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# Why Jesus is worthy of worship

by Scott Grant

*Hebrews 1:5-14*

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## Jesus only

There was that day when Jesus climbed a high mountain and took with him Peter, James and John, and before their eyes, his form changed. His garments glowed. Two others appeared with him: Elijah and Moses, towering figures from Israel's past. Peter, frightened and not knowing what to do, suggested making three sacred tents to recognize the awesome presence of these three: Elijah, Moses and Jesus. At that point a cloud formed, and a voice came out of the cloud, saying,

**"This is my beloved Son; listen to him." Peter and the others looked around and saw no one with them anymore, "except Jesus only" (Mark 9:8).**

Jesus only. As the glory of Jesus was displayed for the disciples, as they saw attributes of his deity expressed in physical form, Elijah and Moses came on the scene in supporting roles. Soon, they would be gone, and the disciples would see Jesus only. They saw Jesus only, because only Jesus was worthy of their worship. Only he is the beloved Son. Jesus is worthy of our worship because he is God - absolutely sovereign, righteous and unchanging.

Hebrews 1:5-14 is an expansion upon the kingly attributes of the Son of God that the writer listed in Hebrews 1:1-4. This section also offers an explanation of Christ's superiority to the angels, a point the writer made in verse 4. His evidence for this is the Old Testament, from which he quotes liberally. He refers to Psalms 2:7, 104:4, 45:6-7, 102:25-27 and 110:1; 2 Samuel 7:14; and Deuteronomy 32:43. Each reference, in its original context, concerns either a human king or the divine king. All references are applied to Jesus, meaning that he is both a human and divine king, the perfect fulfillment of the messianic prophecies. The emphasis later in Chapter 2 will be the humanity of the Son. Here, in Chapter 1, it is his divinity.

Texts and wording that were applied to God by Old Testament writers are now applied to Jesus by the writer of Hebrews. Earlier, angels were to worship God (Deuteronomy 32:43); now they are to worship Jesus (Hebrews 1:6). Earlier, God was responsible for creation (Psalm 102:25-26); now it is Jesus (Hebrews 1:10). The point is clear: Jesus, the Son of God, is God. As such, he deserves our worship. And we appreciate his worthiness by recognizing divine attributes such as those described in the first chapter of Hebrews: his sovereignty, righteousness and immutability.

The writer's emphasis on the divinity of the Son is part of his grand scheme to show Jesus Christ as the perfect high priest. Only one who is God himself can be such a priest.

The literary structure of Hebrews 1:5-14 revolves around God's reported disposition toward angels in verses 5, 7 and 13. Each verse begins a new subsection, in which angels are compared to the Son and the Son is shown to be superior. The first and last sections concern the exaltation of the Son and his sovereignty, and the middle section concerns his righteousness and immutability.

Why does the writer use angels as a point of comparison? Angels in the scriptures are seen as surrounding

God's throne - as creatures approaching him (Isaiah 6:1-5). They also were involved in dispensing previous revelation from God (Hebrews 2:2, Galatians 3:19). They were even called sons of God (Job 2:1). Some in Colosse, and no doubt elsewhere, were worshiping angels (Colossians 2:8). We know from historical records that there was a heightened interest in angels in the First Century. Because of these factors, and because the writer uses angels as a point of comparison, we can assume that many among the writer's recipients at the least thought angels were pretty hot stuff. Therefore, the writer takes beings that were thought to be majestic in order to show the surpassing majesty of the Son. Angels may be sons, but they are not *the* Son, the divine king.

### **The sovereignty of the Son (1:5-6, 13-14)**

Hebrews 1:5-6:

**(5) For to which of the angels did He ever say,  
"You are My Son,  
Today I have begotten You"?  
And again,  
"I will be a Father to Him  
And He shall be a Son to Me"?  
(6) And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says,  
"And let all the angels of God worship Him."**

Hebrews 1:13-14:

**(13) But to which of the angels has He ever said,  
"Sit at My right hand,  
Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet"?  
(14) Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit  
salvation?**

These two sections are introduced with almost identically worded phrases, and each embraces an identical theme: the exaltation and sovereignty of the Son of God. The writer in each case asks a rhetorical question concerning God's words to angels and shows that words concerning sovereignty were never applied to angels but were applied to the Son.

