

# The Superiority of Christ

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## Table of Contents

1. Superiority To Any Messenger .....	2
2. Superiority To Moses .....	6
3. Superiority To Aaron .....	10
4. A Superior Covenant .....	13

## Superior To Any Messenger

The Bible presents Jesus Christ as a person, but different and greater than any other person who ever lived. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." These are the opening words of the epistle to the Hebrews, a book that specifically emphasizes the superiority of Christ.

This book begins by pointing out that God has spoken to us by His Son. The book of Hebrews was written to believers, and therefore the message that you have in it is not the kind of thing that would be spoken to unbelieving people. I think we could describe a believer at this point as a person who is convinced that God *is* and that God has dealings with man. Also, a believer understands that heaven is real, and, in particular connection with this book, angels are real. He would also know that God works the salvation of men by His Word. These are some of the things a person believes, if he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not all, but these will lead you into the line of thinking that you have in the book of Hebrews.

When we say that this epistle is written to the Hebrews, I might point out that it's not very clear in anybody's mind just exactly why these people were called Hebrews. Actually, in New Testament times the people who were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and had lived in the country of Judah were commonly called Jews. But this is not the epistle to the Jews. Probably when we're thinking in terms of "Hebrew" we're thinking of someone who is at least instructed in the Old Testament, someone who knows about the covenant with Abraham – the promise of God to bless those who would walk by faith. I think that much should be clear, and it might be well for us to have it in mind when we're reading this book.

It's quite possible that a good way to interpret this epistle to the Hebrews would be just to put the name of your own denomination in here. This could very well be the epistle to the Presbyterians, the epistle to the Methodists, the epistle to the Baptists, or the epistle to the Episcopalians. Just be sure you name somebody whose family and people will believe in the reality of God and in the various things that I have mentioned.

Undoubtedly these were people who had received instruction about God, and they knew about God's interest in man. They knew that God had revealed His laws to Moses in the Ten Commandments. They knew that God had revealed His grace to Moses in the Tabernacle and in the sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin. Anybody who would be called a Hebrew surely would know those things. He would know that God wants to bless man. He would know that God will judge sin. He would know that God *can* forgive when a man comes with the specified sacrifice and *will* forgive on the basis of the sacrifice that is offered. He would know that God's action toward man is somewhat dependent upon what the man does in response to the call of God in His promises.

I can think right now that someone could say, "If a person knew all that, what else is there to know?" That's what the book of Hebrews is about. There is a lot more to know. Everything I told you so far is true, but there's more.

Now let us keep in mind that no man *naturally* knows what God will do. The promises of God are not just guessed at. You don't just imagine them. You don't wake up in the night and suddenly know what God has said that He will do. In the Scriptures you read, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God

hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (I Cor. 2:9-10). God has revealed to man what He is able and willing to do in the way of providing man with blessing. Thus we have a message from God. This is the Word that is preached to all men everywhere, especially to those who believe.

In the Bible we have a record of the history of revelation. It wasn't all revealed in one moment; it was revealed in the course of time. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets . . ." In the Bible we have a record of how God sent messengers to men. The common word in the Bible for speaking of a messenger from God is the word *angel*. In these first two chapters we have evidence that Christ Jesus is to be considered as superior to the angels. He is "better than the angels."

It would be well for us to pause here and recognize this: so far as the concept *angel* is concerned, there's no standard description of an angel in the Bible. I know that some people think angels have wings and that they usually dress in long flowing robes of white. Now, there are creatures in heaven that have wings. We call them cherubim and seraphim. But insofar as any angels are described in the Bible they have an appearance like human beings. They're not always described. Paul could say, "There stood by me this night the angel of God." We're not given to understand that that angel looked like any human being. Yet there were angels that came in Old Testament times that did look like human beings.

You will remember those three men that came to Abraham and told him about the birth of Isaac and the destruction of Sodom. They undoubtedly were messengers from God and we speak of them as angels.

Abraham and Sarah provided a meal for them. In the book of Hebrews we are told to be careful not to forget to entertain strangers, "for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." That's the way it was with Abraham.

You will remember that an angel came to Jacob when he was at Peniel and wrestled with him on !into the night. When Joshua was out at night before the attack on the city of Jericho, you will recall that an angel came with a sword at his side. When Gideon was hiding, threshing wheat on his father's farm where the Midianites wouldn't see him, an angel came to him. He must have looked like a man, because Gideon got ready to give him a meal.

