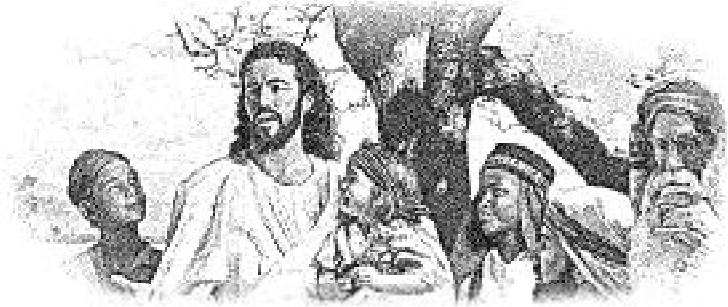


Jesus, Higher and Better



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Heb. 7:7-26; 11:1-26.

MEMORY TEXT: “For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Christ's superiority paves the way for the foundation of His entire ministry and the blessings that we receive from it.

FEW PEOPLE LIKE SNOBS. Snobbishness is difficult to stomach. Do we like being around those who look down their noses at us? Self-superiority, besides being the original sin, is just plain hard to deal with. Yet, the thrust of Hebrews is all about superiority; that is, the superiority of Jesus Christ. In His case, there's nothing offensive, nothing snobbish, nothing that would turn us away.

On the contrary, as we'll see this week, Christ's superiority is manifested in a way that should draw us to Him in faith and obedience, for in that superiority comes the great hope of salvation.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: In what ways does Hebrews depict Jesus as superior? Why is Jesus superior? What are the results of Christ's superiority, in terms of His life, death, and ministry in our behalf? How do we respond to what Christ has accomplished for us?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 26.

JESUS' SUPERIORITY.

What does Hebrews tell us about Jesus' superiority?

Heb. 1:4 _____

Heb. 3:3 _____

Heb. 7:26 _____

Heb. 12:24 _____

Although Jesus is superior to the angels, to Moses, and to the high priests; although His blood is better than Abel's blood; and although He is higher than the heavens; Jesus never strived for superiority while on earth.

On the contrary. Consider what Hebrews writes about Jesus in contrast to the Jesus depicted in all four Gospels. It's hard to imagine they are talking about the same Person. And yet they are.

According to the Gospels, He lived His life in simplicity and humility, serving others before Himself. There was no self-promotion in Christ, even though He certainly had reasons to boast, as Hebrews clearly shows, had He wanted to.

Look at Jesus' attitude in comparison to so much of what's in the world today, where self-promotion is the key motive behind so many of our actions. How unfortunate, too, that Christians are not immune to these influences, even in the context of our faith. Like the disciples, we may discuss the question of who is the greatest among us (Luke 22:24). Like the Pharisees, we may look down on the tax collector (Luke 18:9-12). We compare ourselves to others, preferably to those who are worse off or “lower” than we are. Then we end up “superior” (at least in our own minds) to them and believe we have the right to climb the ecclesiastical ladder.

In contrast, the texts in Hebrews that we looked at today clearly establish the superiority of Christ to angels, to Moses, and so forth. And yet, when we look at His life on earth and how He expressed His character, we see only humility, self-denial, self-renunciation, all for the good of those who were, without a doubt, inferior to Him. The same One who was superior to Moses was the same One who stooped to wash the feet of His disciples.

Superior to all yet servant of all. This was Jesus. How do we feel when confronted with His example? How should we feel? Dwell more on the contrast between the Jesus depicted in Hebrews and the Jesus of the Gospels. What message does that send to us?

THE REASON FOR JESUS' SUPERIORITY.

One reason for Jesus' superiority is, of course, that He is God and Creator (one isn't more superior than that). And, no question, Hebrews clearly refers to Him in this capacity. However, His superiority seems not to be derived primarily from His preexistence and deity. Instead, the apostle links His superiority to, interestingly enough, His "inferiority."

Look at Hebrews 2:9. What does it teach us about the link between "inferiority" and "superiority"? See also Phil. 2:4-9.

In Acts 10:36, Peter presents Jesus as Lord of all. But two verses later, He tells us about how the Lord of all acted while in the flesh: He "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (vs. 38, NRSV). This is real greatness, greatness in "inferiority," and this internal greatness becomes manifest in superiority.