God addressed Jesus as his Son and said that he had "begotten" Jesus. This address, from Psalm 2:7, was originally to the Davidic king of Israel, who was considered God's son. Sonship here for the writer concerns kingship. A Davidic king was "begotten" by God when he was enthroned. Paul quotes Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33 in connection with the resurrection of Christ, which can be seen as part of his ascension to the right hand of the Father. When the Father "begot" the Son, in this context, he enthroned him. The Son, after his resurrection, began his reign as the divine and human king of all creation - an event so earth-shattering, as far as its implications for those who live on the earth are concerned, that the metaphor of birth is invoked.

The writer then quotes from 2 Samuel 7:14, where God addressed David and promised to be a father to David's son. The description of the son there exceeds that of David's son, Solomon, or any other of his descendants, save Jesus, who was "born of the seed of David" (Romans 1:3) and who is "the son of David" (Matthew 1:1). Jesus Christ and the Father have an indescribably intimate Father-Son relationship, out of which Jesus reigns over creation. The Son is also the "first-born," having preeminent status.

Because of his status as Son, all the angels, the highest form of supernatural being conceivable aside from God, worship him. Worship. God, and God only, deserves this, as Jesus says, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13, "For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'" (Matthew 4:10). Satan

wants it (Matthew 4:8-9); men and angels reject it (Acts 10:25-26, 14:11-15, Revelation 19:10); only God deserves it. Jesus is God; he deserves it. And we, beings created for worship, fulfill our purpose when we worship God, when we worship Jesus.

It is the Son who sits at the right hand of the Father, the position of authority and power. These lines in verse 13, again, were originally addressed to a human king in Psalm 110:1, but no human king fulfilled them, because they could only be fulfilled by Jesus. From the right hand of the Father, Jesus sits on his throne, reigning while his enemies are being subdued. In his death and resurrection, Jesus won the victory over all his enemies: Satan, sin and death (Romans 5:12-6:11, Colossians 2:15). Why, then, are there still enemies that need to be subdued? The ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father can be seen as his inauguration. When a powerful king is crowned, it doesn't mean his enemies are automatically subdued. Nevertheless, their ultimate submission is not in question. God, in his sovereignty, allows the presence of evil for a time for his own purposes. But their will come a time when evil is completely subdued, when Jesus delivers over his kingdom, which encompasses all creation, to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:20-28).

Jesus is God the King. Angels, on the other hand, are "ministering spirits" who serve the King. The King gives these servants tasks that concern coming to the aid of people, specifically, those who will inherit salvation - meaning, those who will forever love and serve God. In stark contrast to angels, simple servants, Jesus sits on his throne - exalted above all creation, clothed in majesty, sovereign over every square inch of creation and every second of time.

That means there is Someone in control of every inch and every second. That someone is neither you nor me. But don't we think and act as if we were in control? Don't we constantly get the lay of the land and guard our time? Aren't we constantly surveying the scene to ensure the advancement of our causes? Don't we endeavor to pull the right strings to manipulate time and space and those who inhabit them so that everything suits our purposes? We try, yes, but do we succeed? Of course not. We're not sovereign. We're not in control. All time, all space and all people are galaxies beyond the influence of our puny kingdoms. The truth of this we cannot escape, for even when we convince ourselves that we're in control, the feeling we have is tentative and fragile. We therefore suffer the anxiety of a fearful ruler rather than enjoying the peace of a sovereign king. However in control we may feel, we never feel in control enough. So we're hypervigilant, anxious, exhausted. Peace is far from us.

Meanwhile, Jesus sits on his throne, reigning over all creation and all circumstances. Nothing escapes his view; nothing is beyond his control; no circumstance is beyond his ability to direct according to his purposes. And if we believe what the writer of Hebrews is telling us, we would stop worrying so much. And we would worship him.

