

"BY HIMSELF"

"God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son--Heb. 1:1

SURELY these first words of Hebrews are the most impressive and majestic opening of any of the books in the Bible! They are comparable only to John's Gospel and first Epistle. Both are on the same subject: The greatness of Christ as the Son and manifestation of God.

God spoke in many different portions and many different manners in the past through the prophets. These were not belittled: all were vital, all were glorious. But now has come the full, open, unveiled, manifestation of the glory and goodness and purpose "in these last days." All the "many portions" that went before are fulfilled and completed and bound together in Christ in these "Last days." They were the last days of Israel's commonwealth, the last days of the wonderful, but now passing, law given through Moses which had led them so long.

The Old Covenant was ended. It had run its course and accomplished its purpose. It was, as he says later, "waxed old and ready to vanish away." It was the end of the Mosaic age.

The Temple was about to be destroyed; the sacrifices discontinued; the nation scattered; the Covenant broken off.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is the great divine call to the Hebrew Christians to now leave the Law and Judaism behind--to go forth to Christ without the camp, bearing his reproach. That to which all the Law and Prophets had pointed for so long had now come--the Seed of the Woman; the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; David's Son; the Messiah; Emmanuel--God with us.

How much more beautifully and briefly could Christ's position be defined? He was everything. All that went before bowed before him. All that followed after sprang from him.

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"Whom He hath appointed heir of all things" (1:2) The greatness of Christ was what they must see. This alone could free them from their fleshly bondage. And it is what we must see also. See that, and everything falls into place. To this greatness we are invited to be related. God has approached us and called us to him, invited us to be part of His glorious Son, to put away everything else and seize this pearl of great price.

It is well that we constantly contemplate the infinite greatness of Christ in the Divine purpose. It broadens and enlarges our natural, petty, fleshly outlook so often absorbed in trivialities. Paul said to the Corinthians, trying to lift their small cramped minds from petty present things--"All things are yours--the world, or life, or death or things present, or things to come. ALL are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's!" (1 Cr. 3:21-23).

With this most glorious relationship and destiny, how can we for a moment be concerned about the childish passing things of the present? Nothing matters but this. Nothing begins to compare with this. Get this one thing clear and strong enough in our minds, and everything else fades away and disappears.

Hebrews portrays the supreme greatness of Christ--over the angels, over Moses, over the Levitical priesthood--all very great in their place in God's purpose. To these three provisions from God, the faithful Israelites had taken heed and trusted through all their history.

But while Hebrews gives the fullest and clearest presentation of greatness and glory and preeminence of Christ in the Divine purpose, it also speaks the most clearly of his weakness and subjection to mortal flesh, and his complete dependence upon and subordination to the Father.

It is Hebrews that speaks of his strong crying and tears; his being saved from death; his being heard in that he feared; his learning obedience by the things that he suffered; his being brought from the dead by the blood of the Covenant; his being made perfect through suffering.

The truth concerning Christ and his real struggle and his great victory is very beautiful and inspiring; more, it is transforming. It can turn ugliness to beauty, and death to life.

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"By whom also He (God) made the worlds" (1:2). Rather--"Through whom He made the ages--the aions."

All the ages--dispensations, different periods in the development of God's purpose--revolve around Christ. As in English, "made" in Hebrew is far more than to just create; it is to prepare, make ready or arrange.

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"Who being the brightness of His (God's) glory" (11:3). This word "brightness" simply means the "fullness of the shining forth." It has always been the yearning of godly men to see, and feel, and more fully comprehend the glory of God. Moses, pressed down beyond measure with the burden of faithless, childish, fleshly, rebellious Israel, said--"Show me Thy glory," Just as the disciples said--"Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us."

Herein, in a glimpse of God's glory, and in a direct reassurance of His divine mercy and love, Moses found strength to continue the battle alone.

Christ was the full manifestation of that glory to man--"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. And we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

So John begins to tell this same beautiful marvelous story of Immanuel, "God with us."

Grace and truth--what a power they have! These are the basic divine characteristics from which all else springs. Their power and beauty lie in their inseparable oneness. Together, they are divine eternal love; separated they cease to exist.

This was the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," of which the apostle speaks to the brethren at Corinth, exhorting them to--"Behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord." And be thus--"Changed into the same image from glory to glory."

Let us devote our lives to this divine experience. "Change" is the key word. What we are today is never good enough for tomorrow.

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"And the express image of His person" (1:3). More literally & correctly--"The exact engraving of His substance."

We might point out, first of all, that this loses much of its basic meaning if we do not have a true understanding of the wonderful revelation of man being made in the image of God. But it goes much further--for it is clearly something special as related to Christ--as related to his greatness, as related to his work and accomplishment for men.

"The exact engraving of His substance." The perfect man, the perfect image of God, the perfect, flawless, unblemished manifestation of God--the perfect Son and likeness of the perfect Father.

Perfection is a tremendous and overwhelming conception. We shy away from it as unearthly and unreal, but the command is--"Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." This is what we must aim at constantly, unceasingly, every moment--"BE YE PERFECT"--every deed, word and thought brought into captivity to the mind of Christ.

