

God Speaking in the Son

W. H. Westcott.

Extracted from Scripture Truth Volume 4, 1912, page 84, 117.

Table of Contents

Hebrews 1.....	1
His Birth (Luke 1: 35).	2
His Baptism (Matt. 3: 17).	3
His Cross (Mark 15: 39).	4
His Resurrection (John 20: 30, 31).....	5

Hebrews 1

It is in keeping with the character of this Epistle that there should be an abrupt and complete contact between God and the reader. Its object is to prove that God, in the sovereignty of His Being and in the excellency of His ways, has ordained the removal of all intermediate ranks and offices between Himself and His responsible creature, man. On the one hand, He speaks to us immediately and directly in the One who is the Son; on the other, when that language is received in faith and obedience, the soul — renewed by grace, and perfected by virtue of Christ's one offering of eternal value — is emboldened to enter into God's immediate presence, the Holiest, by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10).

In all the Epistles save those of John and Hebrews the inspired writers give their names, as authorized vessels of inspiration. They are used by the Holy Ghost to outline the Christian faith and the conduct which is suitable to it; and also to refute what man would fain have introduced into Christianity of tradition or philosophy or sinful living, the product of the human mind or will.

The inspired writer of this Epistle however, whoever he was, carefully conceals himself; for it is plain from the opening verses that the gist of the communication is God's grace in speaking to us directly without human mediation. In Old Testament times God spoke. The fathers were the recipients of the things communicated. The prophets were the intermediaries of His utterances. In these last days we are the recipients; God is still the speaker. But in place of certain of our own race standing between us and God to receive the communications and pass them on, He puts Himself in immediate contact with us and speaks to us "in the Son."

This attaches a supreme importance to the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and to His place and His activities in the heavens. Therein God has given to us the highest, greatest, most complete interpretation of all that He is, and the fullest unfolding of the blessing which He bestows on the sons whom He is bringing to glory. There is not a movement of the Son, nor a position in which He was found which does not speak. Its language may not necessarily be articulated in words, but what the Son *is* is itself language from God to us. In Christ God has come near to us, to delineate in an active, moving Person, His own character, feelings, thoughts, purposes, yea, His own very nature.

Let us consider one or two scenes which will illustrate this. In each of those selected the SON OF GOD is designated, one scene being taken from each of the four Gospels.

His Birth (Luke 1: 35).

"That holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the SON OF GOD." We have the birth of a Babe foretold here, conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of Mary the Virgin. He is here called Son of God as born in time. Though seen in the weakness of infancy, and so partaking in humanity perfectly, yet is He sinlessly holy; and He does not forfeit His Sonship by accepting human conditions. Had His mother been divine, He had not been human. She was woman, singularly favoured because chosen out of all the virgins of Israel to be the mother of the Lord; yet the more we make of Mary, the less do we make of the divine miracle of this holy birth. The body in which He appeared was *prepared* for Him (Heb. 10); and in it was He to effectuate all the will of God. It was guarded from every taint of sin in the Virgin's womb; not by any immaculate conception of the Virgin herself (as affirmed by Rome), which could be supposed to free *her* from taint of sin, but by the power and wisdom of God the Holy Ghost. The fable of the Virgin's immaculate birth, had it been true, would have required the same miracle in *her* parentage and birth which Scripture declares with regard to the Babe in David's royal city.

But what is the language of God in the Babe? What does He intend us to understand by the birth in the stable in Bethlehem, while as yet there was no human speech in the lips of Jesus? What the *angels* saw in it is gathered from their praise. They said, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good pleasure in men" (Luke 2: 14). They looked on Him, manifest in flesh, and at once foresaw three results, namely, the glory of God to be made good and secured in a world of sin; the earth to be delivered from the enemy's grasp and brought into righteous blessing; and, finally, the fullest and freest intercourse to be established between God and men, the blessed God being able to find pleasure in men on the ground of what Christ has introduced and inaugurated.