The followers of Jesus one day saw control slipping away as they were traveling in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. A fierce wind arose, waves broke over the boat, and it began to fill with water. The disciples panicked, but Jesus was asleep. They're bailing water to keep the boat afloat, and he's sleeping! They roused him and said, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing." Jesus awoke and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down. He then said to them, "Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?" They said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:35-41) Who indeed? Who has this kind of power over creation but one who is sovereign over it? If the disciples had recognized this, as they one day would, they wouldn't have been so "timid," so anxious, so fearful - so overwhelmed by circumstances that they couldn't control. Neither would we be overwhelmed.

The Son reigns. What kind of reign is it? Some kings are wicked and capricious. After Jesus demonstrated his sovereignty by quieting the storm, the disciples became "very much afraid." We have a deep-seated mistrust of authority, because of the examples we have seen of it. In America, we fought a king and set up our own government. What kind of king is Jesus?

## The righteousness of the Son (1:7-9)

Hebrews 1:7-9:

**(7) And of the angels He says,  
"Who makes His angels winds,  
And His ministers a flame of fire."  
(8) But of the Son He says,  
"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,  
And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.  
(9) You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;  
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You  
With the oil of gladness above Your companions."**

In verse 7, the writer describes the angels, based on Psalm 104:4, and then he contrasts them with descriptions of the Son, based two psalms. The angels are created, having been "made" by God; they are "ministers," or servants, of God; and they are like wind and fire, part of creation, which is subject to change.

In verses 8 and 9, the writer speaks of the righteousness of the Son. He quotes from Psalm 45:6-7, which apparently originally concerned human kingship. But it's clear that no human king could ever fulfill this, certainly not in the eternality, deity or righteousness that is espoused.

Righteousness is the theme of this stanza. The Son rules with a righteous scepter; he loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; and because of his righteousness, God anointed him as king. (Kings would be anointed with oil as a sign of God's appointment.) His righteousness explains both the eternal nature of his reign, for his throne is forever and ever, and the joyful nature of his reign, for he has been anointed with the "oil of gladness." Because the Son is righteous, he reigns forever, and his reign is filled with joy.

How do we understand "righteousness"? Paul, in making the claim that no one is righteous, says, "There is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside" (Romans 3:11-12). One who is righteous, then, is one who "seeks for God." Righteousness does not primarily mean thinking the right thoughts or doing the right things; it means knowing and loving God. Righteousness is knowing God, and righteous thoughts and actions, which concern love for others, spring from relationship with God. Unrighteousness is rejection of God, and unrighteous thoughts and actions, which concern disregard and hatred for others, spring from alienation from God.

Jesus was the only absolutely righteous man. Only he loved God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. The angels do not have this kind of relationship with the Father. They are mere servants; Jesus is the Son, infinitely more intimate with the Father than they.

The writer can say that the Son, in his incarnation, "loved righteousness and hated lawlessness." He loved righteousness because he loved his Father. He loved and hated what his Father loved and hated. That means he loves people. That means he loves us.

So, Jesus is the king. Can we trust him? What kind of reign is it? Should we submit to it, should we bow down and worship, or should we rebel and set up our own kingdoms, desperately trying to control every circumstance because we think the real king is wicked? Jesus' scepter is righteous; he loves righteousness; he hates lawlessness. He can be trusted, far more than we can trust ourselves. He is not only sovereign, he is righteous. He is good. He loves us. We then can certainly assent to the joyful nature of the Son's reign.

Where do we see the righteousness of Jesus? We see it all over the gospels, in the life he lived, loving the Father and loving others. This is no more evident than in the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus envisioned the horror of being forsaken on the cross by the Father he loved, but nevertheless chose to go for two reasons

- first, because he loved the Father, and the Father wanted him to go; and second, because he loved us, and he saw that we needed a savior. Now that's righteous! Trust him. Worship him. Joyfully.

But will he be good tomorrow? Some rulers are fickle and capricious. They win our allegiance by apparently benevolent acts one day, only to betray our trust the next. Is Jesus like that?

