Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews - Lesson 2

Louis T. Talbot

Biola University

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Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews

LESSON II

THE SON OF GOD IS "BETTER THAN" THE PROPHETS.

Hebrews 1:1-3

The prophets in Israel were honored and revered by those Israelites who loved God. Those who obeyed Jehovah listened to the message of the prophets, a message of warning and encouragement and instruction that has come down to the world in the form of many Old Testament books. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit took the good things of Judaism and compared them with the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to prove that the Son of God was "better than" the very best in Judaism, He began by showing that Christ is "better than" the prophets. God has spoken through those men of old who had given to His people precious portions of His Word; but in the Son, God spoke completely and finally to a sinful, erring world, in a voice which could be uttered in no other way!

The three opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews show the striking contrast between the prophets and the Son of God. They also set forth in epitome the entire message of the epistle. If we lived a thousand years, we could never exhaust their meaning; for they give one of the most profound and sublime of all the portraits of the eternal Son of God to be found in His written Word. In our lesson for today we can only touch the fringes of these deep and wonderful lines; yet so simple are they that a child can understand their spiritual teaching, by faith such as God gives to little children. Throughout all eternity we shall be finding out new treasures concerning our Lord's Person and work and position of authority, as outlined in these three verses which open the Epistle to the Hebrews. Let us turn to them and read them; we quote them here from the Revised Version, which makes the meaning very clear:

"God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners,
hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds (i.e., 'ages'); who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image (or 'impress') of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Perhaps the contrasts will stand out more clearly in our minds if we compare each detail of these opening words:

"GOD . . . HATH . . . SPOKEN"

"By the Prophets" "In His Son" "In time past" "At the end of these days" "Unto the fathers" "Unto us" "By divers portions" (i.e., "fragments") "In divers manners" "Once for all!"

Through the Written Word of God Through the Living Word of God

"GOD . . . HATH . . . SPOKEN . . . BY THE PROPHETS"

—A PIECEMEAL REVELATION

When the Holy Spirit wrote that He had spoken "by the prophets" "by divers portions," He meant that He had given a little of the truth of God here and a little there, in fragments. No one prophet spoke all the truth at one time; it was a piecemeal revelation. To Abraham God spoke a little; to Moses, a little more; to Isaiah, a little more; to Daniel, a little more. And on throughout all the Old Testament period God was adding, little by little, to His revealed Word.

For example, God told Adam and Eve, when He spoke to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, that "the seed of woman"; that is, the virgin-born Son of God, would "bruise the serpent's head." It was the first promise of a Redeemer, whose physical body, represented in Gen. 3:15 by the "heel," was to be bruised on Calvary's Cross. About two thousand years passed. Then God told Abraham that the promised "seed" should come through Abraham's family. Yet other years passed; then God told Jacob that the King of Israel should come through the tribe of Judah. Still other centuries went by; and in the time of David God promised that Israel's Messiah and King should come through David's royal family. Again about three centuries passed; and then God told Isaiah that Immanuel should be born of the virgin. At about the same time He spoke through Micah, saying that He should be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. Thus, over a period of about four thousand years, God was revealing, a little here and a little there, that the Redeemer was to come through a certain family of a certain tribe of a certain nation; and that He was to be born in a miraculous manner in a certain city. Meanwhile, God was also revealing, a little here and a little there, that the promised Redeemer was to suffer crucifixion before He "entered into his glory"; that He was to be despised and rejected of men, betrayed by His own familiar friend, buried with the rich in His death, raised from the dead, to ascend into heaven and sit down on the right hand of the Majesty on high—a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

But, you say, that sounds like the Epistle to the Hebrews; and so it does; for the Epistle to the Hebrews is nothing more or less than the New Testament explanation of the Jewish Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel's Messiah and Priest and King. A little here and a little there, God had prepared His people for the coming of Christ; but, at best, it had been a piecemeal revelation. In His Son He spoke "once for all!" The Old Testament revelation, spoken by the prophets, was partial and incomplete, but the revelation spoken by the Son of God was final and complete. God has nothing more to say, other than the message He spoke through the Lord Jesus Christ. What a proof that Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, was "better than" Israel's prophets, mighty and godly though they were.

When the Holy Spirit wrote that He had spoken "by the prophets" "in divers manners," He meant that He had spoken sometimes by prophecy, sometimes by history, again by ordinance or dream or vision or parable or earthquake or fire or tempest. Sometimes God sent an angel to speak His message. To Moses He spoke through the burning bush, a manifestation of the Shekinah Glory. To Daniel He sent
the Angel Gabriel. To David He sent Nathan, the prophet. Verily, He spoke “in divers manners” “in time past . . . unto the Father”.

“GOD. . .HATH. . .SPOKEN. . .IN HIS SON”—
“ONCE FOR ALL!”

But “at the end of these days”; that is, at the end of the Old Testament period, God spoke “once for all” in His Son, the Living Word of the eternal God. Through Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Bible, through Psalmist and prophet and historian and judge, God had spoken of the coming Redeemer. Then the Redeemer came; and by the incarnation of the Son of God, the world received God’s full and complete and final message. The prophets had realized that their writings were only fragmentary, at best; they pointed their readers on to Christ. Concerning His coming, Moses had written saying,

“The Lord thy God shall raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken . . . And the Lord said unto me . . . I will put my words into his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Deut. 18:15-18).

