

Superior to Angels

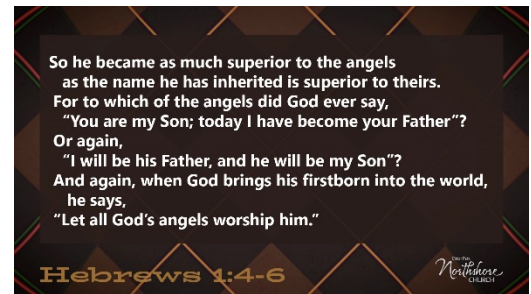
This is the second message in a series we started last week from the New Testament Book of Hebrews that we are calling *Christ Superior*. We are calling the series *Christ Superior* because we will see that Jesus, the Christ, is the clear focus of Hebrews, and that step by step we will see Christ held high as superior to everything else.



Last week we started with the first three verses, as well as an overview of the Book of Hebrews that is worth checking out if you missed it; today we will pick up with verse 4 and go through the end of the first chapter. Our passage begins:

⁴ So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.¹

Angels. May I just say that I really don't have any interest in preaching a sermon about angels? I'd rather preach a sermon about Jesus. The good news is that this passage is, by far, mostly about Jesus. But here it is: *Angels*. So, let's say a few things about angels.



First, the clear presupposition of the passage: Angels are real. They are created beings that serve God primarily in the spiritual realm, but occasionally show up among us.

We see angels throughout the Biblical text. I would say that the most important way we see angels in the Biblical text is in the beginning of the New Testament as they announced the conception and birth of Jesus to Mary, Joseph, and the world. It seems that this is the way angels show up among us the most in the Biblical text, as *messengers* from God.

It seems strange to me that angels are such a big deal here. In this Book of Hebrews, this theological text, lifting high Jesus as Christ Superior, I have to wonder "why go so early to angels?" The first three verses of the text establish Jesus as Christ Superior, and specifically holds Christ superior to the prophets. That makes sense to me; the Prophets are a big deal, the likes of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and such. But then angels?

¹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 1:4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

This is a good time to remember that Hebrews, like all the Books in the Bible, was originally written to a certain people in a certain time and place. Apparently, angels were a big deal among many Jews during that period, and angels were becoming a big deal among Christians too. There are many ancient writings from that time that convince us that various rabbis and Jewish scholars were fascinated with angels. They had them named and numbered. There were arguments about how and when they were created and what they were made of. There were various types and roles and such. Some of it was rooted in Biblical texts; a lot of it wasn't.

What does that have to do with us? Well, I suppose there are people fascinated with angels these days too. In broad terms, there are entire religions and various sects that are focused on angels. Satanists, for example, follow and worship an angel... a fallen angel. There are sects of Islam that are fascinated with angels. Mormons give angels important places in their theology. And there are Christians who seem fascinated with angels.

Our culture has a significant place for angels. Type *angels* into Amazon, and you get some Christian books about angels, but more than books, there are lots of figurines, ornaments, art pieces, and various tchotchkes. There are also the Los Angeles Angels, and Charlie's Angels... but those are something else entirely.

I'm in favor of angels; we have a few angel decorations at our house. I don't have books about angels in my theological library. Perhaps it is a blind spot, but I think a healthy skepticism of complex theologies about angels is good. Angels are in the Bible, but it doesn't say a lot about angels... very little explanation, not much from which to build a theology. To come up with a theology about angels, it seems like one must try to piece together various small fragments, and then connect dots with lines that aren't really there. It seems like it takes a lot of imagination. I'm in favor of imagination; but for theology, I prefer what the Bible has to say over imagination. It seems to me that a lot of what people have to say about angels is mostly imagination.

So, again, what about us (I know, I'm asking *so what* awfully early in the message). While Christ in comparison to angels might not be a question that is on our minds, I think it is helpful to think along these lines. Yes, Christ is superior to angels, but perhaps more importantly, **Christ is superior to every intermediary**. In Jesus, we have direct access to God... no angel or saint or cleric, no complex theology or even simple notion that must be mastered; in Christ there is no need for an intermediary. Christ is superior to angels, and any other intermediary.