The only kind of angels described in the Bible have something of the appearance of men. But there is no exact description of an angel.

The term is functional, and by that I mean something like this: when you say "doctor" you're not describing the person. We wouldn't even know whether you mean a man or woman. We certainly wouldn't know whether he was old or young. We would not know whether she was taller short. There's no description when you say "doctor." Just the same way if you say "farmer," "carpenter," or "bookkeeper." This is the kind of thing I have in mind in understanding the word *angel*. There were such messengers sent from God, and there are such creatures talked about in the first and second chapters of the book of Hebrews.

When we read that God spake in divers manners to the fathers by the prophets we understand that this happened sometimes through the voice of angels and sometimes in other ways. But in these last days, we read, He "hath spoken unto us by his Son." When He spoke by the Son, He did not contradict or correct anything that had! been said before. But He *fulfilled* what had been said before. He actually said *more* than had been said before.

The relationship between what was said by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the prophets in the Old Testament is a good deal like the relationship between the rose bloom and the rose bush. The rose bush comes first, and then the bloom comes on the bush. Without the bush you wouldn't have the bloom, and without the bloom you'd never know what the bush really represented. That's something like the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In the book of Hebrews, however, we find that the writer is dwelling upon the superiority of Christ because of who He is. One of the main reasons He is superior to the angels is because of who He is. He is

superior, you could say, like a doctor is superior to the delivery boy that brings the drugs. Now a drug store delivery boy is very important if you're sick, but if a doctor should walk into the house that's really better. Or, consider the superiority of the bus driver over the mechanic who checks the tires. The mechanic is very important, but the bus driver is a good deal more important if you're going to get anywhere. So we say that the Lord Jesus Christ is superior to those messengers who came before.

In the first and second chapters a number of reasons are given as to why He is superior. In your Bible you may want to mark these reasons as I bring them to your attention.

In Chapter One you will see that He is the Son of God. We read, "unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son . . . ? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?" Then in vs. 6, "Let all the angels of God worship him." He was greater than the angels because He was actually the Son of God.

In vs. 7-9 you will see that He is the King on the throne: "Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom." Christ Jesus is spoken of here in these quotations from the Old Testament as the King on the throne. And the angels are His servants.

Now look in vs. 10, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands." He is considered the Creator, the Maker of earth and heaven.

Look in vs. 11 and 12. "They shall perish; but thou remainest . . . Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." He is eternal. This is a quality that belongs to God. Christ is spoken of here as eternal, and that makes Him superior to any messenger. There's no messenger about whom you would say that.

In vs. 13-14 you will see that He is sitting at the right hand of God. "But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?"

In Chapter Two, from verses 5 to 8, you will see that He is considered to be Lord over all. "Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet." Now that isn't true about the angels, but it's true about Christ.

Finally, from the latter part of the 8th verse on through to vs. 18 you will see that He is considered to be the Savior by virtue of His death. In this respect He is also superior to any messenger that ever went before, because of what He did and! the way in which He did it. The messengers 'before brought the message, but the Lord Jesus performed it. He actually did it.

The book of Hebrews presents Christ as superior to any messenger who had ever come from God before – not so much by comparison of His person. (It's not that He's so much kinder, or so much wiser, or so much gentler, or so much stronger.) Nor is it His way of life that makes Him superior. (It isn't that He acts more honest or more gentle or more sincere, that's not it.) He is superior by reason of who He is. He is the Son of God.

In the latter part of the second chapter, we see that He is superior because of what He did and how He did it. And here is the great big thing that comes to our minds so strongly: He is God, and because He is God, He is entitled to be over all and at the right hand of the Father. Yet He took on Him the nature of man. He actually laid aside His glory. As we read in the book of Philippians, He laid aside His glory and took on Him the nature of man. And as man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death. This sets Him above every other name that ever was. He has done it this way that He might taste death for every man. Thus He became the Savior in Himself.

Now we're going to see a good deal more about this, but perhaps I could repeat it each time and it wouldn't be too often for us to have in mind – the salvation that God offers us in Jesus Christ is the salvation that is in Jesus Christ Himself. He Himself died on Calvary. He Himself was raised from the dead. He Himself was changed in His natural body and entered into eternal existence with God in His new body that He received after the resurrection.

