

# Jesus is Greater

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Just a real quick good morning to you all, but also for those of you who are listening later online this week. Thanks for tuning in and hearing and listening to the sermon. We're actually today, if you're new, it's a great time to be here. We're starting a new series, and we're going through the book of Hebrews. And before we start reading the first chapter, the first verses, I want to just give some brief context, a little history around this book and who it was written to and when it was written, because I think it'll just help us understand this book a lot more, these verses a lot more, and how relevant it actually is for us today, even though it was written hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years ago. And so the book of Hebrews isn't like most letters that were written to believers. I mean, you look at Paul, and he wrote the letters to the Ephesian church, Colossian church, the Galatian church, the Thessalonian church, the Corinthian church, and Hebrews doesn't read like that typical kind of letter. It doesn't have an introduction of like,

I'm the author, I'm writing this letter, and greetings to everybody. It actually, it reads a lot more like a sermon, and a lot of scholars think that's exactly what it was meant to be. It was meant to be an exposition of Scripture to a particular group of Christians, a particular church, to teach them something, and to challenge them as well. And from this also, as you read the book of Hebrews, you begin to realize that this author isn't a stranger to who he's writing to. He actually knows these people really well. There's a lot of assumptions. Like first, the assumption that they would have a working, a very good working knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, which are also known as the Torah, we're probably familiar with it as the Old Testament. Hebrews uses a ton of Old Testament Scripture. In fact, besides the book of Revelation, it is the book that quotes the Old Testament more than any other book in the New Testament. A little interesting fact there. Now, some of us may be thinking, maybe we know a little bit about the Old Testament. Man, what does the Old Testament have to say to us? What would it have to say to Christians? Because what does it really have to do with Jesus?

I mean, Jesus isn't even, you know, talked about in the Old Testament, or is he? Because what I think we'll find out as we go through the book of Hebrews is we'll realize how much the Old Testament actually does point to Jesus. Throughout this book, throughout Hebrews, the author uses the Old Testament to do just that, teach us about Jesus. And he was doing that for the Christians in that day and age as well, which means there's a lot for us as Christians to learn from this, right? We can find Jesus on every page of the Bible. Now, if you're new to Christianity and you're checking it out, maybe you're new and getting more engaged with the Bible, growing your knowledge of it, this is some helpful information for you too. The Bible from beginning to end is telling one story. And it is all about Jesus. It is all pointing to Jesus. He is the central figure. To quote Sally Lowe Jones, who wrote the book, the Jesus Storybook Bible, it says in there, every story whispers his name. That's what the Bible does.

Every story in it, in the Old Testament, it whispers his name, the name of Jesus. So the Bible is more than just a book of moral lessons and wise principles for a better life. It's not something you grab to like, hey, let me give some life hacks to like make my life a little bit better. It's about a person.

It's about Jesus, God's only son. And at every turn, the writer of Hebrews keeps holding Jesus out. He does that as just unstopping, unceasing, just holding Jesus out. Now, it's worth asking, why do Christians need to keep learning so much about Jesus? Why do we need to keep looking at him? Like all the time. Hebrews, this book, after all, was written to a Christian audience.

[ 4 : 0 6 ] They already believed in Jesus. Isn't there anything else to move on to? Isn't there like another level of Christianity and knowledge to move into? But the reason that every Christian needs to keep learning about Jesus and looking at him is that when we take our eyes off Jesus, we fix

them on something else. That invariably happens. It is so easy to get our eyes off of Jesus. The historical context of this letter was written into a similar context as ours right here in church. Christianity, or even in America today. Christianity, right, in America is growing increasingly unpopular, right? We don't enjoy the majority kind of consensus view anymore.

