

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Christ Seated: His Person - Set Himself Down - Hebrews 1:3

There are a number of occasions in the Epistle to the Hebrews where the Son of God is found to sit in some way. As I thought about this, I wondered if different prepositions would lend a variety of reasons for sitting and came up with the following:

- Sit at to work,
- Sit down to rest,
- Sit up to listen,
- Sit on to test,
- Sit round to talk,
- Sit over to fold,
- Sit to - to take,
- Sit by to hold,
- Sit forward to study,
- Sit under to hide,
- Sit back to sleep, and
- Sit sideways to ride.

In the passage before us today, the Son of God sits Himself down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. Hebrews 1:1-4 read: *“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, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”* In this talk we will mainly consider the Person who sat down. We will then briefly think about why He could sit down; and where He sat down.

The writer of the Hebrew Epistle does not introduce himself. Rather, the inspired word immediately points us to God and His Son. Throughout the letter God is pleased to show that His Son is indeed wonderful. In the first chapter, He is seen as being God the Son and greater than angels. In the second chapter, He is greater than Adam. Chapter 3 and the first part of chapter 4 show us how He is superior to Moses and Joshua; while the second part of chapter 4 through to chapter 10 inclusive reveal how He is greater than Aaron. As we later consider His Person, we will confine ourselves to the revelation given to us in chapter 1.

The chapter begins with God. This is the name given to identify the Perfect Being. He is spirit as to His existence, that is to say, He has no material form. Yet he is a person described as being light and love. Many people emphasise His love believing that He must always seek the blessing of everyone. This is true. Yet the same people do not understand why there is suffering and death. God's nature of love is balanced by light. He is absolutely holy. Therefore, on the one hand, He is trustworthy and reliable; while, on the other, He is pure and must judge evil.

The essential attributes of God include the facts that He is:

- eternal - He always has been, is and will be;
- self-existent - He exists in and from Himself;
- immutable - unchanging in being and character;
- omnipotent - all powerful;
- omniscient - all knowing; and
- Omnipresent - He is ever present.

How do we know these things? The first verse of our passage answers: *“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.”* God had been pleased to reveal Himself to the fathers of the Hebrew race through His prophets - those who spoke the mind and counsel of God. He did this in many parts and in many ways. But, we know from what follows that this Old

Testament revelation was fragmentary and incomplete because God was fully revealed in His Son during His life here on earth and during the apostolic period that followed.

In Greek, the words: *“Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...”* are literally: *“At the end of these days has spoken to us in Son...”* The thought is that this is God Himself, as Son, who is speaking. The Son, who is God, stepped into manhood where He could be seen and heard in a direct way. So, in the New Testament, we find that God has been fully revealed to us as a Triune Being - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Each is equally God. In Hebrews 1, both the Deity and Manhood of the Son shine out. It needs to be said that there is no inferiority in the Son. As Son, He Himself could say, *“I and my Father are one.”* (John 10:30). There He claimed equality with the Father. On the other hand, as the dependent Man, He could say *“...My Father is greater than I”* (John 14:28).

O that we appreciated the fact that our Bible is indeed God-breathed - containing words directly from God the Son and words taught by the Holy Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:12-13). What a precious treasure of truth we have! Those who seek to change it according to their own opinions or according to the fads and fashions of this present evil world actively oppose God.

We have seen that the Son is none other than God Himself revealed to the people of this world in a man. The Bible says, *“God was manifest in the flesh”* (1 Timothy 3:16). When we realise this, then the name of “Jesus” takes on a deeper meaning ‘Yahweh who saves.’ His other name, ‘Immanuel’, declares that He is ‘God with us’. Furthermore, there are a number of other ways in which He is called ‘Son’ as equal with God which we may only outline today. He is:

- the Son of God (Luke 1:35),
- the Son of the Father (2 John 3),
- the Son of the Highest (Luke 1:32); and
- the Son of the Blessed (Mark 14:61).

