



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 01st October 2017

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Scripture: Hebrews 1:3

Subject: Part 2 – The Excellency of Christ

“who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”

At a certain point in Jesus’ ministry, there was a lot of talk about who people thought He was. Let’s just read those verses together, Matthew 16 verses 13 to 15.

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus asked the pointed question, “But who do you say that I am?” The disciples told Jesus what everyone else thought, but the only one who actually answered the question was Peter. Even though the other witnessed so much of His ministry, they didn’t answer the actual question. However, Peter spoke up, as led by the Holy Spirit and his reply set the foundation truth for the church.

The writer of Hebrews set forth, as led by the Holy Spirit, to tell us who Jesus is, and its breath taking, it's thrilling, it's challenging, and it's a blessing to our hearts and souls.

An unknown believer once noted the following,

***“Jesus Christ came from the bosom of the father to the bosom of a woman,
He took on humanity that we might put on divinity.”***

He became the Son of man in order that we might become the sons of God. He was born contrary to the law of nature, lived in poverty, was reared in obscurity and only once crossed the boundary of the land in which He was born. In infancy, He startled a king; in boyhood, He puzzled the learned scholars; In manhood, He ruled the course of nature, he walked upon the surging sea, and hushed it to sleep. He healed the multitudes without medicine and made no charge for His services. He never wrote a book yet all the libraries of the world could not hold the books about Him. He never wrote a song yet he has furnished the themes for more songs than all the songwriters together. He never built a collage yet he has more students than all the places of learning. This morning, He stands before and asks the question to each of us, “Who do you say that I am?”

Like the Old Testament we may know in part, but as we study this book, we hope and pray that we will get to know Him even more!

We can in our reading today note that the theme from last week continues, which is the ‘Super abounding excellency of the New Covenant’. The Holy Spirit develops this theme so as to take Jesus, who is the centre and circumference, the life and light of Biblical Christianity, and compare him against the old covenant and the whole way of Jewish life. When you think about the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, then Solomon’s Temple which was one of the wonders of the world, all the prophets, minor and major, all the teachers of the Law, all the ceremonies, all the feasts, the Law itself; even though as elevated, important and venerated as some of these were, yet in the presences of the Son their glories fade into utter insignificance.

I once read an allegory regarding Matthew 17 which is about the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain. Jesus was with His disciples. At first, they see only Jesus and His flashing glory but as they continued gazing, they saw Moses and Elijah. They were taken aback. Peter cried out, “If you approve Lord I will set up three booths”. While Peter was still speaking look at what happened in verse 5.

“While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”

Luke 9 gives an account of this in verse 35 it states -

And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!”

The words that follow are significant and relevant to what we are looking at. “And when the Voice was passed Jesus was found alone”. You see the glory that was associated with Moses and Elijah was so eclipsed by the infinitely greater glory connected with Christ that they faded from view. So it is here, the Holy Spirit holds all that the Jews held dear, even venerated and boasted of, and compares them to the Christ of whom is above all, and in like manner their glory fades and the Lord Jesus is found alone.

Isaiah 42:1

“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

The prophets, the angels, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, the Levitical priesthood, the Old Testament men and women of faith, each comes into view, each is compared with Christ and each in turn fades before His greater glory. Not somethings, but everything that Judaism most highly esteemed, are shown to be far, far inferior to what God has now made known in the Christian revelation.

Just as on the Mount of Transfiguration, the author of Hebrews pointed to **His radiance** –

Who been the brightness of (His) glory -v3

We see Christ’s radiance which is the brightness of the glory of God. He is the radiance of His glory. In the Greek language radiance means “to send forth light”. This represents Jesus as the manifestation of God. He expresses God to us. No one can see God and no one ever will in this life on earth. The only radiance that reaches us from God is mediated to us from Jesus Christ. Just as the rays of the sun light and warm the earth, so Jesus Christ is the glorious light of God shining into the hearts of men. Just as the sun was never without and cannot be separated from its brightness, so God was never without and cannot be separated from the glory of Christ. Never was God without Him or He without God, and never in any way can He be separated from God. Yet the brightness from the sun is not the sun. Neither is Christ God in that sense. He is fully and absolutely God, yet is a distinct Person.