In that day, it was the same. Christianity was very unpopular. There was a lot to be afraid of for those Christians back in the time where Hebrews was written. There was a lot to be cynical about. There was a lot of pressures of life that were calling those Christians to compromise and to give up their faith. That isn't too much different for us today. If you think about life, and when you live life, the more you live life, the more you recognize, man, it has a way of just filling us with anxieties, with apathy, with ambitions that aren't necessarily the best ambitions, and even some avarice, just a sense of idleness and laziness. Now, any of those fight against us. Any of those things that fill us, fight against us from keeping our eyes on Jesus. And Hebrews is written to this community of believers where many had done that. Some had abandoned their faith. Some had compromised their faith by being involved with sin, or doubt had crept into their hearts. Some were just growing weary and becoming discouraged. I want to ask us, man, can any of us relate to any of those things? Maybe some, maybe all. I don't know. I definitely can. I mean, just think about the things we can fix our eyes on during the week as we look around, as we take in news and TV and social media and all that.

But does it discourage us? Does it make us more cynical or fearful? Or does it lead us to looking to Jesus? So now let's read Hebrews chapter 1. And as I read it, just listen to these words carefully. Remember, this is a sermon. So it's funny because as we go through this book, it's like I'm giving a sermon on someone else's sermon, you know? But just listen to these words. They are so beautiful, and they're so amazing on their own. And take notice as I read this. This is God's word, how it is affecting your heart right now. Verse 1, it says, Long ago and at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

[ 7 : 10 ] But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God in the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, you are my son? Today I have begotten you. Or again, another Old Testament scripture, I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son. And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, another Old Testament scripture, let all God's angels worship him.

Of the angels, he says, he makes his angels winds and his ministers a flame of fire. But of the sun, he says, your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of a brightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions. And then again, just to continue his argument that Jesus is better than everything. You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment.

Like a robe, you will roll them up. Like a garment, they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end. And to which of the angels has he ever said, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet? Then he gets on to his argument. Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

Therefore, we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard. While God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. That is the word of God. And we can all go home now. I mean, that's good stuff, guys. I don't know how I can improve on that. I'm going to try. What I love about how this author starts this book out is he does not beat around the bush. He comes right out the gate holding out Jesus as greater than everything else. Verse 1, long ago at many times, in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, Jesus. For those of us that are newer to the Bible, let me explain. A big portion of the Bible, the Old

Testament, is this long history of God and his dealings and his workings into the world, specifically and especially through the people of Israel. And as in any relationship that anybody would have, God had this special relationship with

[10:56] Israel. Communication was a big deal. It was required. But here's the thing. God wouldn't speak directly to his people. He would use a mediator, a go-between. So he would give a message to a prophet, right? And prophets weren't like these angelic beings. Sometimes he would bring a message through an angel. But like this verse here, he spoke to our fathers by the prophets. So prophets was just a man or a woman set apart to deliver God's message, right? They were regular Joes. They put their pants on one leg at a time, just like the rest of us. But that person had a unique responsibility and a unique calling. What he had to do, he had to take a message from God and deliver it to his people, just as God had given it to them. So imagine like the telephone game, right? Except if you messed up the message, you get stoned. So kids don't get any ideas from this, like just stick to your regular telephone game, all right? So over thousands of years, this is how God communicated his love, his purpose, his plans, his warnings to his people. That's what he did. It's also how he communicated his promises to his people.

And regardless of whether Israel was doing good or how wicked they were or how far they drifted from God, he never revoked his promise of a future salvation, a future reconciliation, a future restoration, a future hope for them. And that verse is saying is that actually all these things, all these things that God spoke to the prophets, they were pointing to one person. They were pointing to Jesus. Jesus is greater because he is the fulfillment of God's promises. See, the prophets of old were important messenger boys for God, but Jesus was even more. He not only spoke God's words, he fulfilled all of them in his life, in his death, in his resurrection. No other man could do that. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises, which means Jesus is the final word. See, when the prophets in the Old Testament spoke, there was always a dot, dot, dot, right? There was always a, here's what God is saying, here's the warning, here's what's going to happen, here's hope for the future, dot, dot, dot.