That pattern is for us, for you and for me – if we believe in Him. If we believe in Him, then we are crucified with Him, we are raised with Him, and we become at one with Him. This is the plan and the arrangement by which He becomes our Savior.

The message that He spoke to the people was more than the message that had been spoken before. In our next study, when we pay particular attention to Moses, we shall see that the message which was spoken before by angels told men what was right and wrong. It instructed men to do right and warned them against doing wrong. If they did wrong, the consequences fell upon them just the way the angels, the messengers, had said it would. But the word that God speaks to us through Christ Jesus calls men to share in the salvation that Jesus Christ offers. He doesn't just tell us what to do. He does it in us and for us.

The Word of Christ calls men to share in performance by the power of God. You actually do what God wants you to do.

## Superior To Moses

Can you think of a better way to get to a certain place than for someone to tell you how to get there? Yes, there is a better way: have someone who knows the road ride with you and be your guide.

Right there we have a wonderful introduction to the idea that Christ Jesus is better, is superior, for us than Moses. Moses will tell us what to do, but the Lord Jesus Christ will go with us as we are doing it and help us to do it. The Bible reveals to man the conditions under which he can have the blessings of God. Anyone who believes in God, and feels that he needs the help of God, looks up to God and wonders how he can have help. Sometimes one gets the impression from some people that they think that there are never any conditions involved – that God will bless just anybody . . . He'll bless just everybody all the time. That is simply not true.

If you're going to have anything to do with the God of the Bible it will start out with the fact that God is holy. He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil." God will condemn sin. In judgment, God not only condemns but destroys. This is a basic truth of God both as He is known in the Bible and as He is to be seen in nature.

It is true anybody can come. Thank the Lord. Anyone at all, no matter who he is, can turn to God. But he cannot come in any way. God's way is the way to come.

If you take one quick look at nature you'll see what I mean. God makes the flowers grow, but He doesn't make the flowers grow anywhere. He doesn't make the flowers grow anytime. He doesn't make the flowers grow anyhow. There are certain conditions under which flowers will grow. Meet the conditions and God will make them grow.

That is true in the spiritual sense. God is in Himself a holy being, a righteous being. He can only approve that which is honest and true. God cannot lie. Because this is so, in coming to know God a person is first confronted with the law of God, the nature of God. In the Bible this will bring to your mind a great name, the name of Moses, a man who truly was a great servant of God. And with the name of Moses there will come to your mind something about the Ten Commandments. In many respects this is the basic truth in all revelation. While the Lord Jesus Christ came to save us, He Himself laid down as a principle, never to be forgotten, that "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." The Lord Jesus said of Himself, I am not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it. God is just exactly as He is, and He is as He is eternally. He never varies. And in Himself as He is, He will accept only that which is right in His sight.

When you stop to think about it, this is the essence of the control, the government, of the whole universe. You can hinge the government of the whole universe on God's integrity. It is absolutely necessary for anything and everything that God be consistent. There is a significant aspect of this for us in "the law of the harvest" – "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

So far as all science is concerned we are absolutely dependent on things being consistent with themselves. Hydrogen will just have to be hydrogen till the end of time. Oxygen will be oxygen. Iron will be iron. These things will stay as they are, and every bit of science you ever heard about depends upon things remaining consistent with themselves.

The same is true in morality. If you're going to have anything at all that you can do in the way of government you're going to have to have it laid down as an actual principle that honesty is honesty, thievery is thievery and decency is decency. All morality, all science, even sanity itself depends on this basic integrity of the universe.

Have you ever been in an earthquake? Do you remember how you felt when your house first started shaking? Well, if you remember, it was a frightening experience. I can remember the first earthquake I



ever felt, in California, and I want to tell you that it was a frightening thing. When you can't depend upon the ground you're standing on being solid, that will shake you up.

A person would lose his mind in no time at all if things did not stay consistent with themselves. If salt sometimes acted like sugar, sugar sometimes acted like salt and milk sometimes acted like vinegar, everything would be in impossible turmoil. We depend upon things being as they are and staying put.

This has serious consequences for sinful man, because "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." That's the rule. And, "there's no man that sinneth not." That's the general state. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." That's how it happens.

When you think about this you can understand why some people feel sort of discouraged and almost unwilling to think about spiritual things. There are people who don't even want to go to church. They know they've done wrong, they know perfectly well that God is holy, and they know that in the sight of God they are condemned. They don't want to go and hear it all the time. Their own conscience would tell them that they are right or wrong. They know they're wrong, and because of that and since they don't know any more, they stay away. It's necessary for them to know more, however, and for us to preach the gospel.

