

Faith Reformed Church  
Stevensville, Ontario  
January 27, 2008  
Morning Service

Text: Hebrews 1:4-14  
Sermon: Jesus Superior to Angels

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; AMEN.

The Letter to the Hebrews opens with an assertion of Jesus' superiority. First, he is superior to all kings, for the universe was not only made for him, it was made through him. It belongs to him. Second, he is superior to all prophets, for while they brought some truth about God to man, Jesus is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact representation of his being. If you have seen and heard Jesus, you have seen and heard the divine Father. After Jesus spoke, there was nothing more to add. Third, he is superior to all priests, for Jesus, through his sacrifice, was actually able to purify sinners and make a full and complete atonement for all of the sins of all of his people. We know his atonement was perfect because after making it he sat down, his priestly work done. And so we find that in the three offices to which Old Testament saints were consecrated—prophet, priest and king—while their work was partial and incomplete, Jesus' work was not. He proved to be the fulfillment of those high offices: perfect prophet, perfect priest, and perfect king.

In our lesson today the writer of Hebrews turns his attention to angels and proves the superiority of Christ to these magnificent spiritual beings.

Let me give you some details about angels—who they are and what they do.

Angels are mentioned more than 100 times in the Old Testament and more than 160 times in the New. They are spiritual creatures that exist in vast numbers. In the vision John recorded in the Book of Revelation he describes a vast throng of angels, “numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand” (5:11). You know the story of Elisha when he was surrounded by the army of Ben Hadad at Dothan. Elisha’s servant panicked at the sight. Elisha told him not to worry because there were more on his side than there were on theirs. When the servant didn’t understand his eyes were opened and he saw that all around the city there were chariots of fire—angels who had come to protect the man of God. Sometimes angels are visible, and when they are they usually take human form and are sometimes mistaken for men. Sometimes they shine with glorious light. Sometimes they appear as fabulous winged creatures. The seraphim Isaiah saw in the throne room of God (the name *seraphim* means “shining ones”) had six wings and they hovered around the throne of God calling out “Holy! Holy! Holy!”

There are four basic tasks carried out by angels. First, they continually praise and worship God. Think of Psalm 103: “Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding.” Think of Job 38, where God describes the early days of his creation when “the morning stars

sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.” Or think of the birth of our Lord, when the angel said, “Glory to God in the highest” (Luke 2). Angels worship.

The second thing angels do is communicate God’s message to man. The word for angel in Hebrew is malak and it means “messenger.” The word in Greek is *angelos* and it also means “messenger.” Acts 7 tells us that angels assisted in bringing the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. They revealed the future to Daniel (Daniel 10:10-15) and to John in Revelation. It was an angel that announced the upcoming births of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus. It was angels at the tomb who asked the question, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” He is not here; he has risen!”

The third thing that angels do is minister to believers. Angels encamp around those who fear the Lord (Psalm 34:7). They guard God’s people “in all their ways, lest they dash their foot against a stone” (Psalm 91). They broke the apostles out of jail. They rejoice at the conversion of sinners. They are present in the church. They guard and protect God’s people. I don’t have time to go into it here but there are a number of wonderful stories of missionaries under threat by hostile forces who, nevertheless, are not

harmed because while they can see nothing, the forces arrayed against them can see the angels who protect them.

And finally, angels are God's agents in the final judgement and Second Coming. They call forth the elect with loud trumpets from the four winds (Matthew 24:31) and they separate the wheat from the chaff (Matthew 13:39-42). In Revelation we see them open the seals, blow the trumpets, pour out bowls of wrath and execute judgement against Satan and his servants.