It's going to come, it's going to happen. Their message that they gave was waiting to be fulfilled, but with Jesus, everything he said was an exclamation point. On the cross, he cried, it is finished. All done. Completely fulfilled. And that's an amazing thing. Jesus is the final word, but guess what, guys? He's also more than the final word. He's also the first word and the present word. It says that at the end of verses two and three, right? At the end of verse two, it says, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. And then at the end of verse three, and he upholds the universe, all created things, by the word of his power. Which means this, Jesus is greater than everything because he made it, he owns it, and he upholds it. See, Jesus just isn't the final word that God has spoken to us. He's the first word too. The gospel of John opens this way. It says this about Jesus in the beginning was the word, and the word was God, and the word was with God. So Jesus was there when God created everything. Going back to the first chapter of what these, of the Jewish sacred scriptures, the Torah, the scriptures that this Jewish audience would have been very, very familiar with. Getting back to how those scriptures opened Genesis 1. A lot of us know Genesis 1. It's the creation account, right? It says, man, God said, let there be, boom. And then what happened? That whatever he said came into existence. It happened. The point is God spoke words to create. So now reading

[15:02] Genesis 1 through the Hebrews text and also John's gospel, we get this understanding of Jesus. He was the word spoken at creation. When God the Father spoke creation into being, he spoke through his son Jesus. Jesus was there. So Jesus is also the first word. That is why he is greater. All creation points to his greatness. He made it. Just like a work of art or a song points to the greatness of the artist, so creation points to the greatness of its creator. But Jesus is not just the creator of life.

He is also the sustainer of life. He didn't make the world and walk away. He is not an absentee landlord. He continually upholds everything by the word of his power. Jesus is not just the first word and the final word. He is the ever-present word. Which means he is not just the God of the past and God of the future to come. He is the God of the right now. And that's a game changer for us. I love our Reformed tradition. It is so good at looking back at the historical finished work of the cross. On the cross, he paid it all. Past tense. He rose from the dead, breaking the power of sin and death. Past tense.

That is a finished work that we can look back on with confidence. It can never be undone and it can never be taken away. It's solid footing for us to stand on. But it is a work that also unceasingly breaks into our present all the time. The cross and the empty grave are the first and final words that continually break into our lives every single moment of every single day. Now, all of this truth about Jesus, right? First word, final word, sustaining word, all of this has to confront us about our belief in who Jesus is, right? We don't get to then just casually say, ah, Jesus, whatever, no big deal. No, C.S. Lewis puts it this way. If Jesus is who he says he is, then we have a choice to make. We have a reckoning. We either have to call him a liar or consider him a lunatic or he is who he says he is and he is Lord. We have those three choices. It means that Jesus can't just be a good guy. He is so much more than just a moral teacher. He is wiser than Confucius. He is of more noble character than Gandhi. He is more spiritual than the Dalai Lama. Jesus is greater. Jesus is greater because he is God. And not only that, he showed us who God is. And what's unique about Christianity is that it claims Jesus is both fully God and fully man. He walked among us and had the full human experience. He was susceptible to temptation and sickness and sunburn and every other human frailty.

And yet he was still fully God. It is a mystery. Hebrews, that verse three of chapter one says, he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. Okay. That's an amazing thing. We can look at Jesus and we say, oh, now we know what God is like. But context is important here. Remember, original audience for this letter is Hebrews. Hebrews who know their Old Testament inside and out. And so in the Old Testament, you had this hierarchy, right? You had God way up top.

[18:33] Then you had angels. And then you had man. Psalm 8.5 says, he talked, talking about man, he made them a little, he created us a little lower than the angels. So where do we place Jesus then?

How do they place Jesus then being both fully God and fully man? Is there this new category all of a sudden? Where does he fit into this hierarchy? Well, according to Hebrews and the rest of the Bible, the hierarchy is Jesus is right at top with God. There's no other new category, no hybrid kind of person that is made. There's Jesus isn't somehow fitting in between God and angels or between angels and man. Now Jesus is God. But Hebrews doesn't even stop there. He doesn't just say that Jesus is God.

He tells us that God showed himself in Jesus. Now to the Hebrews, this would have been a big deal. And let me explain why. The second commandment of the big 10, right? The 10 commandments.

