



Sermon-Based Study Guide  
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Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church - May 8, 2011

Sermon Title: Playing With the Wrappings

Sermon Text: Hebrews 1.6-14

Related Texts: Psalm 45.1-7

## **I. Start It – Connecting With One Another**

What is one of your favorite Christmas memories? Does one Christmas gift stand out among those you ever received? What made it so special?

## **II. Introduction**

The Book of Hebrews opens with the affirmation that Jesus is superior to the prophets; in fact, he is supreme over all things. To a people who have become weary and beleaguered, whose faith is waning, and who are feeling the pressure to return to the familiar and acceptable ways of Judaism, the author presents one simple fact – there is no turning back if Jesus is, indeed, the supreme, anointed One from God. As the preacher continues, the emphasis shifts from Jesus' supremacy over the prophets to his superiority over angels who are God's messengers.

## **III. Study the Text – Read Hebrews 1.6-14**

- 1) Before digging into Hebrews 1.6-14, take a look at Colossians 1.24-27. Can you summarize Paul's understanding of 1) the mystery, 2) how the mystery has been disclosed, and 3) the promise made to Gentiles? How is the disclosure of this divine mystery like opening a Christmas present?
- 2) Hebrews 1.6 is focused upon God disclosing the mystery by bringing "his firstborn into the world." Look at Colossians 1.15-18. How does this help to understand the meaning of "firstborn" as it is used in Colossians and Hebrews?

**Note:** Two observations. First, some have suggested that the people this letter was addressed to may have been Jewish Christians living in the Lychus Valley (near Ephesus and central Turkey today). The fact that there are similar themes and expressions in this book and Colossians could suggest the author is addressing people living in the same region. Second, "firstborn" is begin used here to indicate Jesus' superiority or preeminence over all things. In large part, the disclosure of the divine mystery is just this – Jesus, the Son of God, is supreme over all things... and the redeemer of both Jews and Gentiles.

- 3) Hebrews 1.6-14 stresses the Jesus, the Son of God and "firstborn" is superior to angels. Take a look at verses 6 and 14. What are the position and roles of angels? What do the following verses say about the roles of angels? Psalm 91.11; Genesis 19.17; Exodus 23.20; Acts 12.7; Luke 22.43; Acts 12.23.
- 4) Hebrews 1.6-14 also stresses that Jesus, the Son, is superior to the angels not only because he was their creator but also for other reasons. The writer of Hebrews refers

to various Psalms to depict the superiority of the Son over the created angelic beings. Summarize the points made in the following verses:

Verse 7 – referring to Psalm 104.4

Verses 8 & 9 – referring to Psalm 45.6-7

Verses 10-12 – referring to Psalm 102.25-27

Verse 13 – referring to Psalm 110.1

- 5) The author is keenly aware that the Jewish Christians are struggling, are being persecuted, many of their friends and family have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and as a result they are feeling the pressure to return to living under the law given by Moses. Tradition held that the law given to Moses was declared to him by angels. In traditional Jewish thinking angels and the law were almost synonymous. It is reasonable to see the author stressing the point that Jesus is superior to the angels – he is their creator, he is acknowledged by them as such, and they exist to serve his purposes – and if superior to the angels he is also superior to the law. How would this passage help people who are so tempted to return to living under the law?

#### **IV. Apply It – Reflect and Respond**

- 1) If you haven't yet done so, try to find 20 minutes to read through the entire book of Hebrews. In fact, since it seems to be a collection of sermons, you might find reading it out loud to be beneficial.
- 2) Why do you think people in our culture have such a fascination with angels while not always being interested in Jesus?
- 3) How is preoccupation with angels and returning to living under the law like "playing with the wrappings" instead of embracing and enjoying the gift that is found once the wrappings are removed? In what ways are you just "playing with the wrappings?" How could you deepen your reliance on Jesus – the gift – who reveals the mystery of God's loving kindness?

***Don't start playing with the wrappings instead of the true present. Pay closer attention to who Jesus really is; to the role he played, and still plays, in God's plan; and to the life of worship and service to which he, and he alone, calls each of us.***

***N. T. Wright***