

SETTING THE RECORDS STRAIGHT

Today's Text: Hebrews Chaps. 1-2

Extracts:

- 1 God, who at various times, and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, *has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through 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 at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they* [Heb. 1: 1-4]**
- 2 *Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away* [Heb. 2: 1]**

I first heard this story during a national workshop on "Culture and Management," held in Lagos, Nigeria, in November 1987. A young Nigerian Managing Director/CEO of a manufacturing company had a middle-aged messenger attached to his office. His job was to take the MD's brief case at the close of work each day to his driver downstairs. One day, the MD's father, also a middle-aged man, came to visit him close to the end of the day. The messenger came in as usual and exchanged pleasant words with the MD's father. As he took the brief case, the MD's father rushed forward to take it from him. The MD could not stand his father carrying his brief case. So, he took it from him. The messenger could not stand his boss carrying the brief case. So, he also rushed forward to grab it from him. The show continued until the MD sent the messenger away and asked his father what was going on. His father explained that the messenger was his elder from their village and he was, in fact, the chairman of the Lagos branch of their home town association. The young man looked at his father and said, "Here, I'm the boss and he is my messenger and carrying that brief case is his only job!"

The young man had an opportunity to set the record straight, namely, that the culture of that office was not based on age but position/status. Look around your situation- at home, work, church, etc. People are laying claim to superior status that may be simply self-awarded or assumed. We put others down so that we can place ourselves up there. For example, look at how the Jewish leaders treated Jesus with contempt because of His age and family. In today's Bible verses, however, the writer of the Hebrews sets the records straight: Jesus is superior to the angels and humans. He is the Son of God and the Son of Man! There are lessons we can learn therefrom to set our own records straight.

1. Background: Familiarity, they say, breeds contempt!

How do you explain Jesus to those who claim to know so much already about God? That was the challenge faced by the writer of the book of *Hebrews*. The Ten Commandments came through Moses, a Jew. All the prophets were Jews. Jesus was a Jew. Therefore, if Jesus could not be explained within the boundaries of Jewish culture, especially as it relates to the coming Messiah, then, it would be unacceptable. For example, when Jesus came among His people in Nazareth, they were quite cynical, saying, “Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?” [Matt. 13: 53-58]. Elsewhere, as Jesus taught in the temple, the “Jews marvelled, saying, ‘How does this Man know letters, having never studied?’” [Jn 7: 14-15]. Interestingly, most Jews are still expecting the first coming of the Messiah, not His return to judge the world as believers expect! How do you explain the true Christ to such a skeptical audience? How do you set the records straight among such people?

That was the challenge that faced the writer of the book of Hebrews. *Familiarity, they say, breeds contempt. Was Christ’s familiarity and humility a stumbling block to those among whom He grew up and worked? How could such people be made to appreciate that Moses and the prophets and, indeed, all the Scriptures are all about Jesus [Lk 24: 27]? In the verses we are going to concentrate on in today’s study [Heb. Chaps 1-2], the writer addressed some of the issues as follows:*

a) *His status is determined by God Himself!*

The writer said, “God, who at various times, and in various ways, spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has *appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds*; who being the brightness of His glory and *the express image of His person... when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*” [Heb. 1: 1-3]. In other words, *let no one ever be in any doubt that Jesus the Christ is the only begotten Son of God who took human form so that we who are the sons of man can be made sons of God.*

My English teacher used to tell us that every sentence is either an *expression* or an *explanation* or an *illustration* of an idea. You move beyond expression to explanation and/or illustration when people do not understand you! So, to stop at the level of merely expressing the divinity of Jesus in the three verses quoted above would not be enough for cynics. Therefore, the author needed to explain and illustrate that point to his Hebrew audience.

b) *Jesus is exalted far above angels*

The writer wrote that Jesus has “become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” [v. 4]. To no angel did God ever say, “You are My Son. Today I have begotten You.” To Jesus alone, God said, “I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son” [v. 5]. On the other hand, the angels are to minister to Jesus and to worship Him [vv. 6-12].

For example, during His temptation by the devil, the tempter told Jesus to worship him but Jesus replied, “Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’” [Lk 4: 5-8]. When Jesus was in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, we are told, “Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him” [Lk 22: 39-43]. When John fell down to worship the angel that showed him spiritual things in the island of Patmos, the angel said to him, “See that you do not do that. For *I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God*” [Rev. 22: 8-9]. Clearly, angels may be spirits but they are not in the same league with Jesus; they are not God like Jesus!

c) *Yet, He became a man who is lower than the angels!*

Of Jesus, the writer said, “For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” [Heb. 2: 16-18].

To be the Messiah, Jesus had to take human form because spirit beings have no blood!¹ Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin [Lev. 17: 11; Heb. 9: 22]. Secondly, because He has taken human form, He can empathise with our weaknesses [Heb. 2: 18]. When we look at Him, we can see God because nobody has seen God at any time. Jesus has declared Him [Jn 1: 18].

