

So [God's Son] became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. *Hebrews 1.4.*

Before the summer holiday we got roughly half way through *Hebrews*. Last week, to remind ourselves where we had got to I went back to the very beginning to the seemingly simple phrase, 'God has spoken to us' at 1.2. He is a speaking God. Christianity is a revealed religion.

Now, before we set off again in chap 7, I want us to look at 1.4 which tells us that Jesus, God's Son, is superior to angels ... In fact, this is the point of the whole letter to the Hebrews: Jesus is superior to *everything* – angels here in chap 1 and superior even to the great Moses in chap 3. In fact Jesus is nothing less than the exact representation of God himself. God even made the universe through him, 1.2-3... In other words, Jesus is the tops, so don't give up on him. Stand up for Jesus. He is worth it.

So why is Jesus worth it? Why is it vital to stick with him, even at the risk of being unpopular with your neighbours and society? I am more and more convinced that one of the biggest problems in our society is an identity crisis. People don't know who they are. Now I can hear you mutter to yourselves, 'Rubbish, Brian. Surely feeding people and healing them are far more important than pretty questions about identity?' No. Meeting physical needs are, of course, important, but they are only means to an end. Once people are fed and healthy, what are they going to do then? For all our relative material wealth and comfort in this country, our people are desperately unhappy. Why is there such an alarming increase in mental health problems? Why are so many of our teenagers self-harming? Why are alcoholism and drug abuse rampant? Why is everyone covered in tattoos and iron-mongery these days? It isn't because they are poor. Poor people are not

always the unhappy ones. No, it is because people today do not know who they are. They feel they are just a number. No-one cares. No-one is listening, because everyone is too busy. We have a serious identity crisis.

At the root of all this is the fact that people no longer have roots. They don't know where they belong. My wife's people have been in Co Fermanagh since the early 1600s, but then so were most of my parishioners there. They were all inter-related and they knew exactly where they fitted in. They had a sense of place, of belonging. We don't have that any more. We are displaced people, shifting. Look at our surnames. Most English surnames are places. Yes, there really is a village called Dimbleby. Scottish surnames are largely clan names. You knew who you were and where you belonged. But now the idea of the nation state has been rubbished. We are internationalists now and are told we should be ashamed of our culture and island history.

And what about the family unit? Marriage and family life have taken a real battering since the war. Too many people don't even have a family to belong to now. But above all we have been encouraged to see ourselves only as individuals. You have to make your own identity now. Be yourself. I am sure that this insane and ugly tattoo craze is part of this. It used to be only soldiers and sailors who went in for tattoos, but now it is part of a tribal marking, which incidentally is condemned in the Bible (*Lev 19.28*).

We even talk now of identity politics. You shew who you are by your politics. And that is why we cannot now engage rationally and politely with people who disagree with us, because those who disagree with our politics are making an attack on who we are, on our personal identity.

I could go on, but let me tell you that the Bible has really good news

for you and everyone. The Bible declares that even in today's rootless, drifting anonymous society, you have an identity in Christ. You are not who other people say you are. You don't need more money, a bigger house or car to prove who you are. You may never have been good enough for your parents or teachers, but you are good enough for God. He loves you. The world may like you more if you are more beautiful, or cleverer, but such things mean nothing to God. As far as the Bible is concerned, you are not your job. You are not someone else's daughter, someone else's mother, someone else's husband. You are you, and you are loved by God. Despite this materialistic, status-conscious society, your identity does not depend on what you do or what you have done. Our trouble is that we keep trying to find our worth and security in the wrong things. Why are people obsessed with getting plastic surgery? If I straighten my nose or fill my lips, people will like me better. Really? I heard the other day that Istanbul is the hair-transplant capital of the world. One man was saying that he had lost his confidence because his hair was falling out. Istanbul was going to change his life. Oh dear!

So let's be clear. Your identity does not depend on what you do or have done or what others say you are. Your true identity is who *God* says you are. Once you choose to follow Jesus, you become a new creation. The old has passed and you become who you are in Christ, 2 *Cor* 5.16-17, p1161....

And who are you in Christ? You are a child of God. You know, when you finally realise that you are the son or the daughter of a king – of the King of kings – you will feel great about yourself, and you will behave differently. You will feel dignity and worth. You are loved so much that Christ died for you

to raise you to new life. I could give you all the Bible references, but this is who the Bible says you are – in *God's* eyes. You are his own special possession. You are chosen – not just tolerated, but chosen, treasured. You are worth dying for. You are accepted. You are a friend of Jesus. You are a temple of God, and his Spirit is in you. You are even a saint. (Now that is *Eph* 1.1). You are forgiven. You are a new creation. You are seated next to God. (You may not *feel* that, but it is so, because if you are 'in Christ', you are wherever *he* is, and right now he is seated at God's right hand). You have been chosen to bear fruit. Yes, it is your destiny to be fruitful. God wants you not to be successful but to be fruitful.

I am not really bothered whether you believe in God. Even the devil believes in God. What I am concerned with is whether you *believe* God. Do you believe what he says about you in the Bible? I would love to say to that man prepared to get his confidence back by spending thousands on a hair-transplant, just believe what God says about you in the Bible. You are his son and he loves you. It's cheaper to read your Bible than to go to Istanbul. Find your identity not in the world and through others but in Christ. But if Christ is just another bloke like us, we are no further on. It is, as *Heb* keeps saying, because Christ is *God*, that we can be a new person, clothed in him.

Just imagine you are physically 'in Christ'. Effectively you are now him. So wherever he is, you are. He was raised from the dead. So are you. He sits next to God the Father. So do you. When the Father looks at you, especially in judgement, he no longer sees you in your sin; he sees his Son Jesus, for you are 'in him', clothed, draped in his righteousness. Get your identity in Christ right, and you will get your life right. You are God's loved child.