What biblical examples show that true lowliness and humble service are rewarded with exaltation?

Joseph in Egypt performed his tasks faithfully, whether as a slave or a prisoner. Eventually, he was exalted to leadership. Even after Moses tended the sheep of his father-in-law in Midian, he still did not have any ambitions to become the leader of Israel. "Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3, NRSV). David was a shepherd who later became king. Peter quotes the Old Testament and declares: " 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble' " (1 Pet. 5:5, NRSV). Jesus tells us in Luke 22:26 that " 'the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves' " (NRSV).

Jesus' unparalleled service on earth led to His superiority in status, which led to superiority in His present ministry. In Jesus, both aspects—superiority in status and superiority in ministry—unite. The readers of the letter are encouraged to remain faithful to this Jesus who, although being the King, serves us in a way nobody else can.

When was the last time you took the role of servant? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

THE RESULTS OF JESUS' SUPERIOR MINISTRY.

What are the results of Christ's superior status and ministry for us as described in Hebrews?

Heb. 7:19, 22 _____

Heb. 8:6 _____

Heb. 10:34 _____

Heb. 11:16, 35 _____

Most results of Jesus' superiority—a better hope, better promises, a better covenant, a better and lasting possession, a better country, and a better resurrection—are oriented toward the future. Jesus provides a bright future for His followers. Included in that future is a better resurrection, the final resurrection. This is different from previous resurrections in both testaments, because in these, the people returned to temporary mortal life. In contrast, the final resurrection is to endless life in a world made new.

However future oriented the promises, they still have force for us today. Even as a prelude to eternity, this life is still important, because it provides the opportunity to gain eternity with Jesus. Thus, the better promises and the better covenant affect us here and now, as well. It is here and now that the Lord puts His law into our minds and gives us the desire to keep it; it is here and now that we receive the power to obey, to love Him, and to reflect His character.

Read Hebrews 11:13-16. What is the specific point the author is making here? How does it fit in with the gist of his whole letter to the Hebrews? In what ways does it speak even to us now?

God, through Christ, has revealed wonderful truths to His people. However, do they grasp these truths in faith, trusting in the better promises, the better hope, the better country, or do they take their eyes off these things and return to where they once were? This is the challenge to the Hebrews; it's the challenge to us, as well.

OUR REACTION TO CHRIST’S SUPERIORITY: PART 1.

However superior Jesus is in all things, however broad, complete, and efficacious the plan of salvation is that centered on Him and His superiority, one thing God does not do: force anyone to obey, force anyone to partake of what Christ offers. The issue, as always, remains our response. “ ‘Choose this day whom you will serve’ ” (Josh. 24:15, NRSV). Even after thousands of years, Joshua’s imperative to the Hebrews back then is the same as to the Hebrews in Paul’s day and to the “Hebrews” today: Choose whom you will serve.

Though Hebrews has been talking about the superiority of Jesus, it also uses comparisons in regard to people, as well. Read Hebrews 11:4. What is it saying here about Abel? What was his “better” sacrifice? See Genesis 4:1-8.

Abel is found twice in Hebrews. Abel honored God in bringing a better sacrifice than what Cain offered (11:4). In Hebrews 12:24, Jesus’ blood is compared to that of Abel, who had a faith relationship to God and is called righteous. And although (in spite of his death) Abel still “speaks,” the blood of Jesus speaks of better things, better than even Abel’s did. Abel is the first hero of faith in Hebrews 11 and the first martyr. Jesus, nevertheless, far surpasses him.

Read Hebrews 11:25. Here, too, the issue of comparisons arose. What was it? What choice did Moses make between these two options?

Similar to Abel, Moses made a decision for Jesus. He rather (lit., “much more”) chose to suffer with God’s people than to enjoy sin. Moses had a clear vision and had his priorities straight. For him the reproach of Christ was greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

However different our individual situations are from Abel or Moses, we still face the same choices they did. In what ways, large and small, do we make our choices every day?

OUR REACTION TO CHRIST’S SUPERIORITY: PART 2.

Yesterday’s lesson looked at two examples of those who, having to choose between something good and something bad, chose the better of the two. Unfortunately, that’s not always the case. “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven” (Heb. 12:25). Notice, again, the comparison between something better and something not so good. How much more impressive is it to be spoken to from heaven than from earth?

