

The Glory of Christ

First Sermon in a Series on The Character of Christ

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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.

—Hebrews 1:3

Dear congregation, this evening we'd like to begin a short series of sermons that look at the character of Jesus Christ. We're asking the question, "What is Jesus like?" Of course, the moment we say that, we realize, as John tells us at the very end of his gospel, that the whole world could not contain the books that could have been written about Him (John 21:25). There are many, many things to say, but when you look at the character of Christ, especially as you see it in the gospels, there are certainly some characteristics that stand out as prominent and unmistakable. We hope, Lord willing, in the coming weeks, to look at several of these: His compassion, His power to save, His willingness to save, His obedience to His Father, His joy and sorrow.

Through this whole series, we are asking the question that Jesus Himself put to the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ?" (Matt. 22:42). We shouldn't want to just know more about Christ, but we should want to know *Him*, and we need to know *Him*, and to enter into a personal relationship with Him, or to enter more deeply into this personal relationship with Him by faith, so that when we study the character of Jesus, we don't think of this simply as though we were studying some great biography. When you read

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2. Whatever you see in Christ perfectly reveals the glory of God.

1. All the glory of God is revealed in the man Christ Jesus

Our text tells us several things about Christ. It tells us firstly that He is the Son of God in verse 2. God has spoken to us by His Son. It is telling us that He is God. As the ancient church counsel in Nicaea said, “He is God of God. He is Light of Light. He is very God of very God.” Christ Jesus is therefore co-equal with the Father. All the glory and the power of God the Father is there in God the Son. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit have the closest of relationships—*as close as it can be*. Jesus can say, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). What an encouragement to us, congregation, that when we study His character while He was here on earth, as we look at the man who puts His hand on lepers, who is asleep on the boat in the storm, and yes, the man who at last is crucified—that this man is the Son of God. He is God. Remember why God the Son is here on earth, and the reason is: *He is here to save His people from their sin*. The one who is born to Mary in Bethlehem is the eternal Son of God, so that when Mary holds Him, He is holding her. The one who is saving His people from their sins is the Son of God.

It goes on in verse 2 to say that He is “the heir of all things.” The idea of glory often has the idea of *what you possess*. The Queen of Sheba saw all that Solomon had—the meat at his table, his servants and ministers, their clothing, his cupbearers, the house he had made: all his *glory*—and she fainted in herself. What glory Solomon had! But the question here is: What does Christ have? What does the man Christ Jesus, as you see Him walking around—the one who is the Savior of His people—what does He have? What does He possess? What is His glory? Our text tells us that He is “heir of all things.” It tells us that everything we need for salvation, *He has*, He possesses, it is His by right. He is heir of all things.

Dear people, do you see what this means for you? Do you need pardon for sin? He has it. Do you need mercy and compassion and grace? He has it. Do you need sympathy and friendship

and help? He has it. Do you need grace to help you in your time of need? He has it. He has all. He is heir of all things. You will never be disappointed in Christ. So often in our lives we are disappointed, especially if we urgently need something important like some medicine or a piece of equipment, and yet when we go to buy it, we're told, "It's out of stock." Speaking reverently, Jesus Christ will never be out of stock. He is heir of all things. He always possesses everything you need.

Then it continues in verse 2, "By whom also he made the worlds." He is the Creator. We see this glory every day—the glory of God is seen in creation. The heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, the order, the design, the beauty, everything about it shows and preaches the glory of God. And our text tells us that this Son made it all. He made the worlds. All the glory of the created world shows forth something of the glory of Christ. It was all made by Him and for Him. What an encouragement that also is, isn't it? The person on whom we are to rely for the salvation of our souls is the One who made the worlds. Maybe you're here saying, "I need a new heart. I need to be a new creation." Oh, look here; here is the One who made the worlds. Spurgeon says, "I love to think that He who created all things is also our Savior, for then He can create in me a new heart and renew a right spirit within me, and if I need a complete new creation, as I certainly do, He is equal to the task."²

Next, you get these two wonderful expressions in verse 3: "Who being the brightness of his glory," and, "Who being the express image of his person." Even that phrase, "Who *being*," speaks of His eternity. It's not that He *was* the glory of God. It's not that He came to *be* the glory of God. It's not that He is *similar* to the glory of God. It's not that He *reflects in some way* the glory of God. No. Who *being*—who was, and is, and continues to be, without change, without alteration. Who *being* the glory of God. This is the same Being who said, "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14). The eternity of God belongs to Him.