God knew that, even after all the Old Testament prophets had spoken for thousands of years concerning the coming of the Savior, He would yet have very much more to say to a sinful, guilty world; therefore, He had told Moses to say that He would yet speak “once for all” in His Son. Malachi was the last of the prophets. For “four-hundred silent years” there was no added voice from heaven. Then “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4). And in that Son He showed His very heart of grace and forgiving love.

In Old Testament days God had spoken through the sacrifice of a little lamb; then “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,” spoke pardon and peace to the sinning heart. In Old Testament days God spoke through the high priest and the king and the tabernacle and the temple. He gave to Israel an altar, a candlestick, a mercy seat—all foreshadowing the glories of the Person and work of Christ. But the time came when God spoke everything at once.

My friends, it is our business to find out what God said when He sent His Son into the world. There was something that He could not say through the prophets or through the shadow of the Old Testament, or through the ritual of the tabernacle and the temple. To tell out fully what was in His mind, it was necessary that there be the incarnation of His own beloved Son; and it is your business and mine to understand Christ—who He is, what He has done for us, what He has said concerning Himself and His salvation. When the Lord Jesus was upon earth, the Father spoke at His baptism, and again at His transfiguration, saying,

“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matt. 17:5).

And to Nicodemus the Lord Jesus said,

“For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

In His incarnation, the Lord Jesus was revealing the heart of God. Through the peacemeal words spoken by the prophets, God had revealed something of His holiness, His righteousness, His justice, His glory. But only in His Son could He make known His mercy and forgiving love. It was the only way you could know, my unsaved friend, that God loves you. Not even what Moses wrote or Isaiah or all the prophets could tell you, as the Son of God did, the height and the length and the depth and the breadth of God’s forgiving love. “The heavens declare the glory of God.” The vast universe, the whirling planets, the miracle of life—these speak to us of the power and glory and wisdom of God. But only the Son can tell us that “God is love.” He alone can wash away our sins, and give us everlasting life. In His incarnation and life and death on Calvary, the Son of God unveiled the very heart of God—the sinner’s forgiving Lord.

For nearly two thousand years there has been no voice from heaven, for none is needed. God has spoken completely
and finally in His Son. Everything He has to say to sinful man concerning sin and salvation, concerning eternal condemnation and everlasting life, has been spoken in His Son. God has nothing more to say; for in Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

There are those who call themselves “natural religionists.” They go to the woods on the Lord’s Day, and claim to worship the God of nature. But what does nature tell them about the love of God for lost sinners? You may take the tiniest insect that lives but for a day, put it under the microscope, and you will find that it is perfectly fashioned—by the all-wise and all-powerful God. You may dissect the flower of the field; and you will observe that it is delicately and perfectly formed—by the hand of the great God of heaven. But, my friend, what is there in nature to tell you of Calvary’s Cross? If nature could tell of God’s salvation, then poor India would find God without the help of the missionary. In India there are mountains and rivers and lakes, flowers and natural beauty in abundance; but in India there is sin; there is darkness in India—misery and wretchedness and superstition and fear and despair. India needs the Son of God; India and all the dark places of the earth need to know the Son of God and His spoken message of forgiving love. India, as well as all this war-torn, sin-weary world, needs to know that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (II Cor. 5:19). John the Baptist summarized the message when he said, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18).

When John said that the Son had “declared” God, he meant that He had “spoken him out,” revealed Him to mankind. My dear brother, if you want to know God’s mind and heart, then turn to the four Gospels, and learn who the Lord Jesus Christ is and why He came into the world. When you see the Lord Jesus, you see God; when you hear Him, you hear God; when you believe Him, you believe God.

It is wonderful to know that “unto the fathers”; that is, the Hebrew fathers—for this is the Epistle to the Hebrews

—it is wonderful to know that “unto the fathers” God spoke of the coming Saviour. It strengthens our faith in the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God to know that it was God who spoke through the prophets. It was a miraculous revelation—this Book, both Old and New Testaments—written in different ages; in different countries; by men of various ranks, occupations, and methods of thought; in different languages; through friendly letter, history, prophecy, ordinance, and psalm. It strengthens our faith in the supernaturally inspired Word of God to know that it was He who spoke “unto the fathers” “by the prophets.” It strengthens our faith in the Bible to know that although it is composed of sixty-six books, yet it is one Book; that it has one message, in spite of the “divers portions” and “divers manners,” by which it was handed down to man. These things tell us anew that

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (II Tim. 3:16); that “Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (II Peter 1:21).

It strengthens our faith in God’s infallible Word to know that it is authentic, authoritative, and divine. But nothing can compare with the Living Word, spoken in the incarnation, in the sinless life, in the mighty works, in the divine teachings, in the vicarious atonement, in the bodily resurrection, in the ascension into heaven, in the intercessory work, and in the coming glory of our Lord Jesus, the only begotten Son of God! In Him “God... hath... spoken!” And the message He has spoken is that He loves us, even though we are poor, unworthy, vile creatures of dust. We are the objects of His undying, unfathomable love!