Read Hebrews 12:25. What’s the point the author is making here? How does it fit in with the whole tenor of the letter to the Hebrews?

“He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Heb. 10:28, 29).

Read these two verses. What point is being made? What lessons are in them for us, particularly as Seventh-day Adventists, who have been given so “much more” than many others?

The human reaction to Jesus’ superiority always will be two-fold. Some gladly will accept Him as their Lord. Some will refuse Him, and not always out of ignorance, either. Some know who the Lord is and what He has done in their lives but decide against Him anyway. The book of Hebrews is a call specifically to the latter: to those who know about Jesus to not reject what He has done. All through the book this same pleading occurs: Look at who Jesus is and look at what He has done for us. How, then, can you turn away?

If they needed to hear this back then, how much more so do we today?

FURTHER STUDY:

Christ was not insensible to ignominy and disgrace. He felt it all most bitterly. He felt it as much more deeply and acutely than we can feel suffering, as His nature was more exalted and pure and holy than that of the sinful race for whom He suffered. He was the Majesty of heaven, He was equal with the Father, He was the Commander of the hosts of angels, yet He died for man the death that was, above all others, clothed with ignominy and reproach. O that the haughty hearts of men might realize this! O that they might enter into the meaning of redemption and seek to learn the meekness and lowliness of Jesus!”—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 339.

“The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. It speaketh better things than the blood of Abel, for Christ ever liveth to make intercession for us. We need to keep ever before us the efficacy of the blood of Jesus. That life-cleansing, life-sustaining blood, appropriated by living faith, is our hope. We need to grow in appreciation of its inestimable value, for it speaks for us only as we by faith claim its virtue, keeping the conscience clean and at peace with God.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 947.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Tuesday’s study mentioned that the results from Christ’s superiority are future oriented. How do we react when people accuse us of thinking only in terms of the future and forgetting social and political involvement here and now?
2. In the context of Jesus’ superiority being linked to His “inferiority”; that is, in His role of being “lower than the angels,” what can we learn about the servant-leader concept? What does Mark 10:44 add to this idea?
3. In what subtle ways can even faithful Christians be caught up in the trap of self-superiority? What’s the only answer to protect ourselves against this deception?

SUMMARY: Christ’s superior ministry breaks down in His better sacrifice on earth and His superior ministry in heaven as our High Priest. The results for us are a better covenant, a better hope, a better country, and a better resurrection. We commit ourselves to Him who has brought about so great a salvation.



The Sweet Old Lady

Ljiljana Gunjevic

As a child I never knew that God existed, for no one in my home ever talked about God. Then I lost my father in war. When I heard about God, I blamed Him for my father’s death. I didn’t want anything to do with a God who kills fathers.

Even in grade school, partying, drinking, and smoking were a big thing. I joined my friends in these activities when I could. We did not care about God or the future, our health, or our education. The only thing important to us was partying and making jokes to impress others.

However, something happened that changed my life. An old woman came to our door selling books. My mother did not have the heart to refuse her, so she bought a book, *Steps to Christ*. A few days later the woman came to talk about God. Mom was polite and listened, but I was bored, so I left. The woman came often to our house, and sometimes I stayed to listen. In time I grew fond of the old woman.

Time passed, and I started high school. I met a really nice girl named Suzana. I learned that Suzana belonged to a church I had never heard of, the Seventh-day Adventist church. I was sure that was the same church the old woman attended.

Then one day the old woman did not come to our house. I asked Suzana where the woman was, and Suzana said the woman died. I was shaken by this news. Suddenly I wanted to visit the church that this dear old woman had attended. Suzana was happy to invite me.

From then on, I have attended the Adventist church. Even when people tried to convince me not to go, I went. I learned that God loves all of His children, that it is Satan who wants people to suffer. This helped me understand my father’s death.

By studying Christ’s life, my own life changed. I stopped drinking and attending parties that I knew were not pleasing to God. Friends noticed the changes in my life and wondered what had happened to me. At the time I isolated myself from all my friends outside the church, but by doing so I lost a chance to share God’s love with them. Today I realize that was a mistake. I feel sad that I never accepted the nice old woman’s invitation to attend church while she was alive. But I believe that we will meet one day in heaven, and she will see the results of her efforts. Her sweet life and persistent love helped bring me to Jesus.

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