

The Greatness of Christ

Our meeting this morning is based on the fact stated in the opening verse of the chapter. If God had not spoken we would not have come together, but each would have been wandering in the way that ends in death. He has not spoken to us personally, yet has He spoken to us with an effect perhaps as great. He spoke to the fathers by the prophets, and to their children in the last days of Judah's commonwealth by His Son; and we have heard what was said, owing to the marvellous wisdom and kindness which caused the things to be written down. What was said was not, in the kindness of God, intended for those only to whom the word came in the first instance, but was at last made as wide as the world to everyone that had "ears to hear." Therefore we of the high ways and hedges have an opportunity of sitting at the festal board of the King.

The word that last came forth is the most important of all: this is Paul's contention all through the Hebrews. God was the speaker in all cases; but the mode and importance of the communication varied with the "sundry times" in which it took place. At first by the angels; then by His Spirit in the prophets, but last by a Son—not His Son, though Jesus was His Son. "His" is not in the original; its insertion favours Trinitarianism the correct translation is "by a Son," leaving room for the fact that God has "*many sons whom He will lead to glory*" (Heb. ii. 10). His word came through man before, but in this case His word was made man; it became flesh by the operation of the Spirit on Mary as described by the angel. The result was a man who was "*the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person*," whom He constituted "*the heir of all things*," and of whom Paul could say, consequent on his relation to the First Cause, that he "*upheld all things by the word of his power, and when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*."

The first chapter of Hebrews is devoted to showing that he was "*much better than the angels*" (verse 4), higher in rank and authority. The angels were commanded to worship him (verse 6). The angels are made subject to him (i Pet. iii. 22). The angels come with him as his servants (Matt. xxv. 31: xxiv. 31). These things Paul proves from Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. It was a matter that needed proving, and would come home with striking force to the Jews to whom he was writing. They had been accustomed to regard the prophets as objects of veneration; Moses as the founder of their polity, and angels as the highest dignity next to God. By these had God communicated with their fathers, and to the words of these had they been held accountable. When, therefore, Jesus of Nazareth, then recently crucified, was presented to them as a higher object than all, it was apt to stagger their faith and interfere with the connection of things formed by their national experience. They could not resist the testimony of his resurrection, confirmed by the marvellous signs wrought by the apostles: but their understanding needed to be brought into harmony with the fact which they were obliged to receive. This is done by Paul. He puts God first. God spake; angels were but the instruments of His power; the prophets but channels of utterance; Moses but a servant, "*faithful in all his house for a testimony of those things that were to be spoken after*"; but Christ as a Son, "*the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person*"; counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he that buildeth the house hath more honour than the house (Heb. iii. 3), and God is the builder (iii. 4), and Christ was God manifested in the flesh (i Tim. iii. 16) and, therefore, the builder in manifestation, and consequently higher than all the earlier servant-instrumentalities.

Paul makes this fact the ground of his exhortation to earnest attention to what the Lord has spoken. *"Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels (the law which was given by the ministration of angels) was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord?"* Again, further on (Heb. xii. 25), *"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."* This speaking from heaven, as applied to Jesus, is intelligible in the light of his declaration, *"I came down from heaven."* The "I" in the case was the Word, *"the Holy Spirit," "the Power of the Highest"* that came upon Mary (Luke i. 35), causing the generation of the babe of Bethlehem, of whom the angel testified to Joseph, *"That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit"* (Matt. i. 20). The person called Jesus was the result of this operation of the Spirit, yet in truth the Spirit and the person were one. They could not be separated. He was the Spirit become flesh, to which was afterwards superadded at his baptism in Jordan the Spirit in pure form, descending in visible and luminous shape and filling him without measure. The Spirit at all stages was the speaker and actor by him. He was, so to speak, the Spirit in flesh form, and, therefore, spoke of antecedent existence from eternity; *"the Word was made flesh, full of grace and truth."*

The unspeakable greatness of Christ in this respect is the fulcrum of Paul's exhortation. Our attention to the word of any one depends upon their rank or relation to the matter spoken of. If we met a beggar on an estate, we should not give much heed to what he may say as to the conditions on which we might walk through it; but if we met the owner's son, the case would be different; we should give great heed. Our attention to his words would be the result of **our knowledge that he was the owner's son**. So in all matters, and above all in this matter. Knowing that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, and not a mere prophet, but one dwelling by the Spirit in the Father, and speaking with the authority of the Father, we learn to hear with reverence when he says: *"It has been said unto them of old time, thus and so, but I say unto you."* The I who thus puts himself higher than Moses is the God (in flesh-manifestation) who spoke to Moses, and who could therefore say, *"I came down from heaven."* *"Before Abraham was, I am," "the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person."* A recognition of this fact helps us to take our part in that bowing of the knee and confessing of the tongue which God requires of all flesh towards His Son Jesus Christ.

And it helps us to appreciate the great condescension of the Lord his humiliation in the days of his flesh. We can understand the force of Paul's declaration, that *"though in the form of God he thought it no robbery to be equal with God, he made himself of no reputation but took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Phil. ii. 6-9).