Let's take that to the text.

Verse four says that the **name** of Jesus is superior to that of angels, any angel, or all angels. To be reminded of that name, look to verse 3:

³The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being²

The Son is His name. Not merely a messenger or shadow or poor copy, but "the exact representation of his [God's] being."

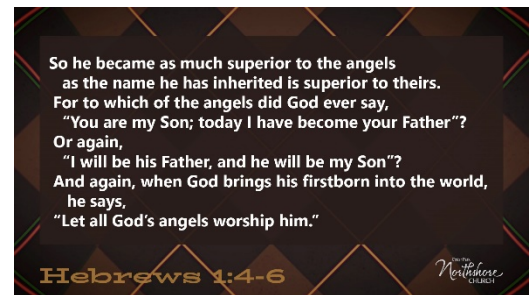
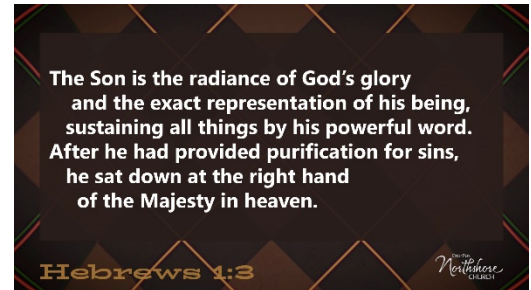
That is reiterated in verse 5 as the comparison between Jesus and angels continues:

⁵For to which of the angels did God ever say,

"You are my Son;
today I have become your Father"?

Or again,

"I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son"? ³



Jesus was announced as God's Son by angels, proclaimed as God's Son by the Father's audible voice from Heaven, and prophesied as God's Son through the Scriptures. In this case, this New-Testament Book of Hebrews quotes Psalm 2, 2 Samuel 7, and 1 Chronicles 17. Old Testament texts are quoted throughout this passage.

While our culture might depict angels as children, they are not God's children. They are not the Son, not the exact representation of God... they are made, created, not begotten... not eternal.

Sure... respected as God's messengers and workers, but not to be worshipped.



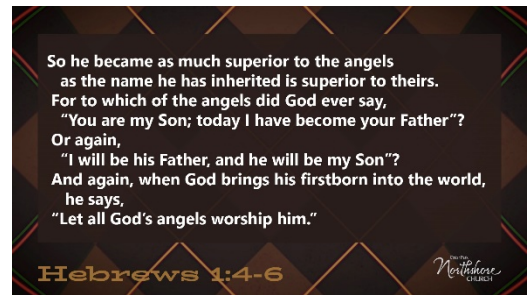
² [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 1:3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 1:5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,

“Let all God’s angels worship him.” ^{s 4}

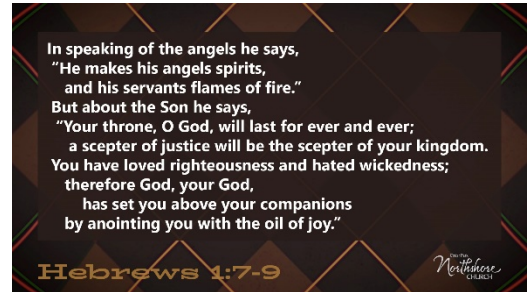
There are several Biblical passages that position angels as worshipers. When they are among us, they are most often messengers; when we are among them, in eternity, we will join them as worshipers.



⁷ In speaking of the angels he says,

“He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire.” ^{t 5}

If you were interested in building a theology about angels, there’s substance here. This is a quote from Psalm 104:4. I mentioned earlier that there were first-century arguments about what angels were made of; some said wind and fire... a theory which found its roots here. The word translated *spirits* here is translated wind in Psalms (in Greek it can be either).



I’m confident that angels are neither actually wind nor fire, something more like spirits as the text says. They are made of stuff beyond our understanding, but sometimes perceived as invisibly powerful like wind, or bright and brilliant like fire. We simply use words like wind and fire to describe that which is still shrouded in mystery.

The main point here, of course, is the contrast with Christ. Angels are made of ethereal stuff like flame and wind,

⁸ But about the Son he says,

“Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.

