

Sermon 2: Hebrews 1:2b-3: The Sufficiency of the Son

OUTLINE

Heir
Creator
Radiance and Imprint
Upholder
Purifier

INTRODUCTION

Who is Jesus? Who do people say that He is? Who is He to you? Islam says He is a prophet; Jews say He is the Archangel Michael; the New Age Movement sees Him as an enlightened one who has realized his own divinity within. During Jesus' ministry He was a despised Nazarene; the son of a carpenter; a crazy demon possessed person; an immoral person who ate with tax collectors and sinners; a prophet; a blasphemer. Hebrews chapter 1 is one of the richest veins in the Bible for opening up the glories of Christ, the richness of His person. Only being equaled by John 1. Today we are opening up 1:2b-3, 'his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.' There is so much squeezed into so few words that we could spend many hours dwelling on each detail. All of the person and work of Christ is in these verses. In Heb. 1:1-3 we see Jesus as the greatest prophet because God has spoken to us in His Son, it is the Son who is the communicator of God, as He is the radiance of His glory and the exact imprint of His nature. We see Jesus as the greatest priest for He has made final purification for sins being seated showing His finished work. We see Jesus as the great King who is seated at God's right hand, and who is the promised heir of all things. But more than that we see that Jesus is both fully human as He is appointed, as He becomes, as He purifies, as He sits; but He is also divine for He creates, sustains and is the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of His nature. As we think of the words from Rom. 11:36, we can see that all things are 'from Him' as He is Creator; 'through Him' as He is sustainer; and 'to Him', for He is heir of all things. The description of Christ here reaches all the way back into eternity past where being the eternal Son to an Eternal Father, He was eternally showing the Father's glory; then creation begins and He is there at the beginning integral to Creation. We see His constant involvement in history as He upholds all things in His providence. Then we see the plan of God come to fruition as the Son becomes incarnate to live and die and rise again for our purification, then ascending into heaven receive the name above all names, where He is now seated in triumph, in glory, in sympathy, applying the benefits of His finished work to His needy people. And the grand finale of the new creation is even spoken of as He is named the Heir of all things. We see Him in His humiliation as He made purification, becoming a criminal in God's eyes as He bore the weight of our sin; and we see Him in His exaltation as is rewarded for His finished work and vindicated when He is appointed heir and seated at God's right hand.

Why such a comprehensive and intense summary of the person and work of Christ? Because needy saints need to know their Saviour. These Jewish believers were facing big problems and needed a bigger Saviour. There is none

greater than Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In one sense this dense blast of the glories of Christ is what the rest of the book opens up and applies. Today we want to stop and try and take in some of the glories of our sufficient Saviour. As the author tries to show us something of the Son we see him layering glory upon glory, heaping up His sufficiency for us. We will simply walk through the 6 descriptions of the Son as our points.

Heir

‘His Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things.’ The word Son means so much when used in reference to the Son here. Son refers to the eternal Divine Son who is one with the Father and Spirit; then it can mean Son of Man, of Adam; or it could be a title referring to being the Son of David. As you look at these various descriptions of the Son you have to decide, is it talking about the Son as human, as God, or both. Some have wrongly read all these references as describing human sonship or divine sonship. We believe that the Eternal Son, became the incarnate Son, or as someone put it, ‘remaining what He was He became what He was not.’ And being the incarnate Son He was also the Davidic Son. Remember the promise to David, 2 Sam. 7:12-13, ‘I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.’ It is to this promised Son that God says in Ps. 2:8, ‘Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.’ We are familiar with the concept that sons are heirs, this is true here but is further enriched by the truth of truth of the Son as the divine Son, that all that is the Father’s is the Son’s; as well as the OT promised of a human Saviour who would be what Adam failed to be in ruling as a God’s Vice Regent over His Creation; who was promised to come through David, and now we are being told has come and has been appointed, set up by the power and authority of God to bring to pass all that was promised. The promised King who would defeat all enemies and bring in eternal peace is appointed, Jesus is this very one.

From the point of view of these Jewish believers, this means that the great hope of their nation for the seed of David, the one who would rescue them and set them free, He has come, Jesus is that one. So to leave Jesus is to leave all that the OT promised, and all that they had waited for. Jesus is the great hope and answer not sin. Some seek peace, we can find no better peace than the peace He gives. As He makes peace between us and God, gives us peace within, gives us His love commands to promote peace between us and others. Whether it is joy, purity, acceptance, purpose, all of the aspirations of the human heart, relief from inward sin, sickness, tyranny, evil, death. He is the one who has come in fulfilment of God’s promises and the desires of our hearts.