THE SEVEN-FOLD DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST’S FULNESS AND GLORY

Following the comparison between the prophets and the Son of God, adding weight to the argument that the Son is “better than” the prophets, the Holy Spirit describes Jesus, the Son of God, in the sublime, profound, seven-fold description of His fulness and glory, of His Person and work
and exalted position, recorded in verses two and three of this opening chapter of Hebrews. Let us outline this description:

1. The Son is the appointed Heir of all things.
2. The Son is the One by whom the ages were planned.
3. The Son is the Reveal of God's Glory.
4. The Son is the express Image of His substance.
5. The Son is the Upholder of all things—the God of Providence.
6. The Son is the Saviour of sinners.
7. The Son is the King-Priest, seated “on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

There are few verses in the Bible of such brevity which give so comprehensive a sweep of the glories of the Person and work and position of the Lord Jesus Christ, as do these lines which we have just read. Here we have, in brief, the content of the entire Epistle; here we have summarized the glories of our Lord's Being and of His ministry for lost sinners—at the cross and in the heavenlies. None of these things could ever be said of the prophets, not even the greatest of them! What an argument for Christ's superiority over all the mighty prophets of God! How complete and how excellent is His glory! It is impossible to mistake the identity of the Son of God as the Second Person of the blessed Trinity, as we read these inspired words.

Before we consider in some detail, each of these seven descriptive terms, given to the Son of God, let us note that they present: (1) The glories of His Person, as the Effulgence of God's Glory, the express Image of His Person; (2) the sufficiency of His work, as the Saviour of sinners, as well as the Creator of the ages and the Upholder of all things; (3) the glory of His position, as the Heir of all things, seated on “the right hand of the Majesty on high,” just waiting till all His enemies shall be made His footstool.

It is significant that the Holy Spirit does not mention here our Lord's mighty miracles or His divine teachings. Even His sinless life on earth is passed over here, although that was necessary to His redemptive work. Indeed, He was the world's omnipotent Miracle-worker; but here the Holy Spirit emphasizes His personal glory, His vicarious atonement, and His position of power at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Why? Because the Holy Spirit knew that unbelieving Jews were denying these very things about our Lord. He knew that throughout all the centuries, even till this very day in which we live, false teachers would deny the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hundreds stand in pulpits today, “blind leaders of the blind,” denying these essentials to the Christian faith. But their denial does not rob our Lord of His eternal deity, of His uncreated glory, and of His omnipotent power as the King-Priest, who will one day be acknowledged by men, angels, and demons as the “Heir of all things.”

There is no reference in this seven-fold description of His fulness and glory to His raising Lazarus from the grave. He did raise the dead and heal the sick, in order to prove His credentials to be Israel's King and the world's Saviour; He did these mighty works to show His heart of compassion for a needy world. But He came into the world to die for sinners. He came to reveal the heart of God, to manifest His glory, and to purge our sins. These are the facts about His Person and work and position that the Holy Spirit records here in this seven-fold description of His fulness and glory.
that He appoints Christians their various spheres of service. Then why—since the Son is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father—why does the Father appoint the Son to be "heir of all things"? The answer is that, as a Man, the Son has been appointed Heir by the Father. It is His humanity that is in view here. From all eternity the Son has been one with the Father and with the Spirit. But when He laid aside His glory—not His deity—He became obedient to His Father's will, as a Man. He gave up His place of equality with the Father, becoming subservient to the will of the Triune God, in order to die for sinners. At the time of His incarnation, He took the place of a Man, humble, lowly, poor, obedient. The Apostle Paul beautifully expressed the motive of our Lord in laying aside His glory when He said,

"Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Cor. 8:9).

And the Lord Himself said, when He was on earth,

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58).

In the world which He had created, the Lord Jesus lived in poverty. And poverty is the state of having nothing. To be unable to meet one's personal needs—that is poverty. My friend, no poverty-stricken person in the world today can know the depths of poverty to which the Lord Jesus came; for He left so much glory when He came down from heaven! On one occasion, when the unbelieving Jews sought occasion to ensnare Him, asking if He should pay tribute to Caesar, the Lord did not even have a penny, with which to illustrate His teaching; for He said,

"Shew me a penny" (Luke 20:24). "Bring me a penny, that I may see it" (Mark 12:15).

Moreover, it was His own voluntary act which led our Lord to leave heaven's glory, to live in poverty among men, to suffer and die for our sins. And because He went to the cross and died; then in His resurrection, as a Man, He was appointed by God to be the Heir of all things. It was this voluntary subservience and this appointed exaltation that Paul had in mind when he wrote as the Holy Spirit guided him, saying in Phil. 2:5-11:

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery (i. e., 'a thing to be grasped after') to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him 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. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

We must ever remember that, even when Christ had "not where to lay his head," He was still the Second Person of the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and with the Spirit. It was as a Man—the God-Man that He was "appointed" to be the Heir of all things.