There is a tremendous power and incentive and joy and glory in even the attempt to be perfect. What greater adventure, what greater ambition, what greater satisfaction can anything in life offer more than this complete mastery of the mind and body by the power of the Spirit of God!

This was Christ. This was his power. This was his greatness before God and men. His life was the most lowly; his circumstances the most humble; his possessions nothing; his end complete desertion by his friends, and rejoicing and triumph by his enemies.

And yet, he could truly, calmly, peacefully, triumphantly say of that end--"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you--be of good cheer--I have OVERCOME THE WORLD."

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"And upholding all things by the Word of His (God's) power" (1:3). The "His" is clearly God in each case: His glory, His person, His power. The apostle is speaking of Christ's life on earth--an aspect of his work and accomplishment. Truly today in his glory he upholds everything by the Word of his own power. He said himself, after his resurrection (Mt 28); "All power is given me in heaven and in earth".

But that is clearly not its meaning here. It is actually much deeper and more meaningful as related to the divine purpose.

In the days of his flesh and weakness and struggle and overcoming, how did he "uphold all things by the Word of God's power?" It is clearer if we look into the meaning of the word "uphold" (phero). Basically it means, according to Liddell and Scott, "to bear or carry a

load," secondarily, "to endure or suffer." The thought is beautifully expressed in Isa. 53--"He hath **borne** our griefs, and carried our sorrows--the chastisement of our peace was upon him; the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all."

The key thought is, not just that it was laid upon him, but that he bore, he carried it, he **sustained it to perfection** "by the Word of God's power." We remember his immediate reaction to the tempter--"It is written." Surely that was "enduring all things by the Word of God's power." Isaiah covers this thought when he says, by the Spirit--"He opened not his mouth."

There was perfect acceptance, complete resignation to the will of God--"Thy will not mine be done."

Job was a wonderful man--a wonderful example of suffering in patience and in faith--a record for all time that few have equalled. But it could hardly be said of him that he "opened not his mouth." In fact, his great realization was of his failure in that respect--"I have uttered that I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not . . . Therefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes."

James says--"If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." There was only one such, "bearing all things by the Word of God's power." Christ bore, endured, suffered all things in the pure perfection of godliness. Paul says of love that it--"Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things--and never faileth." This was Christ--"Greater love hath no man than this."

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"When he had by himself purged our sins" (1:30). Or rather more correctly, as the RV--"Made purification of sins."

It was broader than "our sins." It was universal--"Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

He took away sin--conquered sin--destroyed sin--**all** sin--UNIVERSAL sin--by his perfection.

One man did this: one man alone, strengthened, of course, by God in Whom he fully trusted. Consider the power, and eternal effect, of one man's perfection--one man's perfect, single-minded, wholehearted, dedication to perfect obedience--"As by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."

It was one man alone--terribly, tragically alone. This passage in Hebrews points that out--"BY HIMSELF." He knew it must be that way--"Ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone because the Father is with me."

He was alone with God all his life, and in his death. We have read recently of Paul--"No man stood with me--all men forsook me."

But the results are an eternal multitude of joyful, loving companions that no man can number.

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"Sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high" (1:3). He sat down. The sacrificial aspect--the terrible aspect--of his work was done. He said--"It is finished." He sits at God's right hand: the closest communion, the highest honor, the most joyful relationship. No higher position is possible in the whole universe--on the right hand of the Creator and Ruler of all. In writing to the Colossians Paul bases a deep and urgent exhortation upon this particular point--"If then ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which be above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." This should be the center of all our interest--"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth; for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

This is a glorious command, a life-giving exhortation, a tremendous mental and spiritual revolution. It is the only course that will find acceptance in the great day soon to come.

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"Being made so much better than the angels" (1:4). More correctly, and more clearly, as in the RV--"Having become so much better." It was a "becoming" through suffering. Paul says in the next chapter that he was--"Made a little lower than the angels."

The Psalm from which he quotes refers to man in general, and to Christ in particular as inseparable from man--the man, the only man as man should be. Hebrews 2 is largely concerned with Christ's complete identity with mankind and their weaknesses, temptation and sufferings and the basic fact that his was absolutely essential if he were to be mankind's Savior and High Priest.

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"As he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" (1:4). Christ's superiority to the angels was not only in his accomplishment but in his divine Sonship. As the apostle says later (ch. 5)--"Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things he suffered."

He was Son of God from his beginning, though humbled for the purpose of his perfection. Having perfectly overcome, he showed himself worthy of his sonship, and thus received the honor both by birth and by achievement.

This v. 4 begins the section of ch. 1 in which Paul contrasts Christ with the angels and shows how much greater he was in every way. Things were said of this promised Savior--Messiah--Emmanuel--never said of angels. As the bearer and fulfiller of the memorial Yahweh Name--"He who Shall be Mighty Ones"--he is addressed as "God" and "Lord." This is the deep beauty of God-manifestation, not the meaningless confusion of the Trinity.

In the closing words of ch. 2. Paul beautifully sums up his great work and victory--the destruction of sin and the loving, compassionate, all-understanding, mediatorship between weak, failing, striving man and the God of all holiness and purity and power-- *"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the*

same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham." "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted" (2:14-18).

Let us rejoice that--"We have such an High Priest who can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities."

--G.V.G.