

"What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?"

— Matt. 22: 41.

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It is a sorrowful fact that in these days everything is being called in question. Even the most important truths of Christianity are being assailed, and as a result the minds of many true children of God are being sadly shaken. Many who unfeignedly love our Lord Jesus Christ, who truly desire to do His will, and to hold nothing but the truth, are in perplexity at the present time because of theories that are being circulated around them. I trust we may be enabled to help one another's souls during this Conference, so that we may go hence more firmly established in all "those things which are most surely believed amongst us."

There was a time when the attacks upon the truths of Christianity came from those without, which was no matter of surprise to Christians. Persons who make no religious profession cannot be expected to have any sympathy with the things that are very dear to us. But in these last days Satan has changed his tactics, and his most serious assaults upon the truth are now being made, not by the avowed enemies of Christ, but by those who profess to be the friends of Christ. The most dangerous antagonists of the truth of God to-day are some of the reverend critics.

A few years ago these opponents of God's truth contented themselves with attacking *the Book*. They raised the most serious questions in regard to some of the things contained therein. Thus, for those who believed them, Moses did not write Deuteronomy and many other parts of the Pentateuch; Isaiah was not the writer of the last twenty-seven chapters of his prophecy; and Jonah never existed. It was feared then by those who loved the Lord Jesus Christ that the time would come when they would push their attacks still further, and assail the holy person of our Lord. For in their statements concerning the Book, they frequently put themselves in direct opposition to Christ Himself. It is certain that He more than once attributed to Moses the very portions of Scripture which they say he never wrote at all; and in regard to Jonah, He most solemnly affirmed him to be a historical personage, and that he was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, even as the Old Testament records.

It was inevitable that sooner or later the critics should assail the Lord Himself, in order to make their own position consistent in the eyes of the public. Thus these unholy traffickers are now speaking of Him as if He were just an ignorant country Jew! If He said Moses wrote Deuteronomy, it was because He did not know better, the modern critics being in a much more advantageous position to pronounce upon such subjects than He! They have invented a doctrine called the *Kenosis* (a word borrowed from the Greek of Phil. 2: 7), by which they mean that our Lord Jesus in becoming a man

became limited in knowledge, knowing no more than was generally known in His day, and that therefore His utterances upon some subjects cannot be regarded as authoritative.

It behoves us to look into these things seriously, that our souls may be established in what God has written in His Word. In the passage of Scripture before us, we have the Lord Jesus submitting a test question to the people standing about Him. It happened at the close of a day of questioning. First the Pharisees came to Him raising a query about the tribute money. Then the Sadducees stepped forward and propounded their difficulty about the resurrection of the dead. They were followed by a lawyer, whom the Lord silenced as the others. Then He turned upon them and said (to the Pharisees especially): "What think ye of the Christ? Whose Son is He?" Everything depended on their answer to that question. If they had believed the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning Him, and had replied that He was Son of God, though born of the line of David and Abraham, but one course would have been open to them — to fall at His feet in worship, owning Him God manifested in flesh, the true hope of Israel. The crown and the kingdom would then have been His, instead of the cross and the grave.

The test question for that day is the test question for this day also. Everything depends upon the answer that our souls give to it. The Word of God furnishes us with the answer, and every heart that values the Word and bows to its authority is satisfied with what God has said therein.

Turn to Heb. 1. Here we have the deity of our adorable Lord presented to us. He is the

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more exalted than the angels, having inherited a more excellent name than they. Some people profess to see a difference between the expressions "Son of God" and "God the Son," saying that they accept Him as the former but not as the latter. The difference is altogether a fanciful one. In John 5, where we have the Jews finding fault with the Lord Jesus for saying, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," we read that "the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, *making Himself equal with God.*" They understood Him to mean that when He said He was the Son of God He claimed equality with God, and the Lord did not repudiate their interpretation of His words. Had He been mere man He would certainly have done so. If any servant of Christ on this platform were to put out an expression that appeared blasphemous to any hearer, and no such thought were intended, he would indignantly repudiate it upon its being pointed out to him Our Lord could not have done less had He been merely a good man as some assert. On the contrary He accepted His objectors' interpretation of His words, and went on to confirm it in every possible way in the course of the chapter. (See also John 10: 33; 19: 7). Accordingly our Lord Jesus Christ is the "Son of God," and the expression is equivalent in meaning to "God the Son." He is equal in majesty, power and glory with God the Father, and with God the Holy Ghost.

In the Gospel of Matthew the Lord Jesus Himself answers the question that He put to the Pharisees. On that very day, or perhaps the previous day, He gave utterance to two parables, in both of which He asserted that He was the Son of God. There was first the parable of the vineyard and the husbandmen, in which the owner of the vineyard says: "I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him." The Pharisees knew perfectly well what the Lord meant when He put that parable before them, and described the casting out and murder of the Son. He then proceeded to tell

another parable about the marriage supper that the king made for his son, to which the invited guests refused to come. It was another plain assertion of His divine Sonship. (Matt. 21: 33 — Matt. 22: 14).