The universe, of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the appointed Heir, includes all things which He made, not merely this earth. Indeed, the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us in another place that "all things" were made "for him," as well as "by him" (Heb. 2:10). And, of course, "all things," all of God's universe, include this world. Of His dominion over the universe "there shall be no end." I am glad this little earth, little by way of comparison with the millions of stars and other planets, is going to be included in our Lord's dominion! As we have seen from the prophetic Scriptures, during our evening broadcasts, the heavens will one day roll back like a scroll, and the Lord Jesus will return in power and great glory, to be recognized by all of His universe as King of kings and Lord of lords. In that day He will be crowned "with many crowns." He shall sit upon the throne
of His "father David." He shall rule "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (Psalm 72:8). Every star, every planet will be under His control. Men, angels and demons will acknowledge Him as the rightful King of kings. And, my friends, all this is sure to come to pass—it seems in the not too far distant future—all because the Lord of Glory "humbled himself," and went to the cross to die for fallen man.

As a Man, He became obedient unto His Father in heaven; therefore, the Father exalted Him to the highest place in the heavens. Everything and everyone in heaven and in earth must answer to Him. What a glorious Saviour we have!

Not only so; but this Heir of all things, even the Lord Jesus Christ, hath made us who love Him to be "joint-heirs" with Him! (Rom. 8:17). Christ, the appointed Heir of all things, belongs to us and we belong to Him! Just as a bride becomes a joint-heir of everything which forms the estate of her husband, so the bride of Christ, which is His church, has been made an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. Such an inheritance is far beyond human hopes or dreams. Only the God of eternal love could have planned and wrought out such a salvation!

My unsaved friend, do not continue to turn your back upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The nations today which have forgotten God, the nations which are substituting the gods of war and heathenism for the only true God, will go down in defeat and shame and eternal punishment. Individuals who reject the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of sinners, will go into everlasting torment. Do not be among that number. Look to Calvary's Cross, and be saved; be born again by the shed blood of the Lamb of God. Then you will not only be saved for all eternity; but you will also become a joint-heir with Christ, the Son of God, the appointed Heir of all things.

THE SON, BY WHOM THE AGES WERE FRAMED

"God . . . hath . . . spoken . . . by his Son . . . by whom also he made the ages" (R. V.).

Although the Lord Jesus is the Creator of all things, yet the passage before us means that He framed the "ages." The Greek word here does not mean "worlds"; it means "ages." We know the Bible teaches that Christ did make the whole universe, of which this earth is but a small part. The sun, the moon, and the stars are the work of the hands of the Lord Jesus. The One who, "in the beginning," said, "Let there be light," is none other than the eternal Living Word of God, of whom John wrote, saying,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1-3).

Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians, saying that "all things were created" "by him . . . and for him"—another reference to His being the Heir, as well as the Creator! (See Col. 1:15-17.) The whole Bible teaches that Jesus of Nazareth was the Creator, the eternal God. But in Heb. 1:2 Paul is thinking of Christ's having made or ordered or framed the "ages." He planned the age of law, the age of grace, the millennial age—all the ages of all time. And God framed the ages with respect to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

My friends, how is this age of grace going to end? We know the Bible teaches that it will end in confusion of nations, in utter darkness which will cover the earth during the reign of Satan's Antichrist. But the end of this age of grace will go down in defeat and shame and eternal punishment. Individuals who reject the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of sinners, will go into everlasting torment. Do not be among that number. Look to Calvary's Cross, and be saved; be born again by the shed blood of the Lamb of God. Then you will not only be saved for all eternity; but you will also become a joint-heir with Christ, the Son of God, the appointed Heir of all things.
have taken His rightful throne; then throughout all the ages to come He will be the Supreme Head of all of God’s universe. The Triune God has so appointed Him to an eternal kingdom, a kingdom that shall bring in everlasting righteousness. Yes; the ages were framed by Him and for Him who died, that we might live.

My dear friends, that is the whole story of the Bible. The theme of all the ages is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners. When man innocent failed God and sinned, then God promised that the “seed of woman,” even the virgin-born Son of God, should bruise the serpent’s head. As we saw earlier in this lesson in this first promise of the Redeemer, God told “beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” The serpent, God said, would bruise the heel of “the seed of woman”; and Satan, that old serpent, the devil, bruised the heel of the Son of God when he put Him on the cross. But the day will come when the serpent’s head will be forever bruised. Potentially, Satan’s power is already vanquished by Christ. When He arose from the tomb, the Lord took the sting out of sin and death. And in that coming day, Satan will be finally and literally robbed of his power over fallen humanity. That will come to pass when the glories of Christ are fully recognized throughout all God’s universe. The Lord Jesus will then be the Head over all principalities and powers, over some of which Satan now exercises authority. Satan is the usurper; but he will one day be forever put down! My friend, you have missed the very heart of the story of the Garden of Eden if you have failed to see that Christ is its central theme.

And what is the theme of the Old Testament ages that followed? Conscience, human government, promise, law? What of all the tabernacle and temple service? What of all the offerings on Jewish altars? What of all the feasts of Jehovah? What of the high priest and his sons, and their garments for glory and for beauty? I am glad that we have studied in our former radio Bible lessons something of the “sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow,” as they were eloquently foreshadowed in the typical teachings of the Law of Moses.

Now the Hebrew Christians, to whom Paul addressed this epistle, were well informed about the ages into which the Old Testament was divided. But they failed to see that those ages had been framed with a view of telling “beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” Consequently, Paul was proving to them the very heart of the Scriptures—both Old and New. He was telling the Hebrew Christians that by the Lord Jesus Christ the ages were framed, and that the ages told forth the glories of His Person and the power of His work of redeeming love.