What did it at once imply, however, for *men*? Has it struck the reader that the first utterance out of heaven to men after the birth of Christ was "Fear not?" (Luke 2: 10). Does it not suggest that His advent as a Babe was designed to remove all fear from our hearts, to remove all suspicion from us, to enable us to understand that His disposition towards us after our four thousand years of sin was still friendly, loving, gracious? It is so hard for fallen man to believe anything but the lie that deceived him at the beginning. He cannot accredit the living God against whom he has sinned with any kindly disposition towards him, but supposes Him to be the author of his misfortune, and the vindictive executor of judgment against his sin, only opening His lips to utter wrath against the sinner. To all such ideas does God give the lie in the birth of the Babe. His language therein is one of accessibility to men. The gulf between the holy Creator and the world that has morally strayed from its orbit is so far bridged over from God's side that there suddenly appears in the midst of men One who is God's Son. But He has come, not to repel, but to attract; not to menace, but to woo; not to command, but to accept the lowliest conditions of poverty, dependence, and weakness.

Thus the veriest or poorest child in whom has dawned the consciousness of sin may realize that the Son of God has been younger than he is, lower than he is, bringing all the might of Omnipotence into swaddling clothes, and all the wealth of God's matchless grace into a stable. Or, again, the oldest sinner, grieving over his years and years of sin, and despairing of mercy, may learn in the light of that marvellous birth — occurring, as it did, after four thousand years of sinning in all ways and under all conditions — that God loves still. For no sinner has yet lived four thousand years in his sin, yet there is the testimony to God's love in Jesus' birth after all that long-drawn story of unnumbered crimes.

Not that the Babe spoke. But His very presence here under such a guise told it out. When Dr. George Grenfell was first exploring on the upper tributaries of the Congo River in his missionary

steamer, the natives, who had never seen a steamer before, feared that its pounding machinery and its belching funnel meant war; and they gathered together with weapons of war to oppose the missionary's landing. But seeing that they did not understand the pacific intentions of his heart, the Doctor asked Mrs. Grenfell, who was on board with her infant child, to show herself at the side of the boat with the babe in her arms. This simple action at once disarmed the natives' fears, and led them to abandon their resistance to his landing; for no one, they felt, would come to war against them bringing women and babies. Such was the language of the unconscious babe to their minds. Any one can understand such a language. So Bethlehem clearly establishes the desire of God to hold communication with men; and that, not to crush in judgment, but to attract for blessing. Had He appeared in all the brightness of His *future* manifestation, it would have spelt destruction for those who knew not God (2 Thess. 2: 8).

His Baptism (Matt. 3: 17).

"Lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is MY BELOVED SON, in whom I am well pleased." Here the Son is discovered and designated in a new position. The forerunner John, sent of God, had appealed to the nation of Israel, calling upon them to repent, as the kingdom of heaven was at hand. His teaching clearly emphasized the fact that this was to be of a spiritual nature, so that the mere external relations with the people of God were unavailing; to have any vital interest in the coming Christ, men must repent and confess their sins. The mass of the Jews boasted in their natural descent from Abraham, and were represented in the Pharisees and Sadducees who came and heard him. But the test was not, "Are you a Jew?" It was "good fruit," proceeding from a sincere repentance before God. The Roman axe was already laid at the root of the Jewish trees, ready for its work. If the nation did not repent, the axe would fell the trees, and the fire would follow the axe. Nevertheless God would preserve the true remnant, the wheat would be garnered; all who did repent would be saved. The unrepentant ones were the chaff who would be burnt up with unquenchable fire.

The consequence of his mission was that the nation as a whole stood on the one side, with temple, sacrifices, ritual, priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, lawyers, scribes, and unrepentant Jews of all kinds, on the other a heterogeneous number, drawn from all classes, who had only one thing in common; they were *sinner*s, sinners confessed, sinners encouraged to hope only because God is the God of salvation. Their confession, moreover, was not a secret; they were openly marked off as a repentant minority by their baptism, publicly administered by John in the river of Jordan.

To this repentant company, ostensibly guilty, but truly repentant and confessing their need of a Saviour, apprehending in some degree the spiritual requirement of God's kingdom, and made conscious by His holiness of their sin, came the Messiah, the Son of God. Entitled indeed to the homage of all, from the highest to the lowest, He passed by the masses who felt no need of a Saviour from sin, who looked only for a political leader or an ethical teacher. He came to where John was baptizing; and though discerned by him, and though having no sins to confess, insisted on being baptized and so publicly identifying Himself with the repentant band.

What is the language of this act? What does it speak to our hearts and minds of the intentions and thoughts of God? Does it not proclaim as loudly as though it were written across the sky the fact that Christ's mission was not to call the righteous, but sinners? Does it not show us that the Physician's journey was not for those that were whole, but for the sick? It encourages the man that is most conscious of his sinful estate, who is most burdened in conscience by reason of his guilt, for it is God's *language* to assure him that it was *his* case the Saviour came to undertake.