In addition to setting forth the law of God, it was given: to Moses to show Israel how sinners could come to God. In our next study, when we consider how the Lord Jesus Christ is superior to Aaron, we're going to see the conditions under which a man could come to God.

For the moment now we're considering Moses who in his time was the great teacher. He was the man who revealed right and wrong. He was the law giver. He was the school master for the whole of Israel. The very essence of what was called the first covenant, the old covenant, the old testament, is that right is right and wrong is wrong. God is right and God will approve that which is right and will destroy that which is wrong. Any person who knows what is right and what is wrong is a fortunate person. He has learned a great deal.

Now it is very possible and very common for many sincere people to stop at this point. They feel they've learned what is right and wrong. They know what God requires, and they feel now that all there is left for them is to do it. They're going to do that a little bit later.

There is a sense of truth in that knowledge. The law came by Moses, and it is the truth. But more is true. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

People who stop at the point of just knowing what is right and wrong can be very critical of other people because they see so much that is wrong. They can be very despondent about themselves because they have to admit they're even wrong personally. All their lifetime they live without assurance, because they feel so wrong about things and they have only a very dim hope for the future. They've heard somehow that Christ Jesus saves. It's not uncommon to have that kind of a mind. They may pray asking God to be gracious to them as they live, to forgive their sins, and in the end to see them in heaven. They don't expect anything other than that really to happen in them in this life because they realize that they are sinners. They haven't known the truth of the gospel, and it's for people like that that the book of Hebrews was written. Christ Jesus is the One who comes in grace and in truth.

By just knowing what's right and wrong, the only motivation that you have to do right is reward. And the motivation to stop doing wrong is punishment. On the basis of right and wrong you're confronted with the issue of reward and punishment. If you do right, you'll be rewarded. If you do wrong, you'll be punished. And that seems to be right and just and good.

But human nature being what it is, you know what my human heart will start figuring out? How little do I need to do to get the reward. Because I am a sinful person, I don't want to do any more than I have to. If you tell me I'll be punished if I do wrong, you know what I'll start figuring out? How far can I go before I'll be punished? How much can I get away with before I'll be punished? The truth of the matter is that as long as my heart isn't right, you can teach me right and wrong and it won't make me right.

All the ministry that Moses could give was in showing what was right and wrong, in teaching the

ways of God. And he did lead the people to learn these things. You will remember that Moses brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt. They were very glad to come out. Then he started leading them across the wilderness. Each morning they received the manna from heaven. Every day they were led by the cloud. Every night they were watched over by a pillar of fire. This went on day after day after day. Guided day and night by the cloud and the fire, fed every day with the manna, you'd think these people would have come to trust God. In addition to that they were instructed by the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. They were told how to act. They were given minute instructions.

And yet when the people came to Kadesh Barnea and had the opportunity of going forward, they failed. The reason they failed to go forward is that they didn't have any faith in God. They didn't trust God. Despite all that God had done for them they were still moving in their own strength.

We've got any number of people today who still go in their own strength. They know what is right, they know what is wrong, and they're going to try to do right. They know, too, that if they do wrong they can confess their sin to God and God will forgive them. So they confess their sin to God and God forgives them. Then they will go out and do the best they can again. As they are doing the best they can they will sin again. When they sin again and that's brought to their attention they will come into the presence of God and confess their sin. And God will forgive them their sin. Then they will go out and live on their own and do wrong again. This thing goes on and on and on. It never comes to any conclusion. It's like Israel in the desert. They keep pounding around there in the desert because they do not have the faith to go forward into the land.

The law of Moses, telling us what is right and wrong, is a good deal like giving us a map to travel across the country. Now the difference in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is that the gospel presents Christ as a guide to lead us across the country. Instead of putting a map in your hand, He sits in the front seat with you to guide you. The law is a good deal as if you were to get a prescription filled at the drug-gist. You have the prescription and the instructions about how to use it, but in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ is with you as the doctor. Now the medicine may be ever so good, but it will still be better to have a doctor present who could check on so many things. Another way of considering this is to say that telling you what you ought to do and what you ought not to do is like giving you a box of tools and a manual of instructions and telling you to fix your car. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ will bring you a mechanic: Christ will be the mechanic Himself who will fix your car. If you think of a woman who wants to have a dress, the law is a good deal like giving this woman a sewing machine, a pattern and the cloth. In the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ you bring in a seamstress. The seamstress will take the whole material over and do it for you. In the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ you have the power of God to help you. That's different, and in that sense He is superior to Moses. Now mind you, Moses' telling you what is right and wrong is good. But, on the basis of that, you don't have in you what it takes to do what you ought to do. And your sinful nature, your sinful disposition from within, will cause you to try in some way to escape the judgment.

