

The Sovereign Son

Hebrews

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Bible Text: Hebrews 1:8-9; Psalm 45
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Let's take our Bibles and turn to Hebrews 1, that's on page 1,001. I'm going to test your manual dexterity today, I want you to look up Hebrews 1 and I want you to turn to page 471 in the church Bible, Psalm 45 as well. So you need both of those for this morning.

We've been working our way through Hebrews 1 now for several weeks and we've come to verses 8 and 9. We're going to read those in a moment. God is the speaker, if you glance back to verse 5. God is the speaker but of the Son he says,

8 But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, [or, O God] your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

We'll read from Psalm 45 out of which this quotation comes.

1 My heart overflows with a pleasing theme; I address my verses to the king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe. 2 You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever. 3 Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your splendor and majesty! 4 In your majesty ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness; let your right hand teach you awesome deeds! 5 Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; the peoples fall under you. 6 Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; 7 you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions; 8 your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad; 9 daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor; at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

Well, you say, "What is that about?" Well, as we've been unpacking the opening part of the book of Hebrews, we've discovered that what the writer is doing is, first of all,

placing the Son, one who is Son, in his divine context. So he begins by using two words which in the flow of the passage belong together: the word "God" and the word "Son." In the past, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. In these last days, God has spoken to us by one who is Son.

And he unpacks this. He unpacks, first of all, that very nature. The nature of the one who is called the Son is that he is the Son of the Father. He has the nature of the Father. He is like the Father. He is God as much as the Father is God but he is distinct. He is of God. And we saw that unpacked. He is the radiance of the glory of God. He is the exact imprint. He is the heir of all things. He upholds all things. He created all things. And he has a name more excellent, a name that is unknown except to him; an unknown name, the name that is known only to God and to the heart of God and that name is more excellent even, even than the highest of creatures, the angels. We spent time looking at those angels last week and the point the author is making here is that he has shown us that the angels are spirits and servants, and now in the text that is before us this morning, he's going to show us that the Son is both Son and sovereign. "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever." And he's been writing and all he's been saying, really, from verse 5, is under the rubric of the words "to which of the angels did God ever say any of these things that we are reading together this morning."

Now one of the features we discover what the writer to the Hebrews here demonstrates and what the early church fathers recognized is that as you read the Old Testament Scripture, those Scriptures have embedded into them from time to time the reports of conversations that take place in the distant space and time, some of them before even the world was made and those conversations built into and embedded within the text of the Old Testament are part of the preparation of our minds for the arrival of Christ into the world. It is the coming of Christ into the world that clarifies the meaning of the Old Testament. It's as if his coming, his walking onto the scene is as if an author has been releasing mini books to the public over a period of some years and in those books, a plot line is beginning to emerge. You read any one of them and you don't quite get what the plot line is all about and then there is, at some future point, there is a point at which the author himself turns up, has a press conference, and at that press conference makes it very clear that, in fact, the chief character in all of these previous episodes is none other than himself and that he has been writing, speaking, revealing something of who he is, his character and his ways all this time, and now that he is there and you hear this and you see him, suddenly it makes sense of everything else that's gone before. That's really the way we need to read the Old Testament.

Trinity, the Trinity, is a biblical doctrine but nowhere do you just have a verse that tells you what the Trinity is. It's easy to say that the Trinity is a biblical doctrine but when we say that, we are not saying just that the Trinity is in the Bible. I came across a little phrase this morning from a man called Fred Sanders, who has just released a book called "The Triune God," and he puts it like this: we say that it's a biblical doctrine not just because it's in the Bible but because the Bible is in the Trinity, because it has been the purpose of God, the Triune God, the one God whom we worship, from all eternity to reveal himself to us. It is he who has both made a creaturely existence for us and a creaturely place in

which we might live and has created the means by which he might communicate with us, sending us the holy prophets and later the holy apostles and giving us the holy Scripture in order that he might communicate himself, reveal himself, introduce himself, and then finally in Christ, step onto the scene as the author of the entire work.