Nor is this all. As though to add an emphasis impossible of contradiction, it was when this action

of Jesus, the Son of God, proclaimed His taking up of the cause of these confessed sinners, that the Holy Ghost descended like a dove and alighted upon Him, and a voice from heaven — the Father's voice — said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He *might* have said it at any time. It pleased the Godhead, however, that this most glorious manifestation of the activities and pleasure of the Triune God should be reserved for the moment when the Son openly espoused the cause of the confessed sinner. It tells us in ringing accents that God willeth not the death of the sinner, and that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. It proves to us that when the Son publicly identified Himself with the sinner's cause, Father and Holy Ghost were swift to give public demonstration also of their supreme delight and absolute complacency in that course.

In Christ God has come near to us to delineate, in an active, moving Person, His own character, feelings thoughts, purposes, yea, His own very nature. In a former paper we have seen this at the birth and baptism of the Lord Jesus; we now go on to His cross and resurrection.

His Cross (Mark 15: 39).

"When the centurion, which stood over against Him, saw that He so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this Man was the SON OF GOD."

All the gracious and blessed ministry of Christ among men spoke out the readiness of God to bless. It told His ability to meet every form of need, it showed the versatility of His grace. It was Jesus who acted, but He was the transcript of God — the tangible, visible, audible expression of all that God is. He was not an optical illusion failing of substance, as a reflection in a mirror; never did mirror reflect so faithfully the person standing before it as Christ reflected — or rather expressed — God. In every mirror the left is right and the right is left; and most of us are accustomed to remark how inaccurate the reflection of the eyes is to a second person looking on. But in Christ there was no inaccuracy and no disparity. He expressed God without defect, or loss of a single gesture, or accent, or manner. In the Son, God was speaking.

This, then, is the light in which we are now invited to consider the death of our Lord Jesus. We are to understand the language of the cross, the substance of God's communication to us in the Son when He was put there. Where all is so marvellous, and so infinite, we are sure to omit much; yet, if we remember our smallness, and the greatness of God, it is little wonder if we do not easily grasp all He would show us. The defect, however, will not be in the showing, but in our seeing; not in His language, but in our apprehension of it.

In the first place God was speaking out *His love for men*. "God so *loved* the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." "Not that we loved God but that He *loved us*, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." "God commendeth His *love* toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Then, again, He was giving utterance to *His utter abhorrence of sin*, and exhibiting its infinite consequences before all worlds. The suffering Saviour was really forsaken when He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He was made sin for us, and God *condemned* sin in the flesh. His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, and Christ *suffered* for sins — the just for the unjust. His soul was made an offering for sin.

Further, He proves to us that He is able to *make even the wrath of man* (and we may say the wit and power of Satan) to *praise Him*. David prayed (2 Sam. 15: 31), "O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." This was answered by making Absalom listen to the counsel

of another. But man's wicked counsel to get rid of Christ was allowed to be carried out entirely, to its own defeat. "For of a truth against Thy holy Child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together *for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done.*" What a comfort for believers to realize that God is greater than any combination of men that can be against Him; even though there be behind them all the subtlety and force of Satan himself.

But in the cross of Christ there is the fullest declaration of *what God is* in all His glory *on the sinner's behalf*. For him death was met, its sting borne, its victory reversed. On his behalf the sins were collected by divine omniscience and laid upon Christ; the darkness gathered, the wrath fell, the storm burst, the sword awakened, the fire consumed. The Substitute from God drained the cup of wrath, exhausted the judgment, bore the curse, tasted death as the wages of sin, died unto sin. The heel of the woman's Seed was bruised by the serpent, but the serpent's head was bruised, and his power for mischief for ever brought under control. The grave was entered by our Lord, but it was that God might show us the way out of it by resurrection.