### **The immutability of the Son (1:10-12)**

Hebrews 1:10-12:

**(10) And**

**"You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth,**

**And the heavens are the works of Your hands;**

**(11) They will perish, but You remain;**

**And they all will become old as a garment,**

**(12) And as a mantle You will roll them up;**

**As a garment they will also be changed.**

**But You are the same,**

**And Your years will not come to an end."**

The Son's superiority over the angels is demonstrated by virtue of his relationship to creation. The Son, in this comparison, is shown to be unchanging.

Creation is ascribed to the Son. In the beginning, he created the earth and the heavens - meaning, he created everything. Psalm 102:25-27, from which the writer quotes, ascribes creation to God. The writer thus understands that Jesus himself is the Eternal One, the one who, according to Genesis 1:1, "created the heavens and the earth."

Although the Son is eternal, what he created is not. The earth and the heavens - the entire universe - will perish. Like a garment, it will wear out. Like a pair of socks, Jesus will roll it up. Because it has been damaged by the fall, creation must be "changed." There will be a re-creation, "new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells," thanks to the redemption won by Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:13).

While creation is changeable, the Son never changes. Creation will perish, but he "remains." Creation will be changed, but he is "the same." He is not like the angels, who are like wind and fire, blowing fiercely and dying out, burning brightly and flickering out. Angelic activity can be seen throughout the scriptures. They always seem to be coming and going. They show up, do their work and move on, maybe to return again, maybe not. Jesus is not like that. He never changes. And he stays forever.

Nothing else and no one else is like Jesus. Everything and everyone else changes. People change; moods change; jobs change. Times change; fashions change; computers change. Leaders change; bosses change; interests change. In our age, technology has changed everything. And technology is changing so fast that we can't keep track of the changes. Products of new technology are obsolete by the time they're out the door. Such rapid-fire change frays the edges of our psyches, for we don't know where the next change is coming from, or even if we will notice it at all. And in order to adapt, perhaps we feel we have to adopt the motto espoused by the title of a recently published book by the CEO of a company that employs several of you here today: "Only the paranoid survive" (Andrew Grove, CEO of Intel).

In 1993, I returned to California after living for three years in Idaho. Previously when I lived in California, I always took several trips a year to the far reaches of the state to fish at Hat Creek. It wasn't long after I discovered fly-fishing that I discovered Hat Creek. As a youth on the banks of Hat Creek, I fell in love with fly-fishing, casting to - and sometimes catching - huge numbers of large rainbow and brown trout that eagerly rose for insects. But as the years went by, the fishing deteriorated. The number of fish dwindled, as did their

size. I lamented the change, and my trips became less frequent. Upon my return to California four years ago, I took a little side trip through the North State to take a look at the Hat. I hiked upstream and spotted a solitary fisherman. I asked him how the fishing was. "Nothing but a few small ones," he mumbled. I told him that years ago numbers of big trout inhabited these waters. He nodded knowingly and said, "Memories are the only reason to fish this place anymore." Hat Creek, the cherished stream of my youth, changed. All it is good for anymore is memories. Like everything else, it changed.

Then again, Jesus never changes. Everything we count on may change tomorrow, but even if it does, Jesus will be there with us tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that. He will be with us for all our days, for his years will never come to an end. His sovereign, righteous reign will never end. Worship him.

### **He is worthy**

Jesus, the Son of God, is God. He is sovereign; he is in control. He is righteous; he is good. He is immutable; he never changes. He reigns, he reigns righteously, and his righteous reign will never end.

If this is what his reign is like, how can we not submit to his reign in our lives? We can trust him in every circumstance, every disappointment, every heartache. We can trust him with every nook and cranny of fear, uncertainty and doubt. We can trust him in our bleakest, darkest, most desperate hour. When all seems lost, he is sovereign. When evil seems to have the upper hand, he is good. When change sends our minds racing, he is unchanging. He is worthy of worship. We can therefore join our brother Thomas, who was called doubting, but who examined the holes in the body of the risen Christ that were produced by the instruments of crucifixion and proclaimed, "My Lord, and my God!"

- SCG, 6-15-97

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