The second commandment was, do not make a carved image to worship. Do not make an idol. Israel. So Israel was given this command to worship God, but then God said, I'm so unlike anything created that do never, never, ever try to make an image by your own hands trying to figure out who I am.

And to do that, man, that was anathema for the Jews. You weren't supposed to do that. And this separated Israel from every other nation. Other nations worship gods they can fashion with their own hands.

[20:12] They can think up with their own minds and creativity. But the God of Israel was greater. He was different. To fashion him in any type of image of our own choosing would be reduce him in some way, shape, or form, and to distort his true character.

As King Solomon prayed when they consecrated the temple, he said, Man, Lord, we know that you are too big to dwell in temples made by hands. Like, God was too great to domesticate himself in the form of some small image to worship.

But then here we see that God came and made himself known through Jesus. And we might think, oh, it's God breaking his own rule here. No, he's not. See, Jesus came in a different way to every other man. He was born of a virgin, born by the Holy Spirit.

It was a life. His life was authored by God himself. His form knit together in a womb by God's own hands. Jesus came as the perfect imprint, the radiance of God's glory.

Jesus came and showed us the glory of God as he walked among us. Now, that Greek word there rendered here that we read here as exact imprint, it's the word we get character from.

[21:22] So we know the character of God. We know what God is like by looking at Jesus, by looking at his life, what he said, what he did, how he interacted with people.

We can know what God in heaven is like. Jesus said, and John's gospel records, Jesus is saying this a few times, that he only did and only said what the Father told him to say.

He wasn't this guy going rogue all the time. But that also doesn't mean Jesus was like some marionette on God's strings. Like God was like, you know, telling him what to do and what to say, and he didn't have his own volition.

No, but he was a surrendered son, united with the Father in love. He was only going to do and he was only going to say what his Father told him. And he did that to show us the Father's heart, which is why Jesus is greater.

This is why we must fix our eyes on him. And we need this reminder because it is easier to drift from Jesus than we realize. You know, it says that.

[ 22 : 25 ] Therefore, we must pay closer attention unless we drift. I like that he uses the word drift. Very few of us sprint from Jesus, right?

Most of us just slowly drift from him. I remember a vacation when I was a teenager and we were drifting down this river on inner tubes. It was so painfully slow as a young teenager with way too much energy.

I bet I'd love it a lot now. It was an old fart. But back then, it was just like I was so impatient. I was just like, all right, we're starting here. We're getting there. How fast can we get there? Let's do this thing, right? Man, I remember feeling just going down this really slow, lazy river.

Like, man, we are getting nowhere fast. This is so irritating. The landmarks that I was looking at, I was like, they just were always there. I was just like, oh, okay. There's that bush still there.

Haven't really moved. But then after an hour of talking and playing around and whatever, you kind of looked up and you realize, oh, holy smokes, man.

[ 23 : 27 ] I've put some distance between me and the original place I had. We drift like that. That's what drifting is like.

It's very slow. It's very gradual over time. We slowly stop looking at Jesus. We slowly stop paying attention. We fill up our time with a little bit of this.

We fill up our time with a little bit of that. We fix our eyes on things that aren't necessarily bad, right? Hobbies, TV shows we like.

We get caught up in relationships, social media, careers calling us, all these things. And again, those aren't bad things.

We get caught up in those good things. And then there's also getting caught up in societies like constant messaging about the good life that comes at us, all these isms, materialism and consumerism and hedonism and workaholism, like all these things that saying, man, if you really want the good life, if you really want to be happy, like these are the ways that you can be happy.

[ 24 : 36 ] And those isms dominate our culture. It's always coming at us. It's always tempting us like these sirens. Hey, come our way. You're going to enjoy these things if you do that.

And they're just modern forms of religion that promise a kingdom without a king. These modern religions, they seep into us. They demand our worship, our allegiance, our love, which means that what happens is we give them inordinate amount of time and attention and commitment.

And oftentimes they start to take up more than the time we give Jesus. They all work together. All these things, they work together to create a life of busyness and hurry.