We would never be able to see or enjoy God's light if we did not have Jesus to look at. Standing one day before the Temple, Jesus said,

"I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Jesus Christ is the radiance of God's glory, and He can transmit that light into your life and my life, so that we, in turn, can radiate the glory of God. We live in a dark world. There is the darkness of injustice, of failure, privation, separation, disease, death, and of much more. There is the moral darkness of men blinded by their godless appetites and passions. Into this dark world God sent His glorious Light. Without the Son of God, there is only darkness. The great tragedy, of course, is that most men do not want to even see, much less accept and live in God's light. Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that

"the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God"

God sent His light in the Person of Jesus Christ, that man might behold, accept, and radiate that light; but, Satan has moved through this world to blind the minds of men and prevent the light of the glorious gospel from shining on them. Those, however, who receive His light can say, as Paul said, in 2 Corinthians 4:6

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That is what happens when God comes into your life.

A hymn writer once wrote,

"Come to the light. 'Tis shining for thee. Sweetly the light has dawned upon me."

What a wonderful thing to realise that Jesus Christ, who is the full expression of God in human history, can come into our lives and give us light to see and to know God. His light, in fact, gives us life itself, spiritual life. His light gives us purpose, meaning, happiness, peace, joy, fellowship, everything not just in time but for all eternity.

Now we go on to the next part of verse 3 – **His Being**; *the express image of His person - v3*

Christ's next excellency is His being which is the exact representation of His nature. Jesus Christ is the express image of God. Christ not only was God manifested, He is God in substance.

Exact representation in this verse comes from the original Greek which literally means - an impression made by a die or stamp on a seal and this design on the die is reproduced on the wax. Jesus Christ is the reproduction of God. He is the perfect, personal imprint of God in time and space. Colossians 1:15 gives a similar illustration of this incomprehensible truth:

"He is the image of the invisible God."

The word image here is 'eikon' in Greek, from which we get the word icon. Eikon means a precise copy, an exact reproduction, as in a fine sculpture or portrait. To call Christ the Eikon of God means He is the exact reproduction of God.

"For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" Colossians 2:9.

The next excellency of Christ we see in verse 3 of Hebrews chapter 1 is **His Administration**.

upholding all things by the word of His power

He upholds all things by the word of His power. Christ not only made all things and will someday inherit all things, but He holds them all together in the meanwhile. The Greek word for *upholds* means *to support or to maintain*. It is used here in the present tense, implying continuous action. Everything in the universe is upheld and sustained right now by Jesus Christ. This is more true than we will ever really get our heads around. The more that is discovered about the universe, even the human body we begin to see glimpses of this truth.

An example of this is Laminin, have you ever heard of it? Well Laminin is a protein molecule in our bodies. There are thousands of proteins in the body and we still don't know how many exactly there are. This particular protein molecule is vitally important for the body. Laminin, influences each cell in differentiation, migration, and adhesion. It is an integral part of the structural scaffolding in almost every tissue of an organism and it is vital for the maintenance and survival of tissues. In other words, Laminin not just helps to manage what the cells become and where they go to in the body but it is part of the glue that holds the cells in the body together. Now you may think, well that very interesting Vincent, but what has

that got to do with Jesus upholding and sustaining the universe. Well you really have to see it – Yes it is in the shape of the cross.

It reminds me of that verse in Colossians 1 verse 17,

“And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”

We base our entire lives on the continuance and the constancy of laws. When something such as an earthquake comes along and disrupts the normal condition or operation of things even a little, the consequences are often disastrous. Can you imagine what would happen if Jesus Christ relinquished His sustaining power over the laws of the universe? We would go out of existence. If He suspended his hand to sustain and uphold us, we would all perish, in unimaginable ways.