2. Spurgeon, "Depths and Heights," 45:388.

It also tells us, “Who being the brightness of His glory.” It’s not just saying that Jesus is bright. It’s saying that He is the brightness itself. It’s not saying He is like a ray of light that comes from the sun. No. Christ is the very light itself. “God is light” (1 John 1:5). This person is light. He is the brightness of His glory. This speaks to us of the perfect way in which Jesus represents God and His glory. He is the clear and the perfect exhibition of the glory of God. The divine glory is perfectly seen in Him. Think of the majesty of God. Think of the beauty of God. Think of the boundless perfection of God. Think of all His glorious attributes—His wisdom and knowledge and holiness and justice and goodness and truth. They’re all perfectly found in Jesus Christ. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ.

“Who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person.” Children, “express image” has the idea of a perfect stamp. A king would put his royal stamp on something and press it down so that the image on the stamp would go perfectly onto the paper. The *exact* same image. The *express* image. That’s the idea here. The Father and Christ are two distinct persons but they both have exactly the same nature. Everything that makes God, God, belongs to Christ in every single detail and in the most perfect way. He is the perfect likeness of God. He is identical in essence with God. The Old Testament prophets say that this is what Messiah would be like, this is what God is like, and they describe God in different ways, and all the pictures and the ceremonies and the types and the shadows were all saying, “This is what God is like.” He’s something like this. But Jesus Christ is different. He does not point somewhere else and say, “This is what God is like.” No, He points at Himself and says this is what God is like, because I am God. When you see Me, you see the Father also, because I am the express image of His character. Dear friends, if this is who Jesus Christ is, should we not come and trust and adore this person? If this is who the Good Shepherd is, should we not listen to His voice and follow Him? Should we not say, “O Lord, I am like a lost sheep, but seek and find Thy servant” (Ps. 119:176)? If this is

who is saying, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37), then ought we not come to Him and fall before Him and close in with Christ?

So, all the glory of God is perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. That’s important as we go forward with this study, because is it not true that when you think of the glory of God and when you think of the man Christ Jesus, that at times you might be tempted to think that there is *something less* than the glory of God that you see? You agree, that as the second person, He has all the glory of God. He is God of God, He is Light of Light, He is very God of very God. But then you see Him at the incarnation, you see Him in the manger, you see Him without a place in the inn. You see Him as He takes on weak and frail flesh. You see Him as He is made, as Paul says, in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3). You see Him in His life, and you hear Him say, “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matt. 8:20). And you ask, how that can be the creator of all things? He who made the birds of the air, and their nests, and the holes for the foxes, how does He not have a place to lay his head? Where is the glory here? And you look at His suffering in His life. You go to Gethsemane and you see the great drops of blood, and the suffering, and the cry saying, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matt. 26:39). You see the disciples running away and forsaking Him and fleeing from Him, and He’s left all alone. You see Peter denying Him and the hurt and the pain when they all forsake Him and flee, and you ask, where is the glory here?

And then you go to Calvary. You see Him arrested, mocked, spat on, bearing the cross, made the song of the drunkards, numbered with the transgressors, bearing the sin of many, being made sin for us, being led like a lamb to the slaughter, and you ask, where is the glory there? Then you see Him lying lifeless in a tomb. You see the hands that did so much good, *motionless*. You see the feet that walked around doing good, *motionless*. The eyes that were so kind and full of pity and love; they are closed now. The heart that was so often moved with compassion has stopped

beating now. And you ask, where is the glory there? You might be tempted to think that you see something *less* than the glory of God, something less than the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person.

What we need to realize as we look at Jesus on earth, in His humiliation, is that this is *glory veiled*. Children, if you have a light, and you put a big blanket over it, you will see less of the shining light, but the light would still be there, it would still be shining. Putting a blanket over the light wouldn't actually take away anything from the light itself. You wouldn't have turned it off. The light itself would still be as bright as it always was, but it's now covered, it's now veiled. And that's what it's like at the incarnation. The incarnation, the flesh, is like the blanket that goes over and veils the glory of Christ—because we couldn't see the glory of God and live—but my dear friends, the glory is still there. The glory has not lessened one iota. The person who is born in the manger, the carpenter's son, the man of sorrows, the one who finally hangs between two thieves on a Roman cross, the one who is buried out of sight—that person is the Savior, and that person is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person; that is what we must see if we are to understand how absolutely amazing everything that Christ did was. He is the Son of God. What think ye of Christ?