THE REVEALER OF GOD’S GLORY

“God . . . hath . . . spoken . . . by his Son . . . the brightness (i. e. ‘effulgence’) of his glory.”

That is to say that the Lord Jesus is the out-shining of God’s splendor, the Revealer of His uncreated glory. What the sunbeam is to the sun, the Lord Jesus is to the Triune God. The sunbeam is the effulgence or the brightness of the sun; even so the Lord Jesus is the out-shining of the Father and of the Spirit. Repeatedly the Scriptures tell us that “God is light.” And they tell us also that He is the “Sun of righteousness” (Mal. 4:2). Christ is the Effulgence of that Sun. He is the Sunbeam which shines in our darkened hearts to “give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (II Cor. 4:6). It is the Holy Spirit Himself who tells us that Christ is the Manifestor of God, the One who has come out from the Father.

Now the sun and the sunbeam have the same nature. They are united. You can not separate the one from the other. Both exist at the same moment. If there is a sunbeam, there must also be a sun. If there be a sun, there must also be a sunbeam. Therefore, the sunbeam comes out from the sun, is of the same nature as the sun, is one with it, is co-existent with it. What a picture of the relationship between God, the Father; and God, the Son!

The Gospel According to John is literally filled with our Lord’s own statements concerning this eternal truth. We quote just one or two of these here:
“I proceedeth forth and came from God” (John 8:42).

“I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world again, I leave the world, and go to the Father” (John 16:27, 28).

Christ is “the brightness of his glory,” the Effulgence of the glory of God!

The sun is up there in the heavens; but, my friend, you can not see the sun; you see only the sunbeams, the rays of light that come from the sun. You do not actually see the sun. You see the out-shining of the sun. Likewise, “no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared (or ‘revealed’) him” (John 1:18). You and I may know what God is like only by looking at the Heavenly Sunbeam!

The sunbeam can go everywhere, but it never becomes tainted with anything that is soiled. A sunbeam shines, not only upon the orange groves and upon the city parks; but it also shines upon the dirty alleys, upon the rubbish heap, and upon the junk pile. The sunbeam can purify the soiled places; but the soiled places can not contaminate the sunbeam. No matter how corrupt a pile of rubbish may be, that corruption can not be imparted to the sunbeam, because the sunbeam is the out-shining of the light which is the sun. The sunbeam can transform the corrupt thing, but corruption cannot soil the sunbeam.

Even so the Lord of Glory walked among wicked men; yet never was His holy soul contaminated by the sins which He beheld. He ate with sinners, for whom He came to die; yet He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26). He loved the sinner; but He hated the sinner’s sin. He alone is the One “altogether lovely”!

The Lord Jesus is to the New Testament saint what the Shekinah Glory was to Israel of old, a visible manifestation of the glory of God. Moses led Israel through the wilderness for forty years; and God led Moses and Israel by the pillar of cloud and fire, the Shekinah Glory. When the pillar of cloud and fire rested, Israel rested and pitched the tabernacle, the glory of God filling the Holy of Holies. When the Shekinah Glory lifted from above the tabernacle, the children marched on their journey. Thus God led His people over a long and dreary pilgrimage. Even so Christ is the Light of the world, the Christian’s Guide through the wilderness of this godless earth. He is the out-shining of the glory of God. He is the theme of the Bible. His face is the Light of heaven and earth!

The story is told of an artist of the middle ages, who portrayed the Holy Grail. You are familiar with the legend of this cup, from which the Lord is supposed to have drunk at the last supper. The Holy Grail was a most beautiful cup, according to the legend. The knights of old took long pilgrimages in search of it. The painter of the middle ages who portrayed it spent many hours over his canvass. He painted a picture of the Lord Jesus at the last supper, the Holy Grail in the hand of the Christ. It was a magnificent goblet, hollowed with a heavenly light. Beautifully traced was every line, each pattern. Then when visitors looked at the finished picture, they exclaimed at the exquisite beauty of the Holy Grail.

The artist realized that he had made a grave mistake. No one seemed to see the Lord in the picture he had painted. All saw only the cup. He took his brush and resumed his work. This time he made the goblet an ordinary vessel, putting all his skill into portraying the face of Christ. And the Lord Jesus was then the One whom people saw as they beheld the work of art.

So it is with the perfect work which the Holy Spirit has done in writing the Word of God. He has made Jesus the central theme—from Genesis to Revelation. Only as we behold His face in the portrait that is painted on the pages of the sacred Scriptures, only then do we see God—and His eternal love for lost mankind. Christ is the Revealer of God’s glory!

“THE EXPRESS IMAGE OF HIS PERSON”

“God ... hath ... spoken ... by his Son ... the express image of his person.”
The Revised Version translates these words, "... the very image of his substance"; while the marginal rendering is, "... the impress of his substance." The thought expressed here is that, just as the seal makes an exact impression on the molten wax, so Christ is the "very image" of the "substance" of God. The seal makes this impression upon substance; likewise Christ represents God in the form of human flesh. Therefore, we can understand the very nature of God, because He has revealed Himself in His Son. That is what John the Baptist meant when, guided by the Holy Spirit, he said,

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (i.e., 'led him forth' into full revelation.)"