The Greek word for upholding means to carry or support, it also means to energise or compelled as we seen in 2 Peter 1:21 from the Amplified Version –

“For no prophecy ever originated because some man willed it [to do so—it never came by human impulse], but men spoke from God who were borne along (moved and impelled) by the Holy Spirit.

The term “uphold” also refers to perseveration as well as administration. All the materials that constitute this earth, were called into being and arranged in their order, so too were every other thing in the heavens around us. Everything in this universe is preserved from running into confusion or reverting back into nothing. The whole universe hangs on His arms sort to speak. His unsearchable wisdom, and boundless power are manifested in governing and directing the complicated movements of animate as well as inanimate, rational and irrational beings for His own glory. He does this by the power of His Word.

He is the Sustainer of the universe and yet Mark 10 verse 45 tells us that Jesus said –

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

He is Lord over all, He has been given power over all flesh as seen in John 17:2:

“as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.”

He is not only at the head of the spiritual realm, but he “upholds all things”. All movements, developments and actions are borne up and directed by the word of His power. Glimpses of this power of administration flashed forth even in the days of His flesh. The winds and the waves were subservient to His word. Sickness and disease fled before His command. Demons were subject to His authoritative bidding. Even the dead came forth in response to His mighty Word. All through the ages, even to-day, the whole of creation is directed by the will and word of its Heir, Maker, and Upholder. Even you and I who are His children.

The next part of Christ’s excellency we see in verse 3 of Hebrews chapter 1 is ***His Expiation ..when He had by Himself purged our sins***

Here is something still more astounding. Expiation is the act of making amends or reparation for guilt or wrongdoing. It is the act of atonement, it is the act of His sacrifice on the cross for our sins. Striking is it to behold the point at which this statement is introduced. The cross was the great stumbling-block to the Jews. Yet the writer of Hebrews does not apologise for the death of the Son. Remember death by the cross was a huge shame, but here he includes it as among His highest glories. It was not a failure but a victory. The putting away of the sins of His people was an even greater and grander work than was the making of the worlds or the upholding of all things by His mighty power. His sacrifice for sins has brought greater glory to the Godhead and greater blessing to the redeemed than have His works of creation or providence.

The angels that witnessed creation looked on in wonder of the cross – 1 Peter 1:12

“To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.”

Just think about it, He who sustains and upholds the universe in the palms of his hands, is the same who held out his hand as they were nailed to the cross. Colossians 2:14 &15 -

“having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”

Why has this wonderful and glorious Being, in whom all things are summed up, and who is before all things the Father's delight and the Father's glory; why has this infinite light, this infinite power, this infinite majesty come down to our poor earth?

For what purpose? To shine? To show forth the splendour of His majesty? To teach heavenly wisdom? To rule with just and holy right? No. He came to purge our sins. To reconcile us to Holy God. What height of glory! What depths of abasement! Infinite in His majesty, and infinite in His self-humiliation, and in the depths of His love. What a glorious Lord! And what an awful sacrifice of unspeakable love, to purge our sins by Himself!

This has reference to the atonement which He has made. The metaphor of "purging" is borrowed from the language of the Mosaic economy—Hebrews 9:22,

"And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission."

The merits of Christ's sacrifice and the efficacy thereof denotes a finished work, literally, "having purged." Once and for all. An additional and humbling thought is pointed by this metaphor—the filth of our sins, needed "purging" away. The value and efficacy of Christ's sacrifice is set before us. His blood is distinguished from that of the legal and ceremonial purifications. Ceremonial sacrifice could only cover their sin but it could not take it away completely, nor was it meant to —Hebrews 10:4.

"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins."

The manner and power of this purification forms the subject of this whole Epistle. Yet in verse 3, this short expression, 'by Himself He purged our sins,' sums it up for us. By Jesus, Himself; the Son of God, the eternal Word in humanity. Jesus: the priest, who is sacrifice, yes, altar, and everything that is needed for full and real expiation and reconciliation. Here is fulfilled what was foreshadowed on the day of atonement, when an atonement was made for Israel, to cleanse them from all sins, that they may be clean from all their sins before the Lord (Leviticus 16:30). Our great High Priest tells us, "You are clean this day before God from all your sins. He is the fulfilment and the reality, because He is the Son of God."