Notice that He is heir of all things. And we will be heirs in Him. Paul calls us fellow heirs/co-heirs with Him, Rom. 8:17. How can it be that we, sinners, creatures can share in what He is due? A share in heaven, in the new creation, in eternal life free from the things that plague this life is all ours, because it is His, and we are fellow heirs. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, any other religion cannot deliver these things, but He is already the heir, He is resurrected as proof, we have the Holy Spirit as a seal of guarantee that this will be ours. This is not some abstract unrelated theological truth. ‘O how interesting He is the heir of all things’; see how it applies to you! Paul uses this very point to help us to stop exalting men and see what we have in Christ, 1 Cor. 3:21-22, ‘So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the

world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' It is only those who have faith in Him, who are united with Him, who will be co-heirs with Him.

Creator

'Through whom also he created the world.' Where being appointed heir; and sitting after purification are human bookends of the Son's resume, Creator, Radiance, Imprint, and Upholder make the divine core of the Son's resume. There is a fundamental line that defines all of reality, the Creator-creature line. On the one side of the line is God, uncreated and the Creator of everything else. On the other side of the line is everything that is created. What side of the line is the Son on? Arius said that 'there was a time when He was not' in other words He is a creature not the Creator. This is not the teaching of the Bible, the Son along with the Father is Creator. John 1:3, 'All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.' Col. 1:16, 'For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.' The Son and the Father co-existed and pre-existed creation. They, together created, and we see that this was by/through the Son. This language of 'through' distinguishes the Son from the Father but does not separate Him from the Father and make Him created. For these Jewish believers to say I am going to stop following Jesus to follow my Creator, this is a false choice, God, as Father; Son; and HS is our Creator.

Radiance and Imprint

'He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature'. Sandwiched in between two divine functions, creation and providence, we have these two remarkable descriptions of the divine Son. They are not descriptions of divinity in general terms but of the eternally begotten Son specifically in analogical terms. We have been surprised by the truth that Father and Son are on the Creator, the divine side of being. Paul says the same 1 Cor. 8:6, 'yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.' To be Creator is to be God, and both Father and Son are Creator, of course along with the HS. It seems to me that the author stops to expand at this point. You would ordinarily pair creation with upholding, but I think that because the Son has been grouped with the Father as Creator, there is need for some clarification about the relation between the Father and the Son. What we have here are two word pictures, analogies. Calvin warns that 'we must allow there is a measure of impropriety in what is taken from earthly things and applied to the hidden majesty of God.' Human language will be limited in what it can convey so should be treated accordingly. The first picture is one of light from light. Just as the light source and the rays of the light are one, and just as the rays communicate the light itself, the Son who communicates the Father as the eternally begotten Son is one yet distinct from while communicating the Father. The second picture is one of a mold creating an exact replica. We should not take this picture to mean the same but less; or a negative impression to a positive object; or to illustrate a moment of coming into creation, but rather sameness as to nature/being/essence. These are word pictures that cannot answer all the questions that might suggest themselves to us, but there are some clear take away from the things we find grouped here. Firstly, we find the Son grouped together with the Father in divine action. However, this is not a

case of creating a second Father, but rather communicating that the second person of the Godhead is in fact the ontological Son, who is distinctly the Son. He is the Word that God uses to communicate; He is the radiance of the glory of God; He is the exact imprint of His nature; He is the one who makes the Father known. So we must note that He is portrayed as the same yet distinct. This distinction is a distinction within God not from God. This distinction is also in keeping with His peculiar personal property of being the Son. Thirdly, we also see an affirmation of 'from-ness' the Father begets the Son so He is the eternally begotten Son, the radiance flows from the light, the imprint of God's nature. This begottenness accounts for why the Son is the one who is the Word of God. All of this taken together with what the Word of God teaches on the Trinity is formulated into our creedal statements, this is the 1700 year anniversary of the Nicene Creed, here is the 381 edition, 'We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; by whom all things were made....' If a Jewish believer tried to rationalize that they wanted to leave Jesus to go back to God, Jesus is God, communicates God, you cannot truly know God, or come to God, apart from Jesus Christ.