⁹ 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.” ^{x 6}

Not elusive and temporary like a flame or wind, but solid and eternal.

⁴ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 1:6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 1:7). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 1:8–9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

This is Psalm 45. It is a Psalm about the rule, reign, and authority of God. Christ possesses this authority, anointed as King forever. Perhaps an angel has some task or delegated authority; Christ inherits all authority, all justice, all righteousness.

Angels are merely around the throne, serving God's purposes; Christ Superior reigns on the throne.

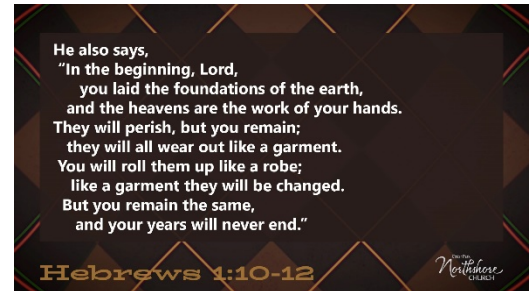
¹⁰ He also says,

“In the beginning, Lord,
you laid the foundations of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

¹¹ They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.

¹² You will roll them up like a robe;
like a garment they will be changed.

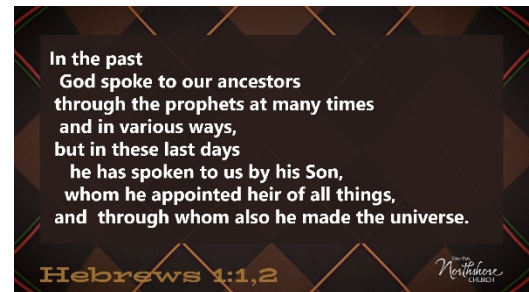
But you remain the same,
and your years will never end.”^{b 7}



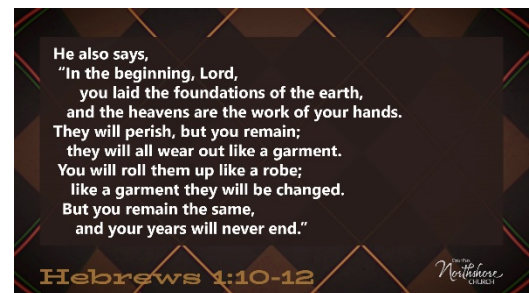
This is the end of Psalm 102. The main point of the quote is the timelessness of Christ, that Christ Superior transcends time, before the beginning and beyond the end.

It is further explication of verse 2, where Christ is held up as the agent of creation, “through whom also he made the universe,” One with the Father and the Spirit eternally.

Angels were not employed in creation; angels are among the creatures... creatures like us, but certainly not exactly like us (more to come on that). Christ is Superior, far superior, in that He is timeless and all powerful.



Like I said, there were expansive theologies about angels during that time of the early Church. I've resisted getting into it much since it could be a path to endless rabbit trails. But I did come across something I had never heard of or seen.



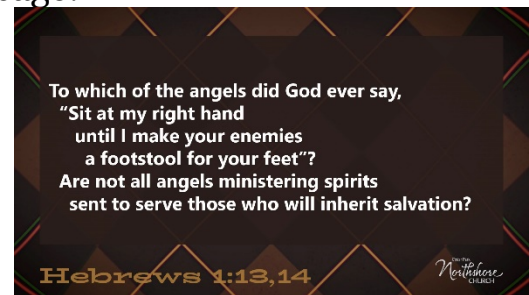
⁷ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 1:10–12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Apparently, there was a theory that angels were recreated daily, that like wind and fire, God would go about the work of making the angels daily... presumably because they were so ethereal and utilitarian. It was as if God would get up in the morning and make a bunch of angels after his morning coffee, something like we might do when getting a fire going in the fireplace. I'm not buying the theory (pay attention, I'm not promoting this), mostly because there is little solid Biblical basis for such an assertion. But I do appreciate the contrast the picture provides. Christ Superior is solid and eternal, while angels are merely among the created order, as if only a daily-created creature compared to the timelessness of Christ.