When we come to this Psalm, you notice what we are being told here. If you look at the Hebrew...first of all before we turn to look at the Psalm in its own right, look at what the writer is doing here. He begins, verse 5, by telling us that God is the speaker. In all of these Scripture references that unfold, that kind of burst out, bubble out from the author's mind as he writes, all of these Scripture references have God as the speaker and yet we come to this one in verse 8, and do you notice that immediately the God who is the speaker is speaking about one who is described, or he's talking to one who is described as "O God." You look a bit further down to verse 9 there and you find that God who is the speaker is speaking to this one whom he describes or to whom he speaks as "O God" and that's repeated in verse 9, "therefore O God, your God."

So there are embedded into this, do you notice, three Gods: God who is the speaker speaking to one God about another God. So are there three Gods? Well, of course there are not three Gods. The whole of the Old Testament is there to drive it into your thick skull that God is one. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD your God is one." And so as we look at this, we ask ourselves as the early church did: who is the speaker here? And throughout Scripture the answer is uniform and it is the same, that whenever God speaks through the prophets, God speaks through the prophets by the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

Who else can tell us what the Father says to the Son or the Son says to the Father? Who else can take us into the mind and heart and being of God other than the Spirit of God? Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 2, he says the Spirit of God knows the deep things of God and he uses an illustration. It's an ordinary illustration. Who knows what's going on in the mind of a man except the Spirit of the man? You have absolutely no idea what I think of you right now at this moment of time until I tell you. Those of you who are already dozing, those of you who are trying to smuggle a sweet into your mouth, you don't know that I'm noticing these things; those of you who are sitting besides somebody that you haven't sat beside before and I'm wondering if there's a little romance going on here or not. You have no idea of what's going on in my mind until I tell you. Only the spirit of a man knows the mind of a man. That's the illustration Paul uses and he goes on to say this, "So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." And when these prophets and psalmists, and remember David is a prophet as well, when these prophets wrote and spoke, Peter is very clear that they spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. So as we read this, of the Son, he says, who says? God the Spirit says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever."

Now, there's the principle that the rabbis recognized and which Christian scholars are beginning to recognize in which the ancient scholars of the church recognized that whenever there is a quotation from the Old Testament, we are not simply meant to stay and stop on the bit of the quotation they give us, usually they're kind of headlines that are meant to take you back to the passage that is being quoted and that's what we're going to

do now. You're going to do it. Now that involves some action on your part with a Bible in your hand. We're going to go back to Psalm 45. There in Psalm 45, the author gives us a very interesting insight into what it means to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and to have the revelation of the Spirit working upon him.

He tells us in verse 1, "My heart overflows with a pleasing theme; I address my verses to the king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe," as if I can't get it down quickly enough. I'm overwhelmed by being in the grip of this word, this message, this theme, that has been placed upon my mind and in my heart. I feel under compulsion, the compulsion of the Holy Spirit to articulate this and to write it down but it's challenging all my categories of thought and expression.

He's under the power of the Spirit, verse 1, and he has a theme, his theme concerns the King. There is a revelation in this message concerning the King. Which King is this? Well, as we shall see, this King is King Jesus. His government. His kingdom. His rule. And the prophet in the persona of the Holy Spirit speaks these words as he addresses the King and do you notice in verse 2 of Psalm 45, he refers to the King in very human terms. Very human terms. "You are the most handsome of the sons of men." He describes the King. There Kidner says, "This King described here is the embodiment of all that gives kingship its unique glory." This writer is not talking about any earthly king, whoever sat on David's throne. This is specifically, this Psalm is entirely about King Jesus.

And he describes as he is described often in the Bible as in the eyes of the believer, the most lovely and the most amiable and the most to be treasured of all human beings. The believer knows him to be this. The Psalm picks up what the believer knows. He knows that on the lips of Jesus there is so much grace. No man ever spoke like this man. "Grace," says the psalmist, "is poured upon your lips." Wherever he speaks, grace pours forth by his word, in his promise, in the Gospel, demonstrating the good will of God towards men and women and the good work of God on our behalf, securing our salvation by the very grace about which he speaks and by which he speaks.

He has received all grace from God, all the endowments requisite to qualify him to be our Mediator and our King and our Savior. From his fullness of grace, we all receive, John says, from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace, whether it's saving grace or keeping grace or comforting grace or persevering grace or suffering grace or dying grace. All the grace we need from his fullness we have received in Christ Jesus our Lord. And he has poured this into our hearts for his strength and encouragement come to us by his sheer grace.