This happened with Israel over and over again in the Old Testament. Despite everything that God would do for them, and no matter how many times He forgave them and helped them, they were a people addicted to sin. They went wrong over and over again. Finally God said, "I am going to do something new and different." He began a new way of doing things, wherein He Himself sent His Son here. His Son would do it for us and in us and would bring us to Himself.

The whole business of living the Christian life can bog down in the keeping of certain rules and regulations. True, there are certain things which you have to do, certain things which you should do, but you could wind up just as unhappy as Israel. They knew the truth but they didn't do it because inwardly they were not changed.

Instead you could trust yourself and everything in you and about you to the Lord. The Lord, by His living presence can work in you when you yield to Him. You can have His power which will move you to



keep the law of God.

This is why Christ Jesus is superior to Moses.

## Superior To Aaron

Any human being born into the world is born without knowledge of how to get the blessing of God. I am willing to think that there is a very real sense in which the reality of God comes to a person intuitively. Probably at the time that you become aware of yourself and aware of other people, you also become aware of God. That I can understand. But how one can come to God, what one should do when a person realizes that he is weak, sinful and guilty of wrong doing, how such a person as that can come into the presence of a holy God and be blessed, this is something that needs to be learned.

We have said before, and we want repeatedly to bring this before our minds, the grace of God, while it is marvelous and wonderful, does not mean that God will pour out His blessing upon all mankind regardless. The blessing of God is given to men under certain conditions. These conditions are outlined in His promises. There is a way in which God will share His grace and mercy. That way is revealed to us through the Scriptures. In the Bible we learn that God provides help. He provides this help for the weak and the wayward soul.

The help of God is administered to us in various ways. We are told that this help comes to us by three offices, three different ways in which we are served – by prophet, priest and king. In the Old Testament there were prophets, priests and kings. The prophet revealed the Word of God to man. Of course the Old Testament prophets were imperfect men. Yet the function they performed was to speak the Word of God to man. We who live now on this side of the earthly career of Christ Jesus know He is the perfect prophet. He is the prophet of all time who reveals the things of God to man. Also, there was the priest. The priest was someone designated by God to make himself available to the worshipper to guide him to God in a way acceptable to God. He was to bring man into the presence of God. We know that the priests of the Old Testament were imperfect men. They made their mistakes, and in due time they passed away and died as others did. But the idea of the priest was set out. Then the Lord Jesus Christ became our high priest forever and ever. He can everlastingly bring men into the presence of God.

And so with the concept of the king in the Old Testament, many were not good men. All were men who had some fault or failing. But the idea of a king was someone who would guide, control and direct the affairs of people into fruitful activity.

The book of Hebrews deals particularly with the problem of coming to God for blessing. So it deals particularly with the function of the priest. The book of Hebrews argues that in Christ we have a high priest who is perfect. He is superior to the priests of the Old Testament, who were Aaron and his sons. The word priest may not be very common for many of us, but it is a good thing to keep in mind with reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. And any Christian would do well to remember for his own service that we have each been made a priest unto God.

In helping men come to God the priest acts with understanding of the man's circumstances and compassion for his weakness and waywardness. Yet he acts with authority because he is the one designated for this. Christ did this perfectly with understanding. "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." And the compassion that He had is seen in this Scripture record, "Christ died for the ungodly." The authority that He had in this function is implied in the word that God the Father said: "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek."

In the Old Testament the high priest, Aaron or his sons, had some definite weaknesses. For instance, he was a sinner. That is a good deal like saying that a man could be a doctor and yet get sick.

Another thing would be that the sacrifices which Aaron offered in themselves were inadequate for what needed to be done. He brought animal sacrifices. These animal sacrifices served a certain purpose. They were limited, but they represented and pointed forward to something. The lamb that was offered in

the Old Testament pointed forward to the time when Christ Jesus would offer Himself and be the Lamb of God. What they did to those animals gives you some idea of what one day was done to Christ. Aaron brought the animals and they were something that God could accept as a symbol. The real sacrifice was offered when Christ Jesus Himself came.