Continuing with the last two verses in today's passage:

¹³To which of the angels did God ever say,

“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet”? ⁸



This is a contrast in authority. Christ Superior is enthroned over all powers and creatures and spirits. Christ has all of God's power and authority.

¹⁴Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? ⁹

With this final verse, **we** are drawn into the mix. The “those who will inherit salvation”... well, that is us believers. We are the inheritors; we are in the family line. We humans are the ones created in the image of God. We are the ones for whom Jesus died to save. We are the ones called to believe. We are the ones invited to be children of God, heirs of salvation.

Angels are not in the family line. Angels are not created in the image of God, not the heirs of salvation.

Perhaps angels are spectacular and awesome, and even powerful in some ways that we might not understand. But they are merely God's messengers and workers. When they are sent or dispatched in any way in dealings with us, they are sent to serve God's purpose for us.

⁸ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 1:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 1:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

It is worth saying here that the implication is that when angels are sent, it is God who does the sending. I'm aware of some who believe that we somehow have authority to dispatch angels; I don't find any convincing Biblical basis for such things. Just as angels have no authority over us, we have no authority over them (for sure not on our own). The only authority is in God; Christ Superior has the authority.

So... back to us. How should we apply this today? I'm going to suggest that we conclude this second message in the series the way we concluded with the first. If you listened to that first message, you might recall that I identified a key verse, really just part of a verse, from chapter 10:

²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings¹⁰

Let's draw near to God.

We are not called to draw near to God by any intermediary other than Christ Superior.

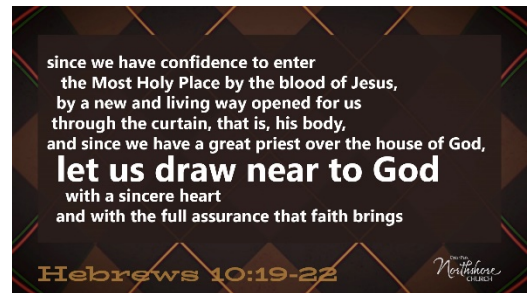
Let's draw near to God.

It seems quite natural to seek and take comfort in an intermediary. There are practical reasons and theological reasons.

Practically, it can be terrifying. Drawing near to God can be terrifying. I might even go so far as to say that drawing near to God (on our own) should be terrifying. If the thought of approaching God on our own is not terrifying then we likely don't truly understand God, or have come to grips with our own shortcomings, or (most likely) both. Think of it, mere mortals like us, flawed, scarred, disobedient, evil... approaching the omnipotent, holy, God of the universe, it should be terrifying.

Theologically, the teaching of the Old Testament is clear, mere humans must not see God. It is strictly prohibited under most every circumstance.

That is the marvelous miracle of it all. Blasting past all theological prohibitions, and overcoming our own fear, we are invited to draw near to God, through Jesus Christ who is The Way, without any intermediary.



¹⁰ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Heb 10:22). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Let's draw near to God by placing all our focus, all our trust, all our faith in Jesus.

Let's draw near to God by putting aside all distractions. Of course that means setting aside sin, and it means not allowing anything to serve as an intermediary, nothing that serves as a layer or go between us and Jesus, whether angels, saints, or people. That doesn't mean we are alone, of course... but that we go to Jesus together, not through one another but with one another.

Let's draw near to God by meeting Him continually through His Word, not merely taking in what might be preached to us (as good as it is here), but digging in ourselves.

Let's draw near to God by following His call and getting to work. One of the best ways to know anyone is to work along side of them; Jesus invites us to work with Him.

Let's draw near to God by worshiping, in times like these, and in our everydays and everyways.

Let's draw near to God through daily devotion.

Let's draw near to God by believing Jesus.

Let's draw near to God in prayer, together, even now as we bring our time to a close.

Father, thank You for this profound invitation to draw near to You. Not through any intermediaries, like angels, but through The Way, Jesus Christ Our Savior, the exact representation of Your being. We know all of God when we know all of Jesus. Give us gifts of direction and conviction to set aside every

distraction, and grant us gifts of faith to focus on Jesus. Thank you that when we draw near to You we experience Your promise that You draw near to us. We thank You, again, in the name above every name, Jesus, Christ Superior. Amen.