2. Whatever you see in Christ perfectly reveals the glory of God.

Let's move here, secondly, to look at this from the other direction, and to say that whatever you see in Christ perfectly reveals the glory of God. Here in this next part of verse 3, you have three of the key points in the ministry of Christ. And it's really a part of the whole: it's speaking of His whole life, but it's highlighting three major parts. It tells us firstly that He upholds all things by the word of His power. Second, it tells us that He, by Himself, purged our sins. And it tells us thirdly that He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. It's really taking us from the beginning to the end.

He upholds all things by the word of His power. What a revelation of the glory of God this is! The idea of upholding is the

idea of carrying or bearing, like a mother who carries a little child when it's just born. She holds it and protects it. If, for a moment, she lets it go, it will fall to the ground. Jesus Christ is upholding everything—this whole world, you, me, the universe, the stars, the galaxies, the nation, all of it. He's holding it up by His powerful word. If He would let it go for a moment, we would all collapse into nothingness.

And He does it by His powerful word. There's something here about how easily He does it. It's effortless. How difficult is it for you to speak a word? You don't even think about it. It's easy to speak. He upholds all things *by the word* of His power: speaking about how majestically effortless it is for Him to hold this whole universe together. Really, it is a stunning thought, that when He dies and breathes His last breath—when it appears that He has no strength left—that person who is hanging on the cross is the same person, right there and then, who is holding all things together, effortlessly, by the word of His power. And if He would let go, the very heartbeats of the Roman centurion, and those who are railing on Him, and the Jews who were crying, “Crucify Him!” would instantly stop. But for you, Christian friend, if He upholds all things effortlessly by the word of His power, will He let you go? He can uphold you, this is saying, in your difficulty that seems so big, and the grief that seems so intense, and the pain that seems so unmovable. He will hold His people fast. He upholds all things by the effortless word of His power.

But then our text moves on, and it says, “When he had by himself purged our sins.” Speaking here of what He does on the cross of Calvary, speaking here of what no one else but He could do—no one else but the person we've been describing could do this! And here, friends, is a work that shows more of the glory of God than anywhere else. Have you seen that? Have you seen that in the work of taking away sin, more of the glory of God is seen than anywhere else? Angels sang for joy on the morning of creation. They could sing, “O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches”

(Ps. 104:24). But when the angels saw the Son of God before whom they had veiled their faces in the temple in heaven, when they saw Him take on human flesh, when they saw the Son of God in our nature, when they saw Him walking around, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and especially, we must say, when they saw Him made sin for us who knew no sin, when they saw the one whose holiness made them cover their faces, when they saw Him made a curse for His people's sin, when they saw the Just One in the place of the unjust, that He would bring us to God, when they saw the Son of God in our nature dying—*never* did the angels see such a display of the glory of God.

More glory was here than in all the work of creation and all the work of providence. Then the angels would sing, as Psalm 21:5 says, "His glory is great in thy salvation." Doesn't this tell us what a great work the work of purging sin is? Children, purging is the idea of *taking away*. It's an Old Testament idea. In the ceremonial law you have guilt that is *purged* or *taken away*. It's removed. But if the glory of God is seen more in this work than anywhere else, what does that tell you about sin? It tells you that sin is an evil and a dreadful thing, if more of the power and wisdom and glory of God is seen in the purging of it, than in the whole creation of the world.

Ah, friends, Christ effortlessly upholds all things by the word of His power. It is easy for Him. But there is nothing effortless, and there is nothing easy, about the removal of sin. Sin is that evil thing which God hates. Sin puts you away from God; it banishes you from God and His presence. God cannot look upon sin. Sin makes you say, like Peter, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Sin makes you say, like Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isa. 6:5). To purge away the sin of God's people, it cost the blessed Son of God *agony*, sweat like great drops of blood. He is saying, "I found trouble and sorrow" (Ps. 116:3) because the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