And in all the hustle and bustle, what do we do? We just slowly drift. Slowly drift away from Jesus. And that's the war we wage as Christians.

I think in our context. In the American context, I think that's one of the big wars we wage. This slow drift. This slow inoculation by our society. That gets our eyes off of Jesus more and more and more.

[ 25 : 48 ] And here's the thing. We have to fight. If you don't fight to see Jesus, you will drift. I will drift. And here's the thing about drifting.

Nobody drifts into a good place. Nobody, like, goes out on a boat and says, you know what? We're just going to drift. You know what? Every time I drift, I always end up at Pleasure Island. You know, typically what happens is you end up in the rocks or beached on some sandbar or something.

Like, nothing good happens when you drift in a boat, right? In my pastoral counseling, I will at some point get around to asking people about their spiritual formation habits.

I want to know their regularity of how they're looking at Jesus. Maybe that's in Bible reading or prayer or community worship, whatever it is. Now, I realize that in counseling and issues that rise up in our lives, there are exceptions.

But I would say, more often than not, what people need more than anything else is a regular dose of seeing Jesus, of being with him. Now, it's hard in our world to fight to see Jesus.

[ 26 : 53 ] It means sacrificing something good to make time for him. It means looking at the calendar and saying, like, wow, I'm focusing my eyes all the time on these things over here, and I'm not spending time looking here.

And if you don't have time to regularly see Jesus, let me just challenge you a little bit on that. It just means there's probably one or more things in your life that you've placed above God, which is what an idol is.

An idol is just a good thing that's become a God thing. That's it. And this passage warns us, how can we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

That's a sobering question for us today. But the good news for us is that God isn't inviting us to fix this ourselves.

He's not inviting us to say, you know what? The real salvation is just working harder, doing better, performing, performing, performing. No, it's inviting us into a relationship.

[ 27 : 59 ] It's inviting us to fix our eyes on Jesus. That's what it's inviting us to do. If I could have the band come up. I want us to consider how we respond to this text in Hebrews, what he's calling us to do.

If you're here and you're not a Christian, and I want to invite you because Jesus is inviting you not to reject his salvation. He is God who became a man.

He became one of us who lived a life that we couldn't live. He lived a life you couldn't live. He died a death in your place so that your sins could be forgiven.

And he rose from the dead so you could live for him. And the offer to you is, the invitation to you is, isn't do better, try harder, start working to earn this salvation.

It is just believing in him. Just believing. Fixing your eyes on him. He's inviting you to do that today. Salvation comes by faith, not by any other means.

[ 29 : 14 ] For those of us who would consider ourselves Christians, what is Jesus inviting us to do? Jesus is inviting us not to neglect this great salvation.

And I want to ask us, I want to ask you to ask yourself, have you drifted? You know, 2020, this past year, has been an opportunity, a year of a lot of opportunity to drift.

A lot of distractions. But 2020 aside, there's always going to be something else. There's always going to be another thing that is going to be pulling at our attention to fix our eyes on something besides Jesus.

And I want to ask us, is Jesus the first word in your day? Is Jesus the last word in your day? And is Jesus the ever-present word in your day?

You know, as we take communion, and we're going to do that in a minute, it's a time to examine ourselves, to ask the Holy Spirit to show where we've drifted or where we've been neglecting this great salvation.

[ 30 : 25 ] Communion reminds us of the final word Jesus said over sin. It brings us back to the finished work of the cross, and it brings us from the past into the present, right?

We get to partake and be reminded of his suffering in our place. His body broken, his blood shed. And it reminds us that his blood, his sacrifice speaks a better word over us right now.

It's a word of faith. It's a word of comfort. It's a word of hope. It's a word of healing. It's a word of love. It's a word of acceptance. It's a word of reminding us that we are one with Jesus by faith.

We get to fix our eyes right now on the death of Jesus as we drink this bread and drink this cup and eat this bread. So take a moment right now just to consider that. Consider what this shows of the character of God, and then eat and give thanks for who he is.