Another thing about Aaron was that His term of service was temporary because, being a man, he would die. With reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, He was raised from the dead and can die no more. He lives forever.

Now something of this difference between Aaron and Christ can also be seen in the tabernacle. Perhaps you may have available a diagram of the tabernacle to refer to. The procedure that was followed by Aaron in the tabernacle would help to point out the difference between his work and the work of Christ. The tabernacle itself was built in a certain design with special furniture to show truths to the people in its very structure. There were two rooms. An inner room contained the mercy seat and the ark. That was the place where it was said that God would meet the worshipper face to face and talk with him as a man talks with his friends. This room was called "the holy of holies."

Into this holy of holies Aaron the high priest was allowed to enter but once a year and the high priest alone. The book of Hebrews mentions that in order to indicate that the way into the holy of holies was not yet open for everybody. Once a year Aaron went in, indicating that sometime, one time, the way would be opened to come into the very presence of God.

The larger, outer room with certain furniture was called "the holy place." In this place Aaron performed his daily function.

Any day, any Israelite could bring his sin offering to the tabernacle. Aaron would meet him at the altar. He would take the sacrifice from the man and would offer that sacrifice, take the blood and bring it in and sprinkle it all over the tabernacle on every piece of furniture. By that he indicated that the sacrifice had died for the sinner. Then Aaron would bring the worshipper to the laver where he would be washed, and then bring him into the holy place, the outer room. He would have the candlestick on one side, giving him light, and the shewbread on the other side, giving him nourishment. Last, he would bring the worshipper to the altar of incense where he would offer up praise to God. But that was as far as he could go. At any time he could come up to the altar of incense and thank God for the forgiveness received and for the grace and mercy that had been shown to him thus far. But He couldn't go into the presence of God himself because of a veil that was across there, blocking the way into the holy of holies.

What would all this mean today? Let me suggest this – your pastor, your preacher, like Aaron of old, can teach you the law of God. He can tell you what you ought to do. And your pastor can lead you through the confession of your sins. That's what ought to be done so far as sin is concerned. He can lead you through the cleansing from sin, the forsaking of sin. He can indicate to you that you can be clean through the Word that has been spoken to you and can encourage you to put off the old man, and be cleansed so far as your sins are concerned. And I can tell you right now that confessed, forgiven sin can be washed away. The next thing your pastor would give you is instruction. As the candlestick in the tabernacle showed light in darkness, so your preacher can instruct you in the ways of God. And He can strengthen you with the food that comes from the bread of God, the Word of God. He can give you things from the Scriptures that will strengthen your faith and encourage you and comfort you. Thus your pastor can bring you before God in an atmosphere of thanksgiving and praise.

Doubtless this is the extent to which many people go in their religious life. It sounds very good. You can come to the worship of God as a sinner. You can confess your sins. You'll be forgiven your sins. You'll be cleansed from all unrighteousness. You can learn the truth from the Scriptures. It will be a light to your pathway, and you can be strengthened by the Scriptures so your faith will grow. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Thus forgiven, cleansed, instructed and made strong, you can be happy and glad before God and give thanksgiving to God.

Yet there's more. Let me show you how that works out. We come to God confessing our sins, it's true, acknowledging the goodness of God, pleasing Him. And then what happens? When you have been in a church service and the preacher has showed you all these things, then what is normal for you to do? The normal thing is that you go out and go home. You're happy because you have had fellowship with God. You found out you sins were forgiven. You were assured that they would be washed away. You were made stronger in the faith, giving glory to God. You understood better the things of God. There was more light in your soul. All the way through you were involved in and surrounded by an attitude and atmosphere of thanksgiving and praise. All sounds very good. And someone will say, "Well, what else would there be?"

The book of Hebrews is written to show that there is something more. "More" is that you still have not yet come into the presence of God by receiving the Holy Spirit in your heart and having personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Now your preacher can do a lot for you, but he can't do for you what Christ Jesus can do for you. Your man in the pulpit can guide you and lead you to God, but only the Lord Jesus Christ Himself by His Holy Spirit in you can make you conscious of the presence of God.