This is what the apostle is occupied with in Heb. 1. He gives us seven quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures in proof of the dignity and glory of the Lord who died. It is very striking how, in verses 2 and 3, in very few words an outline sketch is given to us of the whole career of our blessed Lord from the eternity that lies behind this world up to His present seat at the right hand of God. First we read, "Whom He hath appointed heir of all things." This was before the world began. We are thus given an insight into the eternal counsels of God, and we learn that Christ was always His one grand thought. In the formation of His purposes, whether in regard to creation or redemption, He was thinking of His beloved Son, and of what would be for His glory. Next we have, "By Whom also He made the worlds." This carries our minds back to Gen. 1, to the beginning of material things. The active agent in the great work of creation was the Son — nothing came into being apart from Him. Then we are told that He is "the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His substance" (R.V.) This has special reference to His incarnation. He was, of course, ever the effulgence of the divine glory, but I take it that in this place the apostle is especially occupied with what He was amongst men. So from Gen. 1 we pass to Matt. 1, where we have Him born into this world in order to make God known, to bring Him very near to the hearts of men, and to bring men to the heart of God. Following this we read, "and upholding all things by the word of His power" — a plain assurance to us that when our Lord Jesus became incarnate He did not surrender a single attribute of Deity. In the days of His humiliation He proved His *omniscience* by reading men's thoughts, and laying bare the purposes of their hearts, and He showed His *omnipotence* by commanding the winds and waves to obey Him. And more, the whole universe depended upon Him even in the days of His deepest distress. The apostle's next sentence takes us in thought to the cross — "when He had by Himself purged our sins." Amazing truth — the eternal Son of God stooped to become a sacrifice for us! How awful is sin, if nothing less would suffice to put it away. He brought the world into being by *His word*, and by the same word He upholds all created things, as the apostle here teaches us; but His word was not sufficient for the putting away of our sins. A *work* must be wrought, the Son of God must die. By His atoning death purification has been effected, all the claims of the throne of God have been satisfied, and the One who died has gone above and taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. There the Spirit leaves Him in Heb. 1. He has not got beyond that point yet, but the time will come when He will get on the throne on which He now sits and will come back into the world as its rightful king and judge.

The Lord's question comes again to my mind, "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" If that question were put to this audience this morning, would not every believer present exclaim with all his heart as Peter long ago, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God?" Or would we not say with Thomas, falling at His feet in deepest adoration, "My Lord and my God"? Let others have their doubts as to His peerless person if they will, but He is to our souls their all in all.

Turn now to Heb. 2. Here we have a further answer to our Lord's great question. This chapter gives us, not His divine being but His human nature. He is Son of God in chap. 1; He is

SON OF MAN

in chap. 2. In chap. 1. He is much better than the angels; here He is made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death. We shall never be able to comprehend the union of the divine and the human in our blessed Lord, and we dare not venture in our thoughts beyond what is written in the Scriptures. We unfeignedly believe it, though we cannot fathom the mystery of it, that He who was

very God became very man for our redemption. Have you noticed where, in the New Testament, we first find His title "Son of Man?" It is in Matt. 8: 20. In reply to one who volunteered to follow Him whithersoever He went, He said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." The Divine Son put Himself in the position of Son of Man, not having where to lay His head! He became Son of Man for the suffering of death. In Heb. 2 several reasons are assigned for this. In ver. 9 we are told that He tasted "death for every thing." (The word "man" is not found in the original). In virtue of His death every created thing, both below and above, will be reconciled to God, and He will find pleasure once more in the works of His hands. Secondly, we learn that the majesty of God required His suffering unto death. "For it became Him, for Whom are all things, and by Whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (ver. 10). It was impossible for God to carry out His purposes of grace towards sinful men save on the ground of Christ's death. The perfection spoken of is not *personal* but *official*. *Personally* He was always perfect; but He was not, and could not be, Saviour (in the full meaning of that word) until He had passed through all the suffering of Calvary. Thus was He *officially* perfected. Thirdly, He suffered and died that "He might destroy (or annul) him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (ver. 9). Fourthly, He died that He might "deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (ver. 15). Consequently the dread and the bondage which characterised the saints of Old Testament times have been dispelled for ever for all who now believe.

Fifthly, He became man and suffered in order to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (ver. 17, R.V.); and Sixthly, He became in all things like unto His brethren as a preparation for His present priesthood "for in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted He is able to succour them that are tempted" (ver. 18). While we glory in our Saviour as the divine Son of God, the fact appeals to us most touchingly that He is also Son of Man. As man He walked this earth before us, tempted and tried, enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself from day to day. Having passed through these experiences, He is perfectly able to understand our case, and to sympathise with us in all that comes upon us as children of faith passing through a sinful world. The tender sympathetic heart of Jesus is with us every step of the way. But if He had not passed through this world as man before us, He could not have entered into our circumstances, as now He is able to do.