The fact that He is Son is the first of eight glories listed in the first few verses of this chapter. The second is that God has set Him up to be *“the heir of all things”*. The word for “heir” is derived from a compound word in Greek meaning “a lot to be possessed”. In this case the lot or possession includes everything. This is pictured in Abraham giving all that he had to Isaac (Genesis 24:36). There Abraham is a type of God the Father and Isaac a type of the Son of God. It is stated in John 13:3: that Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands. All that had been created by the Son of the Father’s love are for the possession of that same Son. *“All things were created by him and for him”* (Colossians 1:16). So He is ‘heir of all things’ by right of creation and, especially, by right of redemption because He has tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). He has not yet taken full possession of His inheritance (Hebrews 2:8) but He will in due time. Jim Flanigan, writing in his commentary on the Hebrew Epistle, records:

- “As Son of Abraham He is heir to the land
- As Son of David He is heir to the throne
- As Son of man He is heir to the world
- As Son of God He is heir of all things.”

The third glory of the Son is found in the words: *“...By whom also he made the worlds.”* This may be literally rendered: *“...By whom also he made the ages.”* It seems that the ages encompass the worlds also. The whole of the physical creation including its time zones past, present and future were made by God the Son. This is amazing when we consider that, through the grace of God, the hands that formed the universe were nailed to Calvary’s cross. In the future, those same hands will roll up the heavens like a cloak (Hebrews 1:12) and produce a new heavens and a new earth.

We read on to find that *“He is the brightness of glory”* (the pronoun ‘his’ not in the original). This is His fourth glory. The Greek word for ‘brightness’ means ‘a shining forth’ or ‘effulgence’. The word for ‘glory’ is more difficult to define. Personally, I think ‘splendour’ is appropriate because it expresses the unity of beauty, excellence and majesty. So, this is the ‘effulgence of the splendour of God’. Just as a star makes its own light, so the Son of God radiates the splendour of God because He is God. This is indicated by the word ‘being’ in the clause: *“...Being the brightness of glory.”* The word shows an absolute and timeless existence. The eternal existence of God. The eternal existence of the Son.

In Revelation 21:23, we find a parallel thought relating to the heavenly city which is still future: *“And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”* Here we find that the Lamb, our precious Saviour, is the light or, better, lamp of the city and the light from that lamp was the glory of God. We must therefore conclude that the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, is none other than God. O,

who can understand the wonder of the Godhead! Yet we read that its fullness dwells in the Son of the Father's love (Colossians 1:19), and that all the fullness of that Godhead dwells in Him bodily, that is, as a man (Colossians 2:9).

The fifth glory is expressed in the words, "...*The express image of his person*". The Greek word "*charakter*" translated as express image denotes an impress or stamp like that used to mint a coin. On the other hand, the word for 'person' is 'substance'. So, the phrase may be rendered as "*the expression of his substance*." This tells us all that the essential being of God is seen perfectly in the Son. In Him we see God's nature and all the essential attributes of God that were listed in our introduction. To these we could add the moral attributes of holiness, righteousness, goodness and faithfulness. The hymn writer, John Nelson Darby wrote:

*All the Father's counsels claiming
Equal honours to the Son;
All the Son's effulgence beaming
Makes the Father's glory known.*

This brings us to the sixth glory, namely, that *He upholds all things by the word of His power*. In this context, the word upholding implies government and preservation. He not only sustains the physical universe, but also rules the laws that bind it together. If He wishes then He may change them as He did in Joshua's battle against the Amorites when the sun and moon were stayed for a day (Joshua 10:12-13). In Hezekiah's day, there was a time when the sun went backwards ten degrees at the request of the prophet Isaiah (2 Kings 20:9-11). It was no small matter that darkness covered the earth when the Son of God hung upon the tree. By the word of His power, control of the universe was, has been and will be maintained until He decides to intervene. We must bear this in mind when hurricanes howl, the earth tears, volcanoes vomit, seas soar, famines strike and pestilences persist. He never acts without reason. His ways are above our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. How well William Cowper knew this when he wrote:

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.*

The seventh glory of the Son is found in the words, "*When he had by himself purged our sins...*" the Person who made the universe and upholds it by the word of His power is the very One who died to make purgation or purification of sins. This encompasses the work involved in order that sins could be cleansed away. It is not "our" sins in particular, but sins in a wider sense, namely, the sins of mankind. Nevertheless, we have to remember that His sacrifice makes cleansing available to all, but is only effective for those who trust in him as the Son of the living God and accept His redeeming work on Golgotha's tree. In 1 John 1:7 the apostle John writes, "*The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin*." Here it is a cleansing from that root called sin. Sin in every form it takes can be washed away in the blood of God's Son. It was Christ who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). JG Deck describes the judgment He bore in this way:

