desperately need a Deliverer. You/I were created to rule... now we cower in fear. And it is because Jesus has taken on our humanity that he is able to destroy both death/Satan.
- iii. But this raises an important discussion regarding atonement *theologies*.
 1. Hebrews 2 gives us a strong *Christus Victor* theme. Tendency today is to subsume Christ's entire work under this category. Minimize penal substitution.
 2. *Christus Victor* is a major/glorious theme/truth in Scripture.
 3. But we must not get "the cart before the horse."
- iv. In Scripture, there is an *organic* link between sin, death, God's judgment.
- v. *Christus Victor* is important, but it is best viewed as an entailment, not central.
- vi. Why the incarnation and the cross? B/c it's only the God-man who could ever save us from our plight. Our plight is due to sin which results in death. We need a Savior who will destroy sin. And if He destroys sin, then He destroys *both* death *and* the devil. And there is only One who could accomplish such a feat – Jesus Christ our Lord.

e. **4th: Jesus is better b/c by his incarnation he can do what angels can't do: To satisfy God's wrath against our sin by becoming our HP (17-18).**

- i. *All of this leads to the HP theme* – which is then unpacked in the rest of the book.
- ii. Stress of the author is on the fact that Jesus *had to become like us (=incarnation...)*. There is a *necessity* expressed here. To provide salvation for us, Jesus had to identify with us by sharing our human nature, except for sin.
- iii. *But why?*
 1. Reasons have already been given but the text is moving to these verses.
 2. Answer: Incarnation had to occur for the eternal Son to be qualified *to become our merciful and faithful HP*.
- iv. *What was the job of the HP?* See Hebrews 5:1.
 1. Selected from among men.
 2. Represented the people in matters related to God.
 3. Represented the people in offering gifts and sacrifices for sin.
- v. What is crucial about the HP is that it makes Christ's work God-centered.
 1. *This is picked up in the language of propitiation.*
 2. But who can propitiate God? *Ultimately*, one who is *both God and man*.
 - a. Deity: To fully satisfy God's own righteous demand.
 - b. Human: Representation requires identification.
 - c. Point is stressed in Rom 3:21-26. The only way for God to forgive/justify sinners while at the same time showing mercy – w/o compromising his holy justice – was to send his own dear divine Son, who would identify with us, and who would pay what we rightly deserve.
 - d. This is the crucial point of penal substitution.
 3. Christological/Theological point:
 - a. In Scripture, salvation is an act of God. God must save us by himself.
 - b. We need a divine-human Redeemer. And Christ's work must be a divine-human act simultaneously.
 - c. This requires specific Christology.
 - i. One person in two natures. One person acting thru both natures.
 - ii. *Communicatio*. What is true of each nature is true of Son (=Acts 20:28).
 - iii. Also, a true humanity, two wills (=soul), active/passive obedience.
- vi. And what a HP he is! He is the divine Son who assumed our humanity to save us.
 1. *What motivated him?* V. 17. Mercy. Pity moved to action.
 2. *How did he fulfill his work?* Faithful → Obedience.

3. **Concluding Reflection: Thinking Theologically.**

- a. Here is the biblical-theological warrant to Christ's uniqueness.
- b. Christ must be placed in the entire canon.
- c. Need a specific Christology to give us an all-sufficient Savior.
- d. Need a specific Christology to accomplish the salvation the Bible requires.
- e. In proclaiming Christ, you are proclaiming an entire theology/Christology.
- f. Nicaea/Chalcedon, etc. did not come from nowhere.
- g. In an age of biblical-theological illiteracy, we need exposition that is theological.