Upholder

'and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.' Once again, Jesus functions as God, Paul repeats this idea in Col. 1:17, 'And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.' Jesus as Creator and sustainer is described in the same way as YHWH is in Ps. 104. The Heidelberg catechism outlines what the author of Hebrews is attributing to the Son, 'Q. 27. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. The almighty, everywhere-present power of God, whereby, as it were by His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth with all creatures, and so governs them that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things come not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.'

We believe that even while Jesus was being nurtured as a young babe, He was even then upholding all things by the word of His power. The Bible does not present a Deistic worldview where God is a clockmaker who winds up the clock and then walks away. No, He is at the helm, upholding all things and driving all things according to His perfect plan. Think about that then. Who is the one who is in control of your life? The very same one who laid down His life for you. He is not a disinterested party who stands far off, but who exercises His power on behalf of His people.

Purifier

'After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.' I do think that this description of the Son's redemptive work is put in the climactic position. It is as if the author seeks to emphasize, yes the Son is God, but look how He condescends in becoming a man, look at how He loves us, look at how He suffered, look how He has done all to deal with the great problem of our sins; and yes it is finished, He has succeeded, and now He is seated in triumph, in power, on our behalf.

This statement begins by speaking of Christ's cross work in the once off past tense. Christ's human life where He who was God, became a man, lived a perfect life, died in payment for our sins and was raised is assumed to focus on the effect. He has made purification for our sins. This idea of purification would be familiar to the OT saint, to the Jewish mind. God is holy and commands His people to be holy, God made provision for the holiness of His people through priests offering substitute sacrifices for the sins of God's people. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, because the wages of sin is death. The priests and the tabernacle were God's provision to cover the sins of God's people that God might continue to dwell with them. This letter will open up for us that the OT provision was temporary, that it was a type, that it was given to prepare for the coming of Christ. animal sacrifices could not truly pay for human sins; the repetition of the sacrifices were more of testimony to the ongoing problem of our sins and did not truly cleanse the conscience; the priesthood that was put in effect was forecast to be replaced; even the old covenant itself would be replaced with a better one. The priests had to over sacrifice after sacrifice, year after year, animal after animal, and still it was not the final solution, until Jesus. He was the perfect offerer, having a priesthood greater than Aaron's. He was the perfect offering, not offering animal death but a perfect human being dying to pay for human sin. His sacrifice was enough and He only had to die once. On the cross He cried out it is finished, and it is this superior sacrifice, and the finished nature of Christ's work that is being highlighted in this verse.

But more than that, right now He is seated at God's right hand. Having finished all that was needed to secure our redemption He ascended into heaven. There He was enthroned in reward for His work, reaching the pinnacle of His human ministry as exalted prophet, priest and king. Having done all that was needed to secure redemption He is now active in what is called His heavenly session applying that redemption to His people. He is our representative, right there at God's right hand, everything needed for redemption secured.

What an incredible description of Christ. Do you see Jesus for who He is? He is not a cheerleader for our favourite political positions; He is not merely a man; He is the great Saviour that we need. He is God, the Creator, the sustainer of all things by His mere word; He is the eternal Son radiating as the light of the world, communicating the Father to us. He is God made flesh, a true instantiation of the Father both as the eternally begotten Son and the incarnate Son. This one, this eternal Son has become what He was not, to save us. He lived a perfect life, offered Himself in perfect death, paying as a sufficient sacrifice the penalty of our sins in death. He who should have put me to death for what I had done, took my place, took my death. He completely paid for my sin; He finished all that would be necessary to save me. He ascended into heaven, and there He is controlling history, interceding on my behalf. When someone comes along and pretends to offer salvation look to Him, the God man, the prophet, priest and king. When you feel persuaded by another's words even seeing other believers wandering from their faith, remember the words of Peter when Jesus asked His disciples if they wanted to depart as well, John 6:68, 'Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.' When things seem so hard and you want to give up, look at Him resurrected and ascended and a very present help in times of need. When evil looks like it is going to win, and your life seems full of confusion see Him as Creator and sustainer overruling all. The author of Hebrews is doing what one of our favourite songs instructs us to do, turn your eyes upon Jesus look full in His

wonderful face, and the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.