(See John 1:18.)

Let us note that the word "image" is stronger even than the term "likeness." Your photograph may be a likeness of you, but it is not the very image of your person. An image is an exact counterpart of the one it represents; so that every image is a likeness, though the likeness is not an image. A likeness may misrepresent the one it is supposed to portray, but not so an image. The Lord Jesus is the exact Image of the Father's Person! What Christ is in every detail—in thought, in word, in deed, in Person—everything that He is in His Being, that is what God is. My dear brother, if you want to see an exact image of God, then look at the One who came from God. Behold Him as He took little babies in His arms to bless them. See Him among the sick, among the derelicts, among the human wrecks. Hear Him telling the woman who had missed the way,

"Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more"

(John 8:11).

Watch Him as He stands by the grave of Lazarus, weeping for sympathy and compassion. Behold Him shedding tears over His beloved Jerusalem, yearning over His rebellious people, Israel. Behold Him hanging on the accursed tree, dying for sinners—Jew and Gentile. Look at the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will see unveiled the very heart of God.

This truth should gladden all believers, many of whom are afraid to die, afraid of God. They say that they are not afraid to meet Christ, but that they are afraid to meet God, not realizing that Christ Himself is very God. I remember talking to a woman in Minneapolis some years ago. She was not a member of my church, but did belong to another branch of Christianity. She said she believed that Christ died for her sins, but that she was terribly afraid to die. "I am afraid to meet God," she told me. "But," I said, "are you afraid to meet the Lord Jesus Christ?" "No," she replied; "that would be different." Then I tried to show her that it would not be different at all, because the Lord Jesus is the "express image" of His Person, the very Impress of His Substance.

Perhaps an illustration will help us to realize the forcefulness of these words, "the express image of his person." Two eggs are like each other; but neither of the two being derived from the other, neither is the image of the other. Two men are alike; yet neither is the image of the other. However, the English coin called a sovereign, the equivalent of five dollars of American money, has stamped upon one side the head of the king of England. Now that head is not only a likeness; it is also the image of the king. In other words, the face that is on the sovereign is a copy of the king, and it could not exist apart from the king. Yet even the head upon that coin could not be called the "express image" of the king. The Lord Jesus is not merely the likeness of God; He is not merely the image of God; He is the "express image" of God. What God is Christ is; and what Christ is God is. He is "the express image of his person."

The text here says that God is a Person. Many false religions today teach that God is impersonal, that He is an influence or force that is sometimes called "divine principle." Yet these false systems call themselves Christian. No, my friend; God is a Person—three Persons in one God, the Holy Trinity. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three Persons in one God—these three Persons are set forth in Scripture
as very real and very personal. God lives; He wills; He reasons; He loves; He exercises all the attributes of personality. And here, in Heb. 1:3, we find one of the many plain statements of Scripture, all of which tell us that our "God was in Christ," a living loving Lord.

The many promises of God tell us that He is a Person. He bids us call upon Him in the day of trouble, and assures us that He will deliver us. Indeed, He has delivered us from danger and harm; He has gone with us through sorrow and trial; and He will deliver us, even till He comes or until He takes us home to heaven. I wonder if I am talking to one who feels that he has not a friend in the world? Let me tell you, my brother, God is interested in you. And if you want to know who God is, then read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Read the message of the Gospel if you want to know that God loves sinners; for the Gospels tell the story of Jesus; and Jesus is very God, "the express image of his person." He is the Creator; therefore, He must have existed before there was a universe. He must be above it, independent of it, not an impersonal force or influence or principle. He is the God-Man who came into the world which He created with one purpose, to die for sinners, to redeem them from eternal condemnation unto everlasting life.

THE UPHOLDER OF ALL THINGS

"God . . . hath . . . spoken . . . by his Son . . . upholding all things by the word of his power . . ."

As the Upholder of all things, the Lord Jesus is the God of providence.

"By him all things consist (i. e., 'hold together')"
(Col. 1:17).

He is not only the Creator; He is the One by whom all things hold together; and He upholds all things by the word of His power. Scientific men have sought to find the power that keeps God's universe in place, every planet in its own position. They have sought to find the power that gives the planets their relation to the sun. Some call it the power of attraction. But in the final analysis, my friend, the power that controls the millions of stars as they whirl in space is none other than the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, not some impersonal force, but our personal Saviour is the One who upholds "all things by the word of his power." He sends the rain and makes the plant life grow. He controls the seasons, day and night, storm and sunshine. He controls the solar system, the ocean tides, the currents of the sea. He is, in very truth, the God of providence!

