

## **Supremacy of Christ**

Reading : Exodus 33, Hebrews 3

HN, SS 15/2/04 am

Study: John 1:15-18

Psalms: 27:1-4, 27:7-10, 67, 40:10-11

How do you relate to people older than yourself – and older sister or brother for example? Do you show respect because they are older than you? In many societies older people are greatly respected. Even the language often has different words or forms for addressing an older person. In NT times this was what it was like – older people were given respect.

John the Baptist was older than Jesus – not by much but he was older. Moreover he was a powerful preacher and was known as the man who baptizes. When Jesus came on the scene John baptized him. John attracted quite a following and had his own band of disciples.

Most people would have considered John the Baptist a greater man than Jesus. Some of John's disciples left him to follow Jesus when he told them to, but others stuck by John (3:25). They did not appreciate this new fellow coming and usurping the position of their Rabbi, their teacher. But John the Baptist himself testified unequivocally that Jesus was indeed greater than him.

### **Jesus greater than John the Baptist**

The witness of John the Baptist comes up again in this introduction or prologue. Some have suggested that this was to counter a teaching that elevated the importance of John the Baptist – but a glance at the other gospels shows that John the Baptist features in all. John's role was that of a forerunner, a herald. He publicly baptized Jesus and gave witness that here was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

We have already been told that John was not the true light but a witness to that light. Then in v. 14 there is reference to the Word once again – the Word became flesh. Now in v. 15 the witness of John comes up again – when in fact v. 16 seems to follow closely on v. 14.

The witness of John the Baptist clearly is important. Firstly the reference to him gives a solid historical background to the doctrine that is being taught here – the teaching about grace and truth and about the Word. Let there be no misunderstanding – this is not mere philosophy – not a strange new teaching. This is truth as witnessed by a man of no less stature than John the Baptist.

Secondly remember how Jesus asked the Jews about the authority of John the Baptist. They were questioning him about his own authority when he asked them this question. They could not deny John's Baptism (Mat 21:25).

John the Baptist bore witness of him – him is still the Word, for the name Jesus Christ does not come until v. 17. What was the witness or testimony of John? It was that even though Jesus came after John he was in fact to be given precedence and to be recognized as greater than John. He is preferred before me or has surpassed me.

In this gospel we do not have an extensive record of the birth of Jesus, as in Matthew and Luke, but this verse points to it – he who comes after me is preferred before me for he was before me.

John recognized that Jesus was in fact before him – in Greek protos meaning first. As God the Son, Jesus existed before his incarnation, his birth in this world. John understood this amazing truth unlike the Jewish leaders who later argued with Jesus and in fact tried to kill him for claiming to have existed before Abraham. John had no such difficulty and therefore gave the perfect witness.

This was the unambiguous cry of John. He did not whisper it on the side hoping that no one would hear but he cried out. See verse 30 where he says it again. He made it plain to his disciples and all who were around. Jesus is greater than me.

### **Greater than Moses**

The gospel writer indicates that Jesus is also superior to Moses. Remember the writer to the Hebrews (ch 3) dealt with this same comparison – it was vital that the Jews understood this and that we also understand it. If Jesus was before Abraham as he says in 8:58 – before Abraham was I am – he was certainly before Moses. Of course Jesus was there in the beginning – in the beginning he was with God.

Jesus superiority rested not only on his prior existence – his number of years – but also in the quality or substance of his revelation. Moses gave the law. The law was good but it could not save anyone. The law brought guilt not salvation. Still the law was a demonstration of the grace of God to the extent that it does reveal sin – for no man can be saved who does not recognize and repent of his sin.

This text refers in a very brief way – it is the introduction still – a brief way to the two dispensations. It refers to the law and then to grace and truth. It refers to Moses and then to Jesus Christ. One essential difference pointed out here is that the law was given through Moses. He was not the subject of the law – he just handed it on or gave it to the people.

By contrast grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. He embodied grace and truth – they cannot be separated from him. His is the truth. He is full of grace. That truth and that grace were revealed, fully and finally, on the Cross. There on the Cross the truth about the sin was revealed – wicked, sinful men put the sinless One to death – all mankind including you and me were represented there approving of his death.

Truth, however, includes not only the revelation of sin in each and every human heart but also the truth of the saving grace of God. It was the sovereign plan of God that God the Son be sacrificed for salvation of the world. God made him the propitiation for our sins. All who believe in him have everlasting life.

Jesus came full of grace and truth. This was in contrast to the law that Moses gave. The law of course, as well as the prophets, pointed forward to this full/perfect demonstration of the grace of God. The Scriptures clearly

teach that the new dispensation, the new covenant in the blood of Christ supercedes the old.

Fullness is a wonderful term is it not. It refers to an absolute. If something is full it cannot be added to. Here it seems to be an overflowing fullness, for we have received of his fullness. It is a bit like the living water that the Samaritan woman was offered – an abundance of grace and mercy such that we can never say his grace is not sufficient. Is that your experience? Can you testify to the fullness of His grace in your life?

Grace for grace. This is a perplexing phrase – not only for us but for the scholars also. Hendrickson wrote a thesis on the meaning of the preposition *anti* in the NT – that is the Greek word in this phrase. And many others have written at length on this preposition. It is usually translated for or upon but actually means instead of or in place of.

Now some think it is referring to the new grace of the gospel being in place of the old grace of the law. That may be so but most understand simply as a description of the over-abundance of grace – the grace that flows from the throne of grace into our lives daily – the grace that is there for our every need. Oh the wonder of his grace – grace upon grace that is in Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

### **Christ the Only Begotten**

Our text and the prologue comes to an end with this magnificent declaration about seeing God. Moses was granted the unique privilege of seeing the back of God as he passed by (Exodus 33:22). But he did not see nor has any man seen the face of God. Our text says no one has seen God at any time. That was an accepted fact by the Jews – God said no man shall see me and live.

But the message of this gospel – the amazing message is that the only begotten, the Son who is in the bosom of the Father has made him known. Jesus the Son has 'exegeted' or declared Him. Think back to v. 1 – The Word was God. Here the same truth is expressed in the words in the bosom of the Father. God came into this world. God the Son came and dwelt among us. God the Son, full of grace, went to the cross for you and for me. That is what we believe.

Greater than John, greater than Moses – Jesus was in truth God the Son who came and lived among men and died for men. Jesus himself declared this great truth when he said to his disciple he who has seen me has seen the Father (14:9).

Jesus is no longer dwelling among men – he is dwelling in heaven. But we have this record of his life and death before us – a record that portrays his divinity – and his humanity – a record given to us that we might not only read and but might believe in Him who is spoken of here.

May Jesus hanging on the Cross be just as real to us as it was to his disciples, may his resurrection be just as real as it was to them also. May we see him today seated upon that throne of grace. Come to him and find the grace that you need – grace upon grace for evermore.

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