God has indeed spoken in the Son. Sin has been laid bare in its uttermost unloveliness, and in all its latent possibilities, and has met its utmost due. Hatred has risen to its highest height against incarnate love, but love has risen higher and has overflowed it. The river of God's grace, supplied through righteousness, is flowing over the barren place where Jesus died. If we would see the greatness of sin, it is there. If we would see the greatness of God who has put sin away we see it there. But at what a cost! Lord Salisbury, at the news of the first defeats of British troops in the Boer War, set his face and said, "*We must see this through.*" Blood and treasure flowed, and gallant men died, and the widows and orphans remain to this day to prove at what a cost Britain "*saw it through.*" But the One who at His baptism seemed to say, "I will see the cause of the sinner through" had to lay down His own precious life that God might reveal all that was in His heart and put our sin away. Truly as we look upon the cross we may say that actions speak louder than words. That mighty action is indeed language from God. The veil was rent, the way from God to man was righteously opened by Christ's death; the soul approaching God by virtue of the blood of Christ finds no barrier now. The hand of man might indeed ignorantly renew the veil, and might ignorantly continue the sacrifices of old as though God had not rent it, and as though Christ had not died; but there is now no need of renewed sacrifices. God Himself has opened the way in. As we gaze on Christ's death, and think of all its far-reaching results, we say with the centurion, "Truly this Man was the Son of God."

His Resurrection (John 20: 30, 31).

"Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, THE SON OF GOD; and that believing ye might have life through His name."

We have had the testimony of angels in Luke 1 and Luke 2; the testimony of the Father and the Holy Ghost in Matthew 3; the testimony of man in Mark 15; and now, in John 20, the testimony of the Holy Scriptures. All concur in proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God.

But these last verses are said of Him when He had offered up Himself as a sacrifice, and when He had risen from the dead. By His resurrection God put the seal of His own approval on the work He accomplished by His death. The Holy One who, as Lamb of God, had borne judgment, had by His blood made atonement, and was now seen in resurrection in all the power and joy of acceptance before God, and of relationship with the Father. In what respect, we may ask, is there any language from God

here? What may we gather in the way of communication from God by the resurrection of Christ?

Is it not in this, that the Lord had gone (as He told His disciples in John 14) to prepare *a place for them*? He was yet to ascend to His Father and God, and to His Father's house, to complete the preparation (ver. 17); but are we not to interpret Christ's resurrection as indicating the place He had won for us? He had stepped out of the grave on to a platform of ineffable peace; but it was peace, eternally and righteously complete, which He had secured on our behalf. He said, "Peace be unto you." He was also in the energy and power of resurrection life, beyond all reach of death and judgment; but it was not for Himself alone: He breathed on His disciples and communicated His risen life to *them*. He stood in unclouded favour before His God — no question open, no cloud remaining, no judgment left; but it was that He might say, "My God, and *your* God." He rose in the fulness of His blessed relationship with the Father (ever true of Him as Eternal Son, but possessed of a new phase and a new character for Him in Manhood on earth), knowing the Father's inalienable affection to be on Him, but it was to make it all ours who believe upon Him, for He said, "My Father, and *your* Father." All that He took in resurrection He took not for Himself alone, but for us, that we might share it with Him. His place determines our place; every detail of it, so charming and blessed, is the detailed setting forth of our position and relationship and privilege before His God and Father. What He is as eternal Son remains His own and incommunicable, so that He must ever be pre-eminent; what He is as risen Man is shared in grace with us.

It is in this way that all is language to us. His position speaks. It tells us of what God has planned in His own mind, triumphing over all our sin, defeating Satan with an utter defeat, revealing His own glory, and setting us before His face as sons.

And He will bring all the sons to glory. All shall be consummated in glory. In John 20, though Jesus had not yet ascended, He said, "I ascend." He was going there into all the completeness of the position designed for Him of the Father. Will the purpose of God break down, then, as to us? No more than it broke down as to Him. Thus for the complete thought of God as to us we need to turn our eyes higher, and still higher, even to God's own presence, to the Father's house on high, where we see Jesus, in all the blessed homeliness of that glory. By that position God is speaking to us, and telling us what is His determination as to every soul that believes upon Jesus.

This is the purport of the last two verses of John 20. "These are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" — that you may commit yourself unreservedly to Him "and that believing ye might have life through His name" — that you may understand that He makes you participator in His risen life before the Father.

All hail, then, blessed SON OF GOD! We have learnt in Thee what God is. Thyself art language to us; interpreting all that He is in His nature, all that He is in His triumph over sin, all that He is in His thoughts of blessing to usward. We thank Thee because He has drawn nigh to us in Thee, removing our fear, taking up our case, setting our once guilty consciences in divine rest by the one sacrifice of Calvary, and introducing us into the Holiest of all. There we learn in His own very presence the greatness of His grace, the blessedness of His love, and the infinite glory of the Object — even Thyself — who art for ever to engage us there. Revealer, Interpreter of God, in whom God has spoken to us, we worship, we adore Thee.