Not long ago I listened to a noted astronomer lecture in the planetarium on the Hollywood Hills. I was awed by his description of the vastness of the heavens, revealed in part to those who see them through a telescope. He told us that the sun is so large that, if it were hollow, we could pour into it one million, two hundred thousand earths just like this one on which we live, and still have room for four million, nine hundred moons to lie around the inside edge. He told us also that there are some fixed stars that are five times bigger than the sun which shines in the heavens. Neptune, he said, is seventy-five times bigger than the earth on which we live, and is about three billion miles away. And yet we can not see a planet such as Neptune without the aid of a power telescope. Mercury, he told us, is nearest to the sun, and whirls around in its orbit at the rate of a hundred and ninety thousand miles an hour. The nearer the planets are to the sun, the faster they go. There seems to be no speed limit in the heavens; there are no stop and go signs; no red and green lights; for none are needed. The Lord Jesus upholds all things by the word of His power! And He never makes a mistake!

THE SAVIOUR OF SINNERS

"God . . . hath . . . spoken . . . by his Son . . . when he had by himself purged our sins . . ."

The Revised Version translated these words, "...when he had made purification of sins..." The meaning is very clear; for here we read that Jesus, the Son of God, washed our guilty hearts from the stain of sin by His own precious
blood. Paul had been writing about His glorious Person; now he climaxed that description by telling of the perfection of His work—first on Calvary's Cross, then at the right hand of God. As our Saviour He died for us, as our Great High Priest He makes intercession for us, even as He is seated "on the right hand of the Majesty on high." This One who is the Heir of all things, the One who framed the ages, the Effulgence of His glory, the express Image of His Person, the Upholder of all things—this eternal Son of God so loved the world that He humbled Himself to die "the painful and shameful death of the cross." Why? So that He might "lead many sons unto glory."

The prophets had written to the Hebrew fathers for many centuries, showing how the blood of lambs and calves and goats was but a symbol or a type of the blood of the promised Lamb of God. Those animals sacrificed upon Jewish altars had to be physically perfect, for they foreshadowed the morally perfect Son of Man who was to come. Yet how far short those animal sacrifices came in pointing on to the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God, who "by himself purged our sins"! This is the heart of the message of the Epistle to the Hebrews. We shall not dwell longer upon it here, as the Holy Spirit has very much to say about this central theme in the pages which follow. Yet if we had nothing more than these opening lines of the epistle, we should have enough of God's Word to save our souls, to teach us to look to Calvary, and sing,

"Jesus paid it all;
All to Him I owe:
Sin had left a crimson stain;
He washed it white as snow."

THE KING-PRIEST

"God... hath... spoken... by his Son... who...
when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on
the right hand of the Majesty on high."

These closing words of the Holy Spirit's seven-fold description of Christ's fulness and glory climax the entire passage. They tell us that the eternal Son of God, the Lord of the universe, Creator, and God of providence, having finished His atoning work on Calvary's Cross, sat down in the place of authority and power—our King-Priest. As the rightful King of all the earth, He is seated "on the right hand of the Majesty on high." And while there, waiting until His enemies become His footstool, He is ministering to His blood-bought children, as their Great High Priest, ever living to make intercession for them. That is why we say that He is the King-Priest, one day to be acknowledged as King of kings, meanwhile ministering even now as our Priest.

The words "sat down" had a peculiar significance to the Hebrew Christians, to whom Paul was writing, just because the priests of the Old Testament never finished their work of offering sacrifices for sin; therefore, they never sat down. Their work was never complete. Day after day, year after year, century after century, they stood, often offering the "same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (Heb. 10:11). Now a chair is only for one who has finished his work. When you come home after a busy day at the office, my friend; when you wash your dishes after supper and finish your daily tasks, you sit down to rest at the close of the day. But the priests in Israel could never rest in the offering of calves and lambs and goats; for these animal sacrifices only pointed on to the Lamb of God who was to come. Not until He died on the cross was a full atonement made for sin, "once for all." Not until then could there be complete rest in His finished work of redemption. That is why there was no chair in the Jewish tabernacle or in the temple, beautiful and costly though those buildings were. The golden candlestick alone cost $29,085 in American money, and it was only one of six very costly pieces of furniture in that Jewish sanctuary. Everything about that tabernacle was beautiful—the gold-covered boards, the veil, the hangings; and all told, it must have cost many thousands of dollars. Yet there was no chair, an essential to every com-
pletely furnished home. The ministry of the priests was never done.

But when the Lord Jesus cried out on Calvary, saying, "It is finished," He meant that His vicarious atonement for sin was forever completed, forever finished. And "when he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." That is the meaning of these wonderful words in Heb. 1:3.

There are literally thousands of Christians, believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, who have no comprehension of the fact that He is seated at the right hand of God. They do not realize that they can add nothing to that finished work; but are ever fearful, ever seeking to work for their salvation, not accepting the one sufficient Sacrifice of the Son of God to justify them forever. They think their salvation is partly of faith and partly of works; they believe that it is possible for them to be lost, even after they have trusted in the shed blood of Christ. If you are among that number, my friend, let God speak to your heart through the Epistle to the Hebrews. Listen to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, as He tells you that your salvation depends entirely upon the finished work of Christ, not upon one single act of your own. Only believe; and let the assurance of His great salvation flood your soul. You can not add to a finished work.

Moreover, because our Lord is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, you and I are also seated with Him "in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). We are "crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20); buried with Him; risen with Him; seated with Him in glory—insofar as our relationship with Him is concerned. (See Col. 3:1-3.) Our salvation is eternally secure, not because we deserve it, not because we have earned it—or ever could earn it! We are identified with Him because He loved us with an everlasting love, because He forever settled the sin question when "by himself" He purged our sins and sat down on the right hand of the throne of God.