All of this is to say that angels are awesome beings. When they show up on the scene they cause men to quake and tremble. But for all that, their excellencies and their significance dwindle when compared to the glory of Jesus Christ. In every way Jesus is superior to the angels. Now before we get to the ways in which Christ is superior to the angels I want to put things into perspective. Why is it that the writer of Hebrews takes up the subject of angels at this point? What is going on? Well, let's remember the situation that the Jewish Christians in Rome were facing. They were under pressure to renounce the faith and return to Judaism. They had been ostracized by their families and put out of the synagogues by their leaders. They had suffered one round of government persecution when their property was

confiscated and now they are about to suffer a greater persecution that would involve the shedding of their blood at the hands of Nero. Now here was the temptation: If they would simply confess that Jesus was an angel—or perhaps even the greatest of the angels—they would be accepted back into their families and synagogues and they would escape government persecution. And note: They would not have to out and out deny Christ; they would only have to embrace a different understanding of Christ. He was a glorious being; he was a great man; but he wasn't of the same being and essence as the Father; he wasn't divine. The temptation was this: You can have your family; you can have your culture; you can have your religion; you can affirm your spiritual experiences; you can even have Jesus Christ; all you have to do is confess that while he is glorious and wonderful he is not God in the flesh. With that one little change, all can be well and all the bickering can stop.”

We face that same threat today, although in a slightly different form. It comes when people say, “I believe that your Jesus is a Saviour. If you want to follow him, more power to you. But look: While he is your Saviour he is not my Saviour. I follow a different path to heaven. For me it is one way; for you, another, and that is all right. Whether you follow Buddha or Mohammed or Krishna or someone else, we will all end up in the same

place. You have your Saviour and I have my Saviour and if you would only acknowledge this we could all get along much better.”

The problem with that, of course, is that it is not true. There is only one Saviour and the only way to heaven is by his grace alone through faith alone. If you put your trust anywhere else—if you follow Mohammed or Krishna or Buddha or anyone else you will perish. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12).

In order to press home the point that Jesus must be worshipped in spirit and in truth—that he must be worshipped as he has revealed himself to be—that he must be confessed as the Lord and Saviour who is at the same time true man and true God, uncreated, eternal and of the same substance of the Father, the author of Hebrews outlines five ways in which Jesus is superior to the angels. Jesus has a superior name, honour, status, existence and vocation. Name, honour, status, existence and vocation. Let’s take them one by one.

First of all, Jesus has a name that is superior to the angels. That name is “Son.” To prove his point, the author quotes Psalm 2: “You are my Son;

today I have become your Father.” Now we need to be careful here. Jesus was always God’s Son. God was always his Father. The phrase “today I have become your Father” refers to the resurrection of Jesus. Paul tells us in Romans that Jesus “was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.” Hebrews is saying, in effect, “In the resurrection of Jesus the truth that he was the only Son of God was displayed, manifested and confirmed by the Father.” His resurrection from the dead proves he is God’s eternal Son.

The quotation from II Samuel 7:14 comes from a conversation the prophet Nathan had with King David. David wanted to build a temple to the Lord. Nathan said that after David died his son would build a house for God and establish a royal throne that would endure forever. Now this promise was partially fulfilled when Solomon built the temple—but Solomon and all the other kings of Israel could not establish a throne that would last forever. For that it would take King David’s greater Son, the Lord Jesus. When Gabriel told Mary that she would bear the Christ child he referred to this promise:

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.



Now put those things together and this is what you find: the name of Jesus—  
Son of God—was confirmed when he was born in the flesh and when he  
rose from the dead. Jesus’ name is Son; angels, glorious as they are, are  
only messengers. How dare anyone demote Jesus to the position of  
archangel!

Jesus has a superior name. He is Son. Second, Jesus has a superior  
honour; he is worshipped. “And again, when God brings his firstborn into  
the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’” Jesus was  
worshipped by angels in eternity past. He was worshipped by angels in the  
time of his earthly ministry. He is worshipped by angels now. He will be  
worshipped by them forever. We get a picture of that in Revelation 5. You  
know those thousands upon thousands of angels I mentioned before? Do  
you know what they were doing? They were worshipping God.

They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the  
elders. In a loud voice they sang:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power  
and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and  
praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the  
earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and  
honour and glory and power for ever and ever!”

The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and  
worshipped.