*When we see Thee as the Victim,
Nailed to the accursed tree,
For our guilt an folly stricken,
All our judgment born by Thee,
Lord, we own with hearts adoring,
Thou hast washed us in Thy blood;
Glory, glory everlasting
Be to Thee, Thou Lamb of God.*

Interestingly, the word for purification or cleansing is used in Mark 1:44 where Jesus speaks to a leper He had just cleansed saying, "...*Go, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing what Moses ordained for a testimony to them*." This offering is found in Leviticus 14:1-7 where the priest had to take two clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop. One of the birds was then taken and killed in an earthen vessel over running water. The other elements and the living bird were dipped in the blood of the sacrifice which was sprinkled upon the leper seven times. The leper was then pronounced clean and the living bird was released. The whole thing is a picture of the sacrifice of Christ who was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification.

The bird is a heavenly creature. Christ was the second man, the Lord from out of heaven. The symbolised Christ as the righteous one for the righteous grow as the cedar (Psalm 92:12). The scarlet speaks of His dignity as a man whether as Firstborn (Genesis 38:28), Deliverer (Joshua 2:18), Sin-offering (Isaiah 1:18), Valiant Man (Nahum 2:3) or King of the Jews (Matthew 27:28). The hyssop, a lowly plant that sprung out from walls (1 Kings 4:33), tells of His humility (Philippians 2:6-8). The earthen vessel symbolises the body that was prepared for Him. The running water speaks of the Spirit of God. *“Christ, who by the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot unto God.”* (Hebrews 9:14). It was this blood that cleansed the leper. It is His blood that washes away our sins. We might well take up the strains of Revelation 1:5-6: *“Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood...to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”* What the Son has done brings glory to His name.

So having made one sacrifice for sins, *He seated Himself at the right hand of the Majesty (or, Greatness) on high.* Herein lies His eighth glory. There is a man in the place of acceptance, favour and greatness in the glory because His work for mankind's salvation has been completed. From the cross, He could cry aloud, *“It is finished!”* He had to die sacrificially if we were to be blessed and the Father glorified. W Yerbury expressed this beautifully in his hymn:

*O Lord, by faith we look above,
And crowned with brightest glory see
Thyself, by man once crowned with thorns,
And hear Thee say, “Remember me.”*

*The cross! 'Twas there Thou bowedst Thy head;
There deeper pangs than mortals know
Did rend Thy heart, and deepest floods
Of wrath divine did Thee o'erflow.*

*Love brought Thee down, love led Thee on,
Nor ought Thy steadfast heart could move,
Till all redemption's work was done;
Oh, matchless mystery of love!*

By virtue of His Person and work, He could rightfully take this place. The sacrificial work of priests in the past was never finished. They continually stood to serve the Lord in this way. The offering of the Son was once for all in answer to Psalm 22 where the *sob* of the first part of this Messianic psalm is balanced by the *song* in the second half - picturing the sufferings of Christ and the glory that had to follow (Luke 24:25-26).

Anticipating this finished work, we hear the words of the Son as He spoke to His Father in John 17:4-5: *“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”* Well might we bow in worship saying, “Lord Jesus, we love Thee for the glorious worth which in Thyself we see; we love Thee for that shameful cross endured so patiently.”

The glories of the Son of God are immeasurable. As we move on in this chapter, we find that the inspired writer takes up Old Testament scriptures and applies them directly to Christ. For example, He is greater than angels because He is God the Son. He was declared by God to be the Son who has a more excellent name than the angels. He is declared to be the Son in manhood at His first coming. He is also seen as the Son in relationship with the Father. When He appears as King of kings and Lord of lords, He will be worshipped by angels. He shall reign in righteousness as God upon His millennial throne. Therefore, He must be pre-eminent among His peers. Furthermore, He is the Lord who laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the works of His hands. He is eternal in His being as He remains when this creation perishes. Finally, He is the Lord who is unchanging in His being and character.

The following verse of a hymn by E Williams expresses some of His glory and concludes our talk today:

*Glory, Lord, is Thine for ever,
Ever Thine - Thou art the Son!
Great the glory Thou art given,
Great the glory Thou hast won;
Great the glory and the splendour
Of the holy heavenly place;
Greater far the Godhead glory
Shining, Saviour, in Thy face.*

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