1 John 1:7 –

"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

The church is purchased by the blood of Him who is God, Acts 20:28 –

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Behold the perfection of the sacrifice in the infinite dignity of the incarnate Son. Sin is taken away. Oh, what a wonderful thing is this!”

Finally in verse 3 we see **Christ’s Exaltation**

...sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

This is unspeakably blessed. The One who descended into such unfathomable depths of shame, who humbled Himself and became as Philippians 2 verse 8 says *“obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,”* has been highly exalted above all principalities, powers and dominions, and every name which is named; not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. It is very important to carefully mark the connection between the two wondrous statements: *“obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,”* and what we find here in verse 3:

“when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

We cannot rightly think of the God-man in Heaven, without realising that the very circumstance of His being there, shows, in itself, that “our sins” are put away for ever. The present possession of glory by the Mediator is the conclusive evidence that our sins are put away. What blessed connection is there, then between our peace of soul, and His glory!

“Sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Two things are here denoted.

First, high honour: **sitting**. In Scripture, is often a posture of dignity, when superiors sit before inferiors as seen in Job 29:7,8; Daniel 7:9&10 and Revelation 5:13. Though He will vacate that seat when He descends into the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16) to receive His blood-bought people unto Himself, yet it is clear from Revelation 22:1 that this position of highest honour and glory belongs to Christ for ever and ever.

Secondly, it signifies **rest**, cessation from His sacrificial services and sufferings. It has often been pointed out that no provision was made for Israel’s priests to sit down: there was

no chair in the Tabernacle's furniture. And why? Because their work was never completed which we see in Hebrews 10:1 to 4:

“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. ² For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. ³ But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.”

But Christ's work of expiation is completed; on the cross He declared as seen in John 19:30

“So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.”

In proof of this, He is now seated on High.

The term “Majesty on high” refers to God Himself. “Majesty” signifies such greatness that makes one to be honoured and preferred above all; hence, it is a delegated title which is proper to kings. In our passage it denotes God's supreme sovereignty. It is conveyed here to emphasise and magnify the exaltation of the Saviour, who is elevated to the highest possible dignity and position.

The “right hand” speaks of power and honour.

“On high” is, in the Greek, a compound word, used nowhere else in the New Testament. Literally it signifies the highest height and the most elevated exaltation that could be conceived of or is possible. Thus, we are shown that the highest seat in the universe now belongs to Him who once had no-where to lay His head.

We can observed in verses 2 and 3 that the Holy Spirit briefly set forth the three great offices of the Mediator.

- First, His prophetic: He is the final Spokesman of God.
- Second, His kingly: His royal majesty—upholding all things, and that, by the word of His power, which affirms His absolute sovereignty.
- Third, His priestly: the two parts of which are expiation of His people's sins and intercession at God's right hand.

In conclusion, let me point out that everything in these opening verses of Hebrews is in striking contrast from what Israel enjoyed under the old covenant.

They had prophets but now Christ is the final Spokesman.

They were His people yet all you truly believe and follow Jesus are God's people.

Abraham was constituted "heir of the world", Romans 4:13

For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Yet Christ is the "Heir" of the universe and his people are his co-heirs.

Moses made the tabernacle while Christ made the universe

The law furnished "a shadow of good things to come" while Christ is the fulfilment of all that was prophesied.

In Old Testament times, Israel enjoyed theophanic manifestations of Christ but now He is revealed as the Image of God's person.

Moses bore the burden of Israel - Numbers 11:11 and 12;

"So Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favour in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me?"¹² Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore^{est} to their fathers?"

Yet as we examined today, Christ upholds all things.

The sacrifices of old did not take sins away, however, Christ's sacrifice did, once and for all.

Israel's high priests never sat down but Christ has, at the right hand of the Father, continually interceding for us.

Amen.