Look in the New Testament comments and all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. The Gospel of grace begins with the words of Jesus. The gracious proclamation of the good news that comes to me from outside of my own head, comes to me outside of any activity that I may perform, comes to me by way of promise and by way of power, spoken by the Lord. His words have eternal life.

And this one who comes with gracious lips is blessed forever by God. The Apostle Paul picks up this very phrase and applies it directly to the Lord Jesus in Romans 9:5 and says about him, "the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever," because as we shall see, the passage, the chapter leads us later to see that this God of whom we're going to speak has come in the flesh and in the flesh as the Messiah, has gone about the task of doing his work. And you can see the description of it, what kind of work is it. You are, he says, in majesty riding out victoriously in the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness. He has this military aspect. Here is the warrior going to war. Our Lord Jesus is described in the book of Revelation as the Faithful and the True. He comes into the world for the cause of truth. He preaches the truth. God's word is truth. The Lord Jesus says, "I am the truth." He says to people, "If you come and follow me, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Jesus is all about the business of introducing into a world of lies the final truth that lasts forever.

Maybe you're not a Christian this morning and you're here in church and you believe the lies of the world, the deceit of the world around you. Well, I want to say to you that only in Jesus Christ does the world make sense. Only in Jesus Christ is the truth to be known. Only in Jesus Christ will the truth set you free.

He comes in the interest of truth and meekness and righteousness and you can see from the Psalm and the blessing of God there, that the blessing promised to Abraham, the blessing that is fulfilled in this one who is described in this Psalm, that blessing is the one in which all the nations of the world shall be blessed.

Now, it's this reference to majesty, then, that leads us in verse 6 to this statement in which the author of the Psalm, the Holy Spirit, addresses God. Do you see that? And in particular, he brings our attention to bear on what characterizes this figure about whom he is speaking. He says this: that the divine Son, if we can use the language that the writer to the Hebrews invites us to use about the one who is being described here, about the Son, he says, taking that, the divine Son has a throne. That's the first thing: he has a throne. "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom." Your throne. A throne is the seat of a king and so what we discover, the very first thing we discover in this Psalm as we begin to unpack it together is that in this Psalm we see that the divine Son reigns in majesty. He is the Monarch over all things. The throne is the height of glory for a king. For this king to be named God places his throne above all creaturely existence. For his throne and for his title to be God, it means that his throne is higher than all the creatures, including the angels. He is God over all, forever blessed. His is the majesty. His is the monarchy. And his kingdom is described as being forever and forever, an everlasting kingdom, an everlasting throne.

Now you ask, "Is that a theme we find elsewhere in the Old Testament?" And the answer is: yes, it is. In the book of Daniel, for example, Daniel tells us that he had a vision and in this vision he saw thrones and he saw this figure he calls the Ancient of Days and he is seated and his clothing was white as snow and the hair of his head like pure wool, and the

throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. Lots of fire and whiteness. The Ancient of Days, that is, God from ancient time; God of God, light of light.

And it goes on immediately to describe a human figure, a son of Adam, and to this son of Adam the Ancient of Days gives a kingdom and says about this kingdom, his kingdom, his dominion, is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and it shall never be destroyed. So here you have the Ancient of Days on the throne. The psalmist says that the one on the throne is the Son, according to Hebrews 1, and yet here is the Ancient of Days giving to a human being, a son of man, a son of Adam, a kingdom. How are we to understand the mystery? Well, you look at the book which has the answers and in Revelation 1, the Apostle John is given a vision of the risen Lord Jesus in his glory, and he describes him in these terms: he's the Son of Man in the midst of the lampstands, one like a Son of man, picking up Daniel 7, clothed in a long robe with a golden sash around his chest, the hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow, picking up the language of the Ancient of Days, and then from there on it's fire and fire and fire until you get down to verse 15 of Revelation 1. In other words, in Revelation 1 we learn that the one who reigns eternally, the one who always reigns, is the one who comes to us as the Son of Man and as the Son of Man receives the dominion from God.