Despite attempts by His earthly people, the Jews, to undermine His divinity, Jesus remained humble. But on many occasions, His Father let it be known to humans that Jesus is His beloved and only begotten Son. He did so at His birth [Lk 2: 8-20], at His baptism [Lk 3: 21-22] and during His Transfiguration [Lk 9: 28-36]. God validated Him among evil spirits in every synagogue that He entered [Lk 4: 31-34]. In other words, *Jesus at no time attempted to exalt Himself; it was always His Father and others who set the records straight*. For example, even

¹ “Satan has no blood,” *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 2 No. 9: 25 March 2001, http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_2/PDFs/Satanhasnoblood.pdf

when He had instructed a demon-possessed man who had been healed to go home to his family and friends to tell them what God had done for him, “he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis [i.e., literally ten cities!] all that Jesus had done for him” [Mk 5: 18-20]. What lessons can we learn from that for our own spiritual walk and work among a godless generation?

2. Lessons for us

Here are a few ways that we can use to set records straight concerning us-at home, school, work or place of worship:

a) *Choose humility over impunity*

Impunity can be defined as self-awarded importance or self-exemption from laws, rules and regulations. Humility, on the other hand, is to willingly give up one’s rights and privileges for the benefit of others. See how many of us fight for higher spiritual ranks in our places of worship even when we are as wayward as hell in matters concerning salvation? Jesus always had harsh words for the Pharisees who loved the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces [Lk 11: 37-43]. When He saw how those invited to a wedding party chose the best places, He warned that more honourable guests could force the host to push the impunity-prone guests to lower places. He warned, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” [Lk 14: 7-11].

Writing to the church at Philippi, Paul said [Phil. 2: 5-11]:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death on the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

No matter who you are, there will always be others higher in rank than yourself or equal (that you can neither punish nor reward) or lower. To produce good results, you may need to work with or through others. Therefore, you must learn to defer to others just as you love others to defer to you. Jesus was a Servant among His disciples [Lk 22: 24-27]. The Son of God had nowhere to lay His head- He slept in the wilderness among His disciples, with, most probably, a piece of rock for His pillows [Matt. 8:

20]! Yes, *you could be humiliated when you try to be humble but is that not better than to be disgraced for being too proud?*

b) Choose advocacy over propaganda

The word of God says, “Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips” [Prov. 27: 2]. ***When you sing your own praises (by yourself or through rented crowds), that is propaganda. When others sing your praises (without your prompting), that is advocacy!*** Unfortunately, we are better at propaganda than advocacy. For example, look at our CVs (résumés) and see how loud and far away they are from reality! Who provokes a discussion of our family members’ achievements in our “rumour” clubs? Jesus did not write a single word (nor do we have any evidence of Him dictating passages to His disciples) but John, one of His apostles, wrote in his gospel, “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” [Jn 21: 25]. That is advocacy par excellence.

We may be the only epistles of Christ that others get to read. Therefore, we must ensure that they are not written with ink (hypocrisy and worldly standards) but “by the Spirit of the living God,” not on tablets of flesh but of the heart [2 Cor. 3: 2-3]. By your fruits, not your gifts, you shall be known [Matt. 7: 15-20].

c) Your true worth is determined by God, not man!

Most of us have an identity crisis because we are not who we think we are! For example, the hypocrite tries to give a public image of righteousness until a whistleblower exposes his/her confidential underbelly! Some generous people may be *Robin Hoods* (who take from the rich, such as public funds to spread among family/supporters/admirers) or *Ali Babas* (who access the hidden wealth of thieves to enrich self/family/others) or scavengers (who clean up, i.e., hide the stolen wealth of the Robin Hoods and the Ali Babas). But the word of God says, “Do not look at [a person’s] appearance or at his physical stature...For the LORD does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” [1 Sam. 16: 7].

Take, for example, how God described Job to Satan: “Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, ***one who fears God and shuns evil?***” [Job 1: 8]. So, how does God see you? Do you fear Him and shun evil? Do you think that, because your ministry produces miracles you must be in good standing with God? In the words of Jesus, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will

of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons... and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness’” [Matt. 7: 21-23]:

Indeed, it is by your spiritual fruits that God determines your true worth. When God sets your records straight, it no longer matters how the world sees or talks about you. The world saw Jesus as the son of a carpenter. Now, they know that the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms spoke about Him [Lk 24: 44]. That is all that matters. That is what the Hebrews and the Gentiles should know about Jesus.

3. Conclusion: Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man!

Take your mind back to the Transfiguration story. Jesus led three of His disciples, Peter, James and John, up a high mountain. He was transfigured before them- His face shone like the sun and His clothes became like as white as the light. Moses and Elijah appeared and began to speak with Him. Peter requested for three tabernacles to be made- one for Jesus and one for each of the other two. That was a cultural response. Moses represented the Law; Elijah, the prophets [Matt. 17: 1-4]. Elsewhere, Peter had identified Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God [Matt. 16: 13-16] but here, he could not properly locate Jesus among the Jewish greats! God came in Himself and told Peter and his colleagues, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” [Matt. 17: 5]. That has settled the matter!

Jesus came in flesh to be able to shed blood for our sins and by His stripes, we have been healed [Is. 53: 5]. He will return soon to judge the world. So, what else do you want to know? Satan is a fallen angel and angels have no blood, being spirit beings. Moses, Elijah and other prophets, even though they were descendants of Abraham and had blood, could not save us because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” [Rom. 3: 23]. So, who should you trust: the one who has fallen (Satan or descendants of Adam) or the One (Jesus) who has saved you from falling? Is it not time then for you to give the more earnest heed to the things you have so heard lest you drift away?

The records are quite straight forward!