Sometimes I have put it this way – I could come before God and be glad of His saving grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. I could join with everybody in singing "The old rugged cross, so despised by the world, has a wondrous attraction for me." I could join with other people saying, "At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light, and the burden of my heart rolled away." But you know that there is something else I can do. There is another song I can sing, "I am thine, O Lord. I have heard thy voice, and it told Thy love to me. But I long to rise in the arms of faith and be closer drawn to Thee. Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer blessed Lord."

This is what God wants to hear from us.

## A Superior Covenant

There is more blessing available for a Christian than to be forgiven for sin. In Hebrews 10:4-7 we read, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come . . . to do thy will, O God." In these words is set forth a very important truth.

"It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin." And so the Lord Jesus Christ came to save you for His Father. He knew that God wanted more than just the sacrifice of His body in death. He wanted the sacrifice of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ in service, in life. "A body hast thou prepared me . . . Lo, I come . . . to do thy will, O God."

For the Lord Jesus Christ that meant going to the cross of Calvary, it's true. That He did one time. There He died one time. But He was raised from the dead, and He is going on forever and ever and ever doing the will of God in the body which God had prepared for Him.

You will remember that the epistle to the Hebrews was written to believing people, to Christians, to exhort them that they should enter into the blessing that was available in Christ Jesus. There is more blessing available in Christ Jesus than was available in the Old Testament truth. The whole Bible deals with the general problem of the salvation of men. The Bible is written to show us the conditions under which a man who has done wrong (and therefore is among those that are condemned) can now become right in God's sight. The way is revealed for bringing weak, sinful persons who are covered and laden with their own guilt into the blessedness of being children of God.

The Bible presents this truth in two phases, which is indicated by the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is also spoken of as the first covenant and the second covenant, or the old covenant and the new covenant. This has the two phases in the problem of bringing a sinner into the eternal life of God.

The Old Testament teaches the law of God as revealed in the law that was given by Moses. It operated to deliver people from sin. To this day it would be the way in which we are delivered from sin. By the law is the knowledge of sin. And in the law there is revealed to us what must be done about sin. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And if he doesn't die, someone must die for him. All of that is in the Old Testament law. John the Baptist, very well acquainted with the Old Testament law, could look on the Lord Jesus Christ and say about Him, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

The Bible also presents the New Testament with the grace of God manifested in Christ Jesus and operating to bring people into the life of God, into eternal life.

This whole idea of these two phases can be felt if I bring to your mind a number of simple illustrations. If a person bought a kitchen utensil to be used for cooking, there would be two phases in connection with this project. In the first place you'd have to buy it and cleanse it and sterilize it to make it ready for use. The second phase is that you'd use it. You'd fill it with vegetables and put it on the stove and cook.

Or perhaps we can think of a person preparing a garden. If I wanted to have a garden, there are two things I'd have to do. I'd have to rent or buy the land and clear off whatever was there. There might be old weeds or last year's plants. I'd have to clear off the trash, plow the field and dig the soil. In other words, if I were preparing a garden, first I'd get the land and get it ready. Then I'd plant the seed and watch over it and nurture it during the season. That's the way to have a garden.

If we wanted to have a library there are two things we would have to do. First, we would have to get the land and prepare the lot. If there were old buildings on there we would have to demolish those and take them away. We would also have to get the materials for building a library and build the structure. All of this is the preparation of the library. Then the second phase is the process of having people come to

study and borrow books.

Perhaps I can use one more illustration to make sure you don't miss how these two phases work. Suppose a cook wants to serve a cake. The first thing she does is to mix it and get it into the oven and bake it. The second phase of this cake is to serve and eat it. We go through the eating process which is the real purpose for the cake.

All the way through there is a first phase of preparation up to a certain point, and then there is the phase of using, of operating this material that you've prepared. So it is with the human soul. By nature we are guilty of wrong doing and sinful in ourselves. We are born with a tendency to do wrong. Salvation works first to remove the guilt and to set men free from sin. The second phase is to lift us into eternal life that this life of God may operate in the forgiven sinner. This is still a stronger thing than the first. Thus Christ Jesus died for our sins on Calvary, because of which we may be forgiven and set free. Then the second phase is that Christ Jesus rose from the dead, and He lives before His Father and has sent His Holy Spirit. Because of that, we may live in newness of life through the indwelling Holy Spirit who will work in us the will of God. There is our eternal life set forth. By the cross we are crucified with Christ. But through the resurrection we are regenerated in Christ. By His personal presence with the Holy Spirit in us, we are brought into eternal life. Christ Jesus is even now continuing as our Head, and in this relationship He is continuing His responsibility of obeying His Father. So we say that Christ is superior because He operates on a better covenant.