Jesus has a superior name—Son. He has a superior honour—he is worshipped. Third, he has a superior status. Angels, you see, are servants. “He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.” Now to say that they are servants is in no way to demean them. They are glorious servants. But Jesus is Master and Lord. He is sovereign. The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 45 and applies it to Jesus:

Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever,  
And righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.  
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;  
Therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions  
By anointing you with the oil of joy.

The throne of Jesus—that is his rule—will never end. His scepter—that is his authority—will be executed in righteousness. That righteousness is a righteousness of Christ’s won making, for “the oil of joy” points us to the truth found in chapter 12. There we read of Jesus, “who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right and of the throne of God.” Time and time and time again the author makes the same point: Jesus is superior, so you cannot turn back. There is nowhere else for you to go; there is only one comfort in life and in death, and that is to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

A superior name—Son; a superior honour—he is worshipped; a superior status—he is Lord and Master; and a superior existence—he is

eternal and everlasting. Look at verses 10 through 12 where the writer quotes Psalm 102:

He also says,

In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same and your years will never end.

Beloved, this old world is passing away, and so are we. We are here for an instant and then the world sees and remembers us no more. Between them Daisy and Ella have fewer than 19 months on this earth. By God's grace they will grow up to be strong and healthy. But by that same grace they will also grow to be old and frail. Now you might say, "But Ken, that is still a long way off." I used to think so too. I don't any more. It makes me think of the hymn "Abide with Me."

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens, Lord with me abide.  
Change and decay in all around I see;  
O thou who changest not, abide with me.

The superiority of Christ is this: He is "the same yesterday, today and forever." He alone does not change. He alone cannot be moved. And so he alone is secure. If you build your life on him you are building on a sure foundation and a solid rock. If you don't, you are a fool.

A superior name—Son; a superior honour—he is worshipped; a superior status—he is Lord and Master; a superior existence—he is eternal and everlasting; a superior vocation, for he is victor over sin and death. Beloved, it is the calling of Jesus Christ to be the conqueror of every enemy. It was not to angels but to the Lord Jesus that God said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” In olden times a victorious general would place his feet upon the neck of a defeated foe, as Joshua had his commanders do to the captured kings of Canaan. The enemies would become a “footstool.” Who are the enemies of Christ that will be his footstool? Paul writes about them in I Corinthians 15:

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

I like the way Richard Phillips puts it in his commentary as he sums up these enemies:

The curse of the law, sin, Satan, the worldly powers, death, the grave—these are Christ’s enemies. During his earthly ministry he advanced into the ranks of his enemy, casting out demons, purifying leprosy, bringing healing to the sick, exposing hypocrisy, opposing false teaching, humbling the proud, cleansing the temple of moneychangers, and all the while calling sinners to faith and repentance. It is especially in the extension of the gospel that he now overcomes his foes as men and women come to saving faith in him. In the end, he will have no enemies left standing, as the Book of Revelation tells us: “Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14). “He will wipe away every tear from [his

people's] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

Isn't this the Saviour that you need? He has the name. He has the honour. He has the status. He has the existence. He has the vocation. It all adds up to this: In Jesus and Jesus alone we have the supreme and only Saviour. There is nothing you need that is not found in him. Do you need pardon for your sins? See him exalted and know that God has accepted his sacrifice on your behalf. Do you need to be reconciled to God? Lift up your eyes and you will see Jesus interceding on your behalf and offering his own perfect righteousness and the ground of your acceptance. Do you need newness of life—a new heart, a renewed mind and will, and renewed strength to follow? From his throne of grace he not only sends his angels, he sends the Holy Spirit to take up residence in your hearts. Do you have troubles and tough decisions to make? Christ is enthroned in power and cares for you with wisdom and love. Do you fear death? Christ reigns now and will until this last enemy is finally defeated. Death will have no hold on those who trust in him; it will only usher believers into his presence.

Never turn back. Never seek another Saviour. Hold fast to Christ in whom alone are found all the riches of God. In Christ's name. AMEN.