

# St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Penrith

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## ENCOURAGEMENT LETTER 1/5/2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

How are you today? I am thankful for the things we learned from the Songs of Ascent in the Psalms and how they help us engage with God and point us to Jesus.

Today's encouragement begins a series in Hebrews, with "Christ Is Superior". There is a variety of church matters including the day for Brian Thornton Snr's funeral and a link to the latest CONTACT.

### ENCOURAGEMENT: Christ is Superior (Hebrews 1:1-4)

These days, while people in the West move away from Christianity, there is still much talk about spiritual matters. One of those interests is angels. People can talk about guardian angels that look out for them or the possibility of meeting angels. In some ways, people prefer to talk about angels rather than God. In the times of the NT, angels were seen as messengers and that the word of God was mediated to God's people through them. There can be a fascination with angels and their role in the world (we see this in the Colossian church where an ascetic spirituality invaded the church puffed up with notions of visions of the worship of angels Col. 2:18). The letter to the Hebrews begins by addressing this interest in angels to show that Jesus is by far superior to the angels.

*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.*

Hebrews 1:1-4

The author here looks back to what God has done, how he spoke through the prophets (a message spoken through angels, Heb 2:2), but now he has spoken through his Son. The good news comes to us first and foremost, not through prophets, not by angels, but through the Son.

Who is the Son? In these few verses we have a resumé of God's Son, presenting to us one who is far superior to angels and prophets.

1. **Heir of All Things:** He is the one given rule of the Creation like the firstborn has rule over his father's property. So all things are his and for him.

2. **The Universe is Made Through Him:** He is present at the beginning when God made the universe. The Father made all things through the Son. The Son is divine, the second person of the Trinity and works with God the Father to make the world.
3. **The Son perfectly displays God's glory and character:** Because the Son is God in the flesh we can see what God is like by the way he acts and relates to people.
4. **He Sustains All Things By His Word:** It's his word that holds the world together and keeps everything moving along. It shows us the extent of his power. Prophets and angels merely spoke what they were given. The Son speaks with divine power that brought the universe into being and maintains its existence.
5. **He Provided Purification for Sins:** By his death on the cross, he has cleansed the people of God from their sins. He is the sacrifice that buys our forgiveness. God himself given us for our salvation.
6. **He Sat Down At God's Right Hand:** He now rules from the Father's side, reigning over heaven and earth, reigning over history, reigning over the world to come.

So the author to the Hebrews then underscores the point drawing attention that the Son, that is Jesus, is more superior than angels and their name. He is the divine Son who acted to save humanity by giving himself as the sacrifice for our sins.

Seeing the list of characteristics, actions and power that belong to the Son should stagger us at his immensity and glory. It should elicit awe and amazement and wonder for all Jesus is and all that he has done. Too easily we lose sight of Christ's supremacy for a multitude of lesser things. At the time, an interest in angels obscured their commitment to Christ. We can think of sin as obvious acts that break the Ten Commandments, but often it is elevating good things to compete with that which is by far superior. We devote ourselves to our spouses and/or families in a way that eclipses our devotion to Christ. We prioritise what we do for God before knowing God, so our own acts of service become more important than the one we serve. We find our identity in our own competence rather than Christ's accomplishment. We must fix Christ in the centre of our lives, in the place of prominence and priority to reflect the superiority that is his. Does your life reflect the superiority of Christ in all things?

## CHALLENGES

The challenges from each of the sermons of the last few weeks are as follows:

*Psalm 120-121:* Memorise Psalm 121

*Psalm 122 & 125:* Write what God has given to you personally in Christ. In Christ, I am... (Fill one page – Use Ephesians 1 or Romans 8 as a starting point).

*Psalm 123-124:* Write a prayer relevant to the circumstances of your life that is directed and inspired by Psalm 123 and/or Psalm 124

*Psalm 126:* Write a page of all the things that you are thankful for.

*Psalm 127-128:* Begin (or continue) reading the Bible together in your homes each day (eg. The gospel of Mark). You could ask the following questions:

- what do we learn about God?
- what do we learn about humanity?

- what do we learn about Jesus?
- how do we live in light of this passage?

*Psalm 129:* Write your worries and suffering in this world upon a piece of paper. Then lay the paper out before the Lord and commit it into his hands. Share them with another and pray together.

*Psalm 130:* Give Creative expression to Psalm 130 or another Psalm. For example:

- Draw a picture
- Compose a song
- Write a poem
- Take a photo
- Build a sculpture

*Psalm 131:* Find a quiet place in the Creation. Sit with your Bible. Consider Christ, still your heart, and enjoy him.

*Psalm 132:* EITHER fill a page listing all the characteristics of God you remember from the Bible AND/OR fill a page with all the names of Jesus you can remember from the Bible

*Psalm 133-134:* Find time to praise God and worship him for who he is. You can do this in a few ways:

- Sing to God some Christian songs (hymn book, CDs, Youtube/Spotify)
- Write your own Psalm of praise
- Praise God out loud

I would love to hear from people who have been putting these challenges into practice.

~ Steve