The Old Testament could promise forgiveness for sins that had been committed and confessed. But Christ Jesus promises not only forgiveness of sins which are past, but life eternal and deliverance from the dominion of sin as well. And so the book of Hebrews urges: don't be satisfied with anything less than getting to know Christ Jesus personally and through Him getting to know God.

You can see this truth of the difference between Christ and other methods of getting right with God if you consider the sacrifice itself. Aaron as priest offered calves and goats who died for sin. And they stayed dead. Christ offered Himself to die for sill, but He was raised from the dead and lives forever. By belonging to Christ we too will be raised from the dead and will live forever.

There is a certain continuing aspect of the crucifixion that the book of Hebrews brings out and you can feel it as you go through the latter chapters. When we yield our bodies to God in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we yield them, as Paul said in the book of Romans, as "living sacrifices." We offer ourselves to God in Christ Jesus, and then we experience certain suffering experiences. After all, the Lord Jesus was persecuted and "the servant is not greater than his Lord."

In the book of Hebrews we can gather this in several different ways. For example, we will suffer personal mistreatment. We find that in Hebrews 10:32-33: "Call to remembrance the former days, in which . . . ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst you were made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used." They were personally persecuted and mistreated. Then in the very next verse you will see that they suffered the loss of goods – "Ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance." Part of the suffering that these people experienced was to have their property taken away from them and impaired and destroyed. In 11:36-38 we find quite a record of how people suffered in their obedience to God in faith. We read that they had "trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword." These were all believers. But because they believed in God, they were given this kind of treatment. "They wandered about in sheepskin and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." The writer of the book of Hebrews brings to our mind that it will be in the will of God for us to pass through certain experiences which will have the effect of further crucifying the flesh.



Because of our faith in Christ the suffering that we now have, however, is in connection with this crucifixion of the flesh. It is not considered punishment. It is thought of as chastening. This is a very important item, and it comes out in the twelfth chapter of the book of Hebrews. The suffering that we endure, the hard experiences that we have, is not to be taken as punishment but is to be thought of as chastening.

You can help yourself understand this very simply if you think about certain suffering that a person might have. For the moment think of yourself as being in a place of suffering. So far as you are concerned, in your past record there are sins, things you've done wrong. And, if you're a believer, in your future there is glory. You're going to be in the presence of God. If in your mind you relate this suffering that you now have to the sins of the past, you'll be inclined to feel that what happens to you is punishment. And punishment is never easy to bear. Whenever you're punished you always have the feeling that it was overdone, that you're not treated fairly and it could be done differently.

But now if you think in terms of what is going to happen to you in Christ Jesus, you think in terms of the fact that you're going to be in heaven with Him, and this suffering actually becomes a chastening experience. It will improve you. It will help you to be a stronger, better Christian than you ever were before. And so we read, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (12:11).

Our daily suffering should be a part of the dying of the flesh, because if we're going to work along with the Lord Jesus Christ and walk along with Him, we're going to have to be free from the things of the flesh. The things of the flesh contain not only the wicked and the evil things, but the things of the flesh will also contain our personal relationship with God so far as just being one of His creatures is concerned. However, God calls us to be His children forever in the Lord Jesus Christ. This dying of the flesh has to take place that we might be raised to live forever.

So far as the world is concerned, we are, in a certain sense, "bearing His reproach." The world can't understand why we suffer, but we know. We go gladly with Him, because in the light of eternity our trust is in Him who changes not.

So, in this book of Hebrews we find that in Christ Jesus there is all the full blessing of eternal life available through Him. He brings the entire Word of God to us and is the superior messenger. He not only tells us what to do but will do it in and for us. He is superior to Moses. He has offered Himself as an eternal, once-for-all-time sacrifice and as our Great High Priest has opened the way for anyone to enter into the presence of God. A superior covenant is offered whereby man the sinner may be changed from within and may now, in this world, know the operation and blessing of the life and the will of God. Every circumstance and every happening may be seen as God's doing for our good. Thus the glory of heaven and the presence of God is brought to us and we are ever and continually being brought more and more into the presence of God.

Christ Jesus alone makes all this available.