Some years ago I was called to see a man who was slowly dying of creeping paralysis. As I stood by his bedside, I asked him if he was a Christian. In reply, the dying man said, "I am doing my level best to be a Christian"; and there was a pathetic look of uncertainty on his worn face. Then I told him: "My dear friend, you do not have to strive to be a Christian. Look away to Calvary. The Lord Jesus has forever finished the work of redeeming your soul." I shall never forget the expression of peace that came over that man's face, as he rested his weary heart in the finished work of Jesus, the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

How different the story of a Choctaw Indian youth, even now in the service of our country, in this terrible war that covers the earth. He is one of the Merchant Marines, just a boy, only a few months out of high school. But about a week ago he wrote to his Bible teacher, saying: "I know this work is very dangerous; but I believe in the deity of Christ, and know that He died on the cross to save me from the penalty of my sins; therefore, I am not afraid." Oh, that every Christian in the world today knew the peace that such assurance gives! How much more he would honor the Lord who bought him than those do who, by doubts and fears, limit the finished work of the grace of God!

It is very important also that we note, from Heb. 1:3, just where the Lord Jesus is seated. His position on "the right hand of the Majesty on high" speaks to us of His exaltation to the place of supreme power and authority. Before He ascended into heaven, He said to His disciples:

"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost... and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age (R. V.)" (Matt. 28:18-20).

As we go into all the world, seeking to obey this great commission of our Lord, it is encouraging to know that He who goes with us has "all power in heaven and in earth." As we look at the world today, with all its bloodshed and famine and heartache, we realize that man has failed utterly to bring peace and righteousness upon earth. Things do not get better;
rather, they grow worse and worse. But there is a Man in the place of supreme power, the "Man, Christ Jesus." The One who took upon Himself human flesh is today the most exalted One; the Lord before whom angels fall down upon their faces; the One before whom men, angels, and demons will one day bow in acknowledgment of His deity and power and glory.

But some will dare to ask: "If Christ has supreme power, why does He permit this awful war? Why does He allow Satan-possessed men to rob and kill and torture their fellows? Why does He not do something about it all?" In answer to such queries, let me say that He has already done something about it! He has died on the cross that souls might be saved. He has robbed Satan of the power of sin and death for all who will believe Him. And He is waiting patiently for the day of His coming to earth again in glory, waiting only because He is "longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). My friend, if you will ask: "Why does He not stop war and famine and mass murder? Why does He permit Hitler and the Japanese to continue to commit unspeakable atrocities?" Then let me remind you that Satan, the usurper, is now in the place of authority, insofar as this earth is concerned. And our Lord is waiting His time, waiting until His enemies shall become His footstool. (See Psalm 110:1; Heb. 1:13.) Christ is seated on the right hand of God in expectation. We can not know all the mind of God; but we do know that He has told us that His patience, His long-suffering, causes Him to wait, seeking the lost who will yet be saved.

You know that, in our own country, we elect a president of the United States some months before he is inaugurated to office. Even though he is duly elected, he has no right to grant pardon, to sign or veto a bill, to exercise any of the duties of president, until he is inducted into office. He has to wait for his time of authority to come.

Our Lord Jesus is waiting, seeking the lost, expecting the day when His church will be completed and translated to be with Himself. Now He is seated on the right hand of God, exalted to the place of authority; but one day He will fully exercise that power. The heavens will roll back like a scroll; He will descend in the clouds with great glory; and He will take the reins of government in His all-powerful hands. Then war shall cease. Then cruelty and famine and pestilence will be done away. Then shall be fulfilled the words of Rev. 11:15:

"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

As we look back over these three opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we would remind ourselves again that they are an epitome of the entire epistle; for they tell us: (1) Of our Lord's Person; (2) of His redeeming work; and (3) of His exalted position at the place of power and authority. As the marvels of the pages of this portion of the inspired record unfold before us, in these studies, we shall find these three facts presented to our view. We shall see that the Holy Spirit repeatedly tells us that Jesus of Nazareth was always the eternal God; that He died for sinners; and that He is ministering to His blood-bought children before "the throne of grace," ever living to "make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25); ever dealing gently with them as He leads them on toward heaven and home.

As we continue these studies, let us never lose sight of the fact that the "chief point" of the epistle is Christ's High Priestly work for us; and that, in order to be a perfect Priest, the eternal God had to become a Man. As the God-Man, He died for us; and as the Man in the glory, He prays for us. "What a wonderful Saviour!"

Do you know Him, my friend, as your personal Redeemer and Lord? If not, open your heart to receive Him. He longs to lead you with Him "unto glory" (Heb. 2:10). He wants to fill your life with assurance and peace and joy—"the joy of the Lord." He died to save your soul. And God
the Father has spoken to your heart through Jesus, His beloved Son, who is the eternal Word of God.

"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way" (Psalm 2:12).

He is "better than" the prophets, "better than" the angels or Moses or Joshua or Aaron—"better than" any earthly person or thing. Let His love fill your heart; and you will meet Him one day, to behold and to share His glory throughout all the endless ages (John 17:24).