Because He is Son of Man, He is entitled to universal dominion. He is going to be the Head of all things in "the world to come." When God made the first man He gave him dominion over the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, the fishes of the sea, indeed, over all the lower creatures of His hand. But the first man proved himself utterly unworthy of the position of responsibility and authority in which God set him. Instead of being able to rule over everything that God had placed under him, he soon proved that he was unable to rule himself. He fell into the bondage of the devil, and man has been there ever since. But God is going to give universal dominion by and bye to the Second Man, called in Psalm 8, "the Son of Man." This Psalm cannot refer to Adam; he was not the Son of Man — he was nobody's son in that sense. We read "What is man that Thou art mindful of him? And the Son of Man that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made Him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned Him with glory and honour. Thou madest Him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under His feet. All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas." As Son of Man who has perfectly glorified God, He is entitled to take up the first man's forfeited rights, with an immeasurably wider glory. The time is coming when He will sit upon the throne of the universe; in that blessed era the whole creation will rest peacefully under His beneficent sway. The first man failed, but the Second Man can never fail. The Son of Man — God's ideal man — will yet be seen in His rightful place as

Head of all things that God has made.

We will now leave the epistle to the Hebrews, and turn to Matt. 1 for further answers to our Lord's question. This Gospel opens with "the generation of Jesus Christ, the

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the son of Abraham." No doubt the Spirit of God began in that way because it was His design in the Gospel by Matthew to show the Jewish people that Jesus of Nazareth was the One on Whom their national hopes were based. The first of the four Evangelists makes it plain that the babe who was born in Bethlehem is David's true seed according to the flesh, the heir to the promises contained in the Old Testament Scriptures. In Psalm 132: 11, it is written, "the Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; He will not turn from it; of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne." This passage has, no doubt, some reference to Solomon, but its primary application is to David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus. Before our Lord came into the world, the right to David's throne was in the hands of Joseph, who was his descendant through Solomon. Mary was also of David's line, but she belonged to a junior branch, being descended from the great king through Nathan. Through Mary alone the Lord Jesus could never have inherited David's throne, for Joseph and his heirs would have barred the way. God had thus this problem to solve, how to give Him Joseph's rights, without making Him Joseph's actual son. Had He been **Joseph's son** He could not have been our Saviour; He **would then have been** just a man like ourselves, and nothing more. But God in His infinite wisdom ordered it that He should be born in wedlock, yet by the miraculous intervention of the Holy Ghost, whatever some of the evil critics of the present day may say in their unbelief The facts were put before Joseph by God Himself, and devoutly accepted by him. All responsibility connected with the babe was divinely put upon Joseph, according to the Matthew account of the matter. To him the angel appeared, not to Mary; it was he who took both mother and Babe into Egypt, and it was he who brought them back again into the land of Israel Our Lord thus inherits Joseph's rights indisputably. Before all Israel He stood forth as his legal heir, and probably no Jew would ever be disposed to question His claim to that position. And so it is divinely said, "the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end " (Luke 1: 32, 33).

His title Son of David involves within itself the restoration of the people of Israel to their land. At the present time there is no nation of Israel for David's greater Son to rule over. It is a remarkable sign of the times that the Jewish people are now desiring to be a nation once more. During the past few years they have held their Congresses in various parts of Europe for the discussion of the question how they can get Jerusalem and Palestine into their own hands again Their minds are bent on accomplishing this, and they are not willing to accept any refusal. It surely points to the speedy return of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will indeed soon appear, and will deliver Zion so long trodden down by the Gentiles, setting up again the throne of David so long dishonoured in the dust. The whole twelve tribes of Israel will then be **restored by** divine favour, and He will establish them in the land of their fathers, Himself administering the government of the kingdom in perfect righteousness and equity. We thus look to see our Lord Jesus Christ getting His earthly rights as Son of David.

We come back again to the great question, "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" Matthew furnishes us with yet another answer to it. Not only is He Son of David; He is also

SON OF ABRAHAM.

It was not Isaac but Christ that God had before His mind when He said to the patriarch at Moriah, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22: 18). This is fully argued by the apostle in Gal. 3. God is not only going to bless the whole house of Israel in the day to come, He has also in His mind purposes concerning universal blessing He means to bless the human family as such, filling the whole earth with the knowledge of Himself "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isaiah 40: 5) When God's time comes for this, the tempter will be hurled from his throne, the rightful King of Kings and Lord of Lords will be established on *His* throne, and all the nations of the earth will enjoy His sway. All that men can do will never bring in universal peace and blessing. Civilization will not accomplish it. Peace Congresses will not bring it about. But God is going to bless all the nations in Abraham's Seed, the Christ who died and rose again. The world's hopes centre in Him, although the world as yet neither knows it nor recognises it. But the day will dawn when the whole world will be brought to His feet, and men of every clime will be able to give a true answer to the question in Matt. 22: 41. From one end of the universe to the other men will say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God"

This happy condition of things will not be brought about by evangelistic effort. Some Christian people imagine that the whole human family is to be brought to Christ through the preaching of the present Gospel. But it is a mistake. God is occupied during this age in taking out from among the nations a people for His name (Acts 15: 14). When this work is completed, the Church of God will be called up to the Father's house. Then God will turn to the accomplishment of His larger purposes; Israel will be restored, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed in the true seed of Abraham. He is both the hope of Israel and of the whole creation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is thus Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David, and Son of Abraham, and worthy of the homage of our hearts both now and for ever.