The Son of Man is the Ancient of Days. Professor Beile at Westminster puts it like this, "The description of the Son of Man's head and hair is taken from the picture of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7, showing how Christ and God are to be thought of in the same terms. And the description of his voice in Revelation 1, like the sound of many waters, is taken from that vision of the Almighty in Ezekiel 1. When he sees God on his throne, he sees him as one like the Son of Man."

So what the writer to the Hebrews is saying is consistent with elsewhere in Scripture, that the divine Son has a throne and the divine Son has a scepter, this is the second of his *isignia regnum*, the signs of his reign. And the word "scepter" denotes the actual administration of his rule. You can see that whether you're in Psalm 45 or back in Hebrews and maybe we should just stick to Hebrews now for the time being, "the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom." The scepter of uprightness, of righteousness.

You know the scepter can be used in bad ways. In the book of Esther that we were studying over the summer, the scepter of King Ahasuerus, if it was not pointed to you and you came into his presence and he didn't point it to you in a friendly kind of a way, you were taken out and you were beheaded or something worse was done to you, hung, drawn, quartered, whatever. So the scepter can be used in an unrighteous, it can be used in a completely random way or it can be used in the interest of righteousness and that certainly is how the divine Son exercises his government.

And what we see really from the language here, do you notice, that as God, the Son shares the undivided divine glory and monarchy. He reigns over all creatures everywhere. The Lord has established his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all. That's why when it comes to his Incarnation, the divine King, Jesus, King, the Son, is by virtue

of his monarchy completely equipped to come into the world and to be the King; to be the one who comes announcing the kingdom of God; to be the one coming and affirming and acclaiming and proclaiming his own right to rule over the hearts and minds of creatures that God has made and to exert his rule as he silences and banishes evil spirits, as he confronts the powers of darkness, as he responds to Satan in the temptation of the wilderness, as he abolishes the arguments articulated by his enemies to try and bring him down and brings everything back to the word of God, who by the breath of his mouth, by his word, like a sword he destroys his enemies and brings light and salvation into the world. That's what he does. So we read that in the days of his flesh after he had been tempted by Satan and overcome him by the word, we read that he returned in power, the power of the Spirit, to Galilee and went about all through the surrounding country and he taught in their synagogues and he was glorified.

"Your throne, O God, is forever." And not only that, "O God, your God, has anointed you." Not only does this passage teach us the divine monarchy of the Son, but it begins to introduce to us the earthly mission of the Son. "O God, your God, has anointed you." In other words, embedded in the Psalm there is a clue to the identity of this one who is acclaimed as "O God." Do you see that? And it strikes us how faithful the Jewish translators of the Septuagint, that is the Greek translation of the Hebrew, were 200 years before Jesus came when they did not try to correct this embarrassing text. They left it as it stood, the vocative, "O God, your God." Bruce Metzger who used to teach at Princeton biblical Greek and exegesis, throws the weight of his learning behind that translation that this is the vocative. The King is being addressed directly twice as "O God."

And we are told about his character and his priorities. He is the pinnacle of perfection, loving what God loves, doing what God does. He possesses a royal scepter. He rules with justice. And most crucially, he is identified by this word "anointed." Anointed. And before we look at that word "anointed," we're reminded that there are also embedded in the Psalm hints of his deity because he reigns with splendor and with majesty and his claimed as God.

You remember that little story in Isaiah 6 when Isaiah in the year that King Uzziah died, goes into the temple or goes to the temple. He doesn't get into the temple. He can't get into the temple because it's full but he tells us that he went to the temple the year King Uzziah died and he saw the Lord, that is, the Lord God of Israel, the Lord of Hosts. He saw the Lord sitting on a throne high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple, and above him stood the seraphim with their wings covering their faces and their feet and flying. And the whole point is the King is sitting and the angels, they're standing ready to serve, but only the King is seated. And who is the King? It is the God of Israel. And who is this God of Israel whom Isaiah saw? In John 12 we're given the answer: Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory, Jesus' glory, and spoke of him.