To see a great man performing menial offices, is striking as an example of humility. To see a servant doing it, does not speak of humility. Our appreciation of the humility of the act depends upon our knowledge of the greatness of the actor. To know, then, that he who submitted to be a man without property, though heir of all things; who refused the honours of a king, though they were his; who condescended to the society of children, though in union with Eternal Wisdom; who submitted to the derision of those who were usurpers of his power; who washed the feet of his companions, and surrendered to the violence of a rabble, though he had power to destroy them with a word; to know that he who left us this example of patience was the Father Himself, veiled in the seed of David (saying to Philip, *"Have I*

been so long with you and have ye not known me? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father also"), is to be greatly helped in our own submission to like evils, seeing that we are but sons of the dust, and having no standing before God, except such as He is pleased to grant us through Christ, His beloved.

We are drawn close to him in the contemplation of the days when he was "*God manifest in the flesh*." We not only behold the greater than Solomon, the greater than Jonas, the greater than the Temple, the Lord of the Sabbath, but we see him "*made a little lower than the angels . . . that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man*" (Heb. ii. 9). We see him as one of ourselves, though verity in his quiet dignity the majesty of heaven and earth. We see "*the captain of our salvation*," but "*made perfect through suffering*." We have "*a man of sorrows*"; of "*travail of soul*"; of bitterness and grief, of strong crying and tears, offering prayers and supplications to Him that was able to save, and was heard in that he feared (v. 7). In this we see that "*both he (Jesus) that sanctifieth, and they (the saints) who are sanctified, are all of one*"—one Father, one stock, one experience: "*for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren*." We are bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, and therefore bound up with him in the closest of connections—BRETHREN OF CHRIST. This is the highest dignity on earth, appreciated by those only who understand and see things in their ultimate bearings. It is full of blessing, now and in the age to come. It is present with us as a consolation and a joy, and a constraining power in the midst of evil and dishonour: the love of Christ is an ennobling grace in all in whom it dwells. But its true glory will be seen when the captain of our salvation stands once more on the earth, and invites his chosen companions of every kindred and nation to sit down with him in the glory, and honour, and power, incorruptibility, and joy of the kingdom of God.

Yet even this true glory springs from the present relation. We must be able to say with John: "*Now are we the sons of God*," before we can join with him in the confidence that "*when he shall appear, we shall be like him*." This is the declaration of truth contained in the name "Christadelphian"—not that all who acknowledge the name are necessarily the sons of God; but it sets before the world a great truth that has been lost sight of in the workings of the apostasy in generations past. It proclaims the scriptural standing of obedient believers as the sons of God and brethren of the Lord Jesus. Popular theology has no place for this idea. It regards man as an immortal subject of damnation rescued from hell by the interposition of the eternal God in one of His so-called triune elements, and therefore in the cowering position of a mere creature in relation to the so-called Eternal Son. The word "Christadelphian" represents the rejection of this travesty of truth, and the revival of this scriptural teaching that Adam's race is mortal, and that from among them a family is being gathered for immortality by adoption through Christ, to be sons of the Father, and rejoicing and holy brethren of him who manifested his love and his power in Israel 1,800 years ago. The name is, in fact, a symbol of the sentiment expressed by John when he said, "*Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God*" (1 John iii. 1). This sentiment is a great possession to those who stand in the favoured position. It speaks to them of the Father's friendship; it is the pledge of sins forgiven; it is the incentive to vigilance against sin, and striving after true holiness. It represents the delightful truth that the Lord, in the flesh and blood of his brethren, destroyed, through death, their great destroyer, Sin; and delivered them who, through fear of death, were subject to bondage. In all things, Paul tells us, it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the making reconciliation for the sins of the people. He is enabled to fulfil this part in that "*he himself hath suffered, being tempted*." He stands to obtain forgiveness for his brethren for all their shortcomings, and sends succour to those that are tempted. This is his

part as "*a merciful and faithful high priest.*" His mercy and his faithfulness are assured to his brethren, who strive to fulfil the part he assigns to them in his messages to the seven churches. They are not available for such as are in bondage to the world in its affections and lusts. They are not for those with whom Christ is no dweller by faith. They are not for those who are barren in the fruits of the Spirit, and who, unforgiving and great in flesh, think comfortably of themselves that they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing—in ignorance of the staring fact that towards God they are "*poor and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked.*" They are for the poor in spirit, the broken and contrite in heart, the pure of hands, the forgiving of heart, the helpers of the poor and needy, the workers of righteousness, working out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Such are tenderly commended to the mercy of the Father by the Son, whose voice is always heard; their prayers are accepted, their trespasses forgiven, and their weakness aided in the fight. They overcome at the last, and in the day of his glory they will appear in the blood-washed throng, and join in the mighty anthem of the Saviour's praise!

(Taken from "Seasons of Comfort" Volume 1, pages 59-63 by Bro. R. Roberts)