But look what it says: “When he had by himself purged our sins.” He did it. It’s complete. He completed it before going back to heaven. And He did it *by Himself*. Not by His example. Not by His miracles. Not by His healings. Not by His teaching. But by Himself. It’s speaking about His sacrifice, as Hebrews 9:26 says: “Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” It is something that He did alone. Oh, how He reveals and shows the glory of God in the purging away of sin, because you know it, don’t you, Christian friend, that when sin is in your conscience and sin is real and you are convicted of sin, it has a crippling effect. You can’t sing, you can’t pray, you can’t read, you can’t worship, you can’t come near to God, you can’t trust. And you realize you cannot purge away your own sin by yourself. You can’t get rid of the guilt of sin yourself. Hugh Cartwright made this point: it is the guilt of sin that needs to be removed, not just the guilt of conscience. So often we want the guilt out of our conscience, but as I remember him saying, “There are many ways to get guilt out of your conscience.” You can drown a guilty conscience with pleasure, or with music, or with an easy gospel. You can get rid of the guilt of conscience. But the solemn reality is, you can have the guilt of conscience removed and you can still go to hell, because it’s not the guilt of *conscience*—that’s simply the effect of sin—it’s the guilt of *sin* itself that needs to be removed. And the blood of bulls and of goats cannot do that, and your own good works and best efforts cannot do that. Suppose you were to work yourself to death in religious, and moral, and otherwise good charitable activities; you’d be more a child of hell than when you began.

But this text gloriously tells us that He, by Himself, purged our sins. The blood of Christ made atonement for sin. The blood of Christ took the sins away. It purged them. Where did the sin go after it had been nailed to the tree? The Bible says that God has cast all the sins of His people behind His back (Isa. 38:17). But children, where is the back of God? Doesn’t God see everything? Aren’t all things before His face? So where is the back of God? The back of God does not exist. And that’s where all the sins of

God's people are: they don't exist anymore. You can search high and low for them. Satan can search high and low for them. Your conscience can search high and low for them. You can search your heart. You can search everywhere. But in terms of the court of heaven, they are gone, if washed in the blood of Christ. They don't exist. That's how wonderful, how full, how thorough, and how glorious this purging away of sin is.

And then lastly here, we see that Christ sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. It's not just saying that He did this next, as though this is just what happened afterwards. It's making an important connection. It is saying that He did this *because* He did that. Because He purged sins away so gloriously and effectively, *therefore* He sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Philippians 2:5-9 brings that out very clearly: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery 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 hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." *Because* He did that, God *therefore* sets Him now in the place of the highest honor at the right hand of God. He is on the throne of the universe. And it is saying that the work that He did is finished and it is perfect. And Jesus is now there making intercession and praying. But not like a beggar, not like someone who is down on his knees pleading like we might. He is there saying, "Father, *I will*. Because of what I have done, this is what *I will*." And He and his Father are one, and whatever Jesus asks for, He gets (Ps. 21:4). So now, as the poet says, "The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now."

So, whatever you see in Christ perfectly reveals the glory of God. When we look at Him in the gospels, whether you look at Him in His action or His emotion, what He says or what He does, whenever and wherever you look at Him, *He is never out of*

character. Sometimes we are. Sometimes you might look at a man who is very patient and you say he was out of character when he did this or that—it wasn't like him. Jesus Christ will never act out of character. He will never look back at something He said, did, or thought, and say He wished He acted differently. And the Father will never look at anything He thought, said, or did, and say that it didn't represent Him well.

When you put this all together, it means that when we look at Christ in His compassion for sinners, or His pronouncing woe on impenitent cities, or when you listen to His invitations, this is exactly the picture that God the Holy Spirit wants you to see. And what you see in everything that Jesus does is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person. He is to be believed. As we begin this series on the character of Christ, my dear friend, He is to be believed. Remember the words we read at the beginning of Hebrews 2: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

This series will bring us to self-examination time and again: "What think ye of Christ?" And each time we learn more of who He is or what He has done, each time there is a ray of divine glory that shines in the face of Jesus Christ, the question comes again, "What think ye of Christ?" And the prayer for us all is, "Lord, show me Thy glory." It is for you children, too, because the Jesus of the Bible is a Jesus who takes children and who loves to hear from children, and who says to any who would stop them, "Suffer them to come unto me and forbid them not" (Luke 18:16). Psalm 102, tells us that when the Lord builds up Zion, He will appear in His glory. But what does it say next? "He shall appear in His glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer" (Ps. 102:16–17). Because that is His glory, too! He will not despise this prayer, so you take this prayer to this glorious person—"Lord, show me thy glory"—and see if He doesn't show you something of the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person as it shines in the face of the Jesus Christ. Amen.