So we have the divine monarchy of the Son and it's against that background, then, that we are told about the earthly mission of the Son. He is the anointed one. The word "anointed, chrisem," Christ, Messiah, he is the one who is anointed. God's anointed. He is the one who is born of Mary. He is the one who is descended from David. He is the one who is

the second and last Adam. You see, the problem is that it's human beings that have rebelled against God. It's human beings that have broken God's law. It's human beings that have disobeyed God's commands. It's human beings who are lost and hell-bound. And therefore it is important that it is as a human being that our Mediator and our Savior should obey where we disobeyed, should suffer where we deserve, should in his own body bear our sins and our sorrows and make them his very own and take the burden to Calvary and suffer and die alone. He has to do that as man and it was for us and for our salvation that he came.

Now, that means the Mediator has to be God. That's why you have these two things brought together in the text and it's frequent in Old Testament prophecy. Future realities are spoken about in the past tense to emphasize the they're absolutely certain. They are sure to take place. The one who is on the throne will be anointed by God, is the one who is so suited to be the anointed Savior. Think of this. In all that's said about the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one, in the Old Testament Scriptures, who does he have to be? He has to be a son of Adam if he's to be the second and last Adam. He has to be human. He has to be the Son of Abraham. He has to be a Jew. He has to be the son of David because he's going to inherit David's throne. He has to be the son of the virgin, the son of the woman promised in Genesis 3, articulated by Isaiah. Born of a virgin. Mary's son. Who is best suited to be the son of Adam, the son of David and the son of Mary within the Godhead but the Son, one who is Son? By very nature, Son? Outside of creaturely reality, breaking into our creaturely reality, who is best suited? None other than the Son himself.

Athanasius, one of the early church fathers, writes like this, "As existing before coming to dwell in the flesh, he was not man but God with God, being invisible and impassable, but when he became man, he took the name Christ, anointed, because the passion and the death are consequent upon the name." He came as the Christ because the Christ was to be the suffering servant of Isaiah. Oh yes, he was to be the descendant of David and the inheritor of David's throne, he was to be the one with divine honors and divine names, but he was coming to be the servant. He was to learn obedience by what he suffered. He was to take our place and be the Israel of God who would save the Israel of God. That's why Jesus came into the world.

So when we read these words, "O God, your God," we're reminded, of course, as we were early on in the passage, that the Son is God of God, very God of very God, and it's appropriate that he be the one who comes into the world to deal with the rebellion here in this world; come as the King to re-establish his kingdom in this world; and to draw out of this world his own chosen people and to make them part of his eternal kingdom. As divine Son he is God of God. As human Christ he is created and preserved by God. As Mediator, he is the God-man, deputed to come and act on our behalf to bring us to God. He's the only one who touches both worlds, a world of creaturely reality and the world of ultimate reality and as we come to him as fallen creatures, we are reconciled to God and God is reconciled to us.

Our Redeemer. Our Mediator. Our Savior. These are the wonders, the lengths to which he has gone. You know, when we say at Christmas time when we sin, "Thou who art rich

beyond all splendor," we can't even conceive how rich. He who was rich for our sakes became poor. We cannot imagine how rich. "Your throne, O God, is forever." Over all things. In all times. In all spaces and places. And for our sakes he became man, a little baby thing, and he went to the cross.

Well, as we come to contemplate this one who came this Christmas time, we want to remind ourselves of who it was that came. Severian of Gabala said, "He who has an eternal throne always was with the Father." Theodoret said, "The phrase 'he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high' was meant in human fashion." As God he had a throne that is eternal, a kingdom that is without beginning, but in his humanity, he sits on the throne. John of Damascus puts it like this, "It was when the Word became flesh that we say he received the name of Christ Jesus." It was his humanity that was anointed. His humanity that was anointed and he became Christ. This is the sum and substance of the Gospel.

There is a little phrase that I think is helpful here: in that he is Savior, may he deign to save us from sin. In that he is our high priest, may he deign to reconcile us to God the Father. In that he is the King, may he deign to give us the eternal kingdom of his Father. He is Jesus Christ our Lord, who with the Father and Holy Spirit, lives and reigns. God for all ages. Amen.

Let's pray.

Father, we pray that our Lord Jesus would be very lovely to us, to our understanding, to our minds, engaging our hearts, stretching to the limits our imagination, and drawing from the very depths of our being worship and adoration. We pray that today in this room those who don't know him would be drawn to him, drawn to him like a magnet by your grace, and find in him life, light, joy, peace and perfection, the perfection of who he is. In his strong name we pray. Amen.