

# **“BUT WHO DO YOU SAY WHAT I AM?”**

(Matt 16:15)

THE ENTIRE OLD TESTAMENT with all its prophecies points to the kingdom of God and the Messiah. Christianity, as well, from its inception gives incessant testimony to Christ. This zeal for Christ is not merely the product of recent years, rather it is founded in the Old Testament with its prophecies. Here, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were instructed to widen their borders to include the whole of humanity. There was to be one king who would rule over his kingdom in righteousness. He was to unite the entire world under his banner. The world’s praise and service would be offered to this king who would, in turn, heal the world of its moral corruption. God was to become their father through the new birth of the Spirit to the redeemed ones. He would forgive their iniquity and renew their hearts and minds. All of this was to culminate in the person of the Christ.

This is the axis of the Old Testament. The New Testament reveals that all of this has indeed taken place in the Christ.

If this is not true, how is the Messiah to come from the house of David? Should one be born today who claimed to be the Messiah, who could testify to the fact that he was born of the house of David? The house of David has dissipated leaving not a trace.

There is a mystical air that enshrouds the Messiah of the Old Testament. He is revered, feared, glorified. He is raised to the divine with a beauty of expression that surpasses our rational capacities: “And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Is 9:6). His kingdom is portrayed as eternal and absolute—a trait which God alone shares with him: “And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14).

The prophets of old were not prohibited from speaking of the mysterious relationship existing between the Messiah and God the Father—a relationship of essence. However, such revelations were given under the cover of mystery and confession of ignorance as well as lack of understanding by the prophet: “Surely I am too stupid to be a man. I have not the understanding of a man. I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the

Holy One. Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name? Surely you know!" (Prov 30:2-4)

In one famous Jewish holiday still celebrated today, the leader stands in front of the people and cries out with passion and awe: "What is his name and what is his son's name if you know?" Indeed he is the Christ, the Son of the Highest. However, it is a sonship which human logic cannot ascertain.

The Apostle Paul refers to this sonship which he understood through tradition as well as revelation of visions and the Spirit: "This he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee'" (Acts 13:33).

The writer of Hebrews repeats the mystery of which Paul spoke. He possesses the same sense of certainty concerning this inherited tradition that came through revelation: "For to what angel did God ever say, 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee?'" (Heb 1:5). The New Testament confirms that the speaker of the Old Testament is God himself. Also, the angels, in spite of their spiritual nature, cannot reach up to the sonship of the Messiah to God. This is how the writer speaks of that ineffably sublime relationship which Jesus enjoys with the Father regarding the angels: "'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.' And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him'" (Heb 1:5-6).

Paul gives testimony to what was revealed in Deuteronomy (the Septuagint): "Rejoice, ye heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship him" (Deut 32:43). This declaration was fulfilled to the letter on the day of Christ's birth to which the Psalms refer: "The heavens proclaim his righteousness; and all the peoples behold his glory" (Ps 97:6).

The Apostle Peter refers to this tradition as one who has seen the divine preeminence of the Son over the angels: "Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God (in entity but not in place), with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him" (1 Pet 3:22).

Concerning the relation of God to man and Christ's work in that regard, Paul comments in the introduction of the letter to the Hebrews: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb 1:1-2).

The reader must take note of Paul's differentiation between the prophets and Christ. God spoke to us through the prophets. But God spoke to us *in his son*. The prophets relayed the word of God to man. But, God spoke to man in Christ. That is to say that Christ himself is the word of God sent to us. Thus, whenever the Son speaks, the Father is speaking.

Then the Apostle Paul elevates our minds to grasp the majesty of Christ's relationship to the whole of creation including mankind—past, present and future. He affirms that Christ is not of this world as are the prophets. Nor is he part of the created order. Rather, he is the creator. He says: "through whom also he created the world" (Heb 1:2).

Paul also speaks of the relation of Christ to the former prophecies. Christ was the central thrust and fulfillment of all that was spoken by the prophets. He was the heir of all the works and words of God: "whom he has appointed heir of all things" (Heb 1:2). This means that Christ is the fulfillment of all prophecies. Every event, whether in or out of time and space, finds its fulfillment in him. Paul affirms this truth in many places such as:

"For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:16-19).

As he also said: "For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things of earth" (Eph 1:9-10).

The apostles understood the meaning of the phrase: "son of God." Peter uttered it openly as a prophecy in response to the question of Christ: "And who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15). Peter responded: "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."

In response to this statement Jesus neither exempted himself nor treated the designation as though it were above his status. He was neither a mere servant of God nor simply a created being. Rather, he affirmed Peter's statement resoundingly. Peter's pronouncement was not the result of an emotional response, human rationality or imaginative design. Peter was directly inspired by the heavenly Father: "And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven' " (Mt 16:17).

Jesus' sonship is grasped through divine illumination. Human reason cannot ascertain it. It is revealed in a state of blessedness or happiness: "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona." Apart from this spiritual state of blessedness the human mind cannot discover the

mystery of Christ's sonship. It is a sonship which is grasped in the realm of the Spirit, not the flesh: "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3).

Those who find this doctrine difficult, whether in times past or present, have asked the question, why this complication in the revelation of the one and only God?

The answer is found in our being raised from the level of sinful slaves to the level of beloved sons of God. This elevation is the source of the complication. Being enslaved to God is accomplished with the greatest of ease. There is no complication in kneeling before God or reciting his name. However, to become beloved sons of God rather than slaves, to stand before him blameless in love, to have bold access to appear before him justified in glory, this is what necessitated the appearance of the Son of God in the flesh. This also illustrates the difficulty of the role Christ played in elevating mankind to a state of sonship and innocence through his own flesh. No angel, no archangel and no prophet could accomplish this. Only the Son of God is able to raise mere slaves to the level of sons.

In this way the sonship which is in God has been made manifest to the world. God has displayed his marvelous plan in raising our estate above that of every other creature. In the end we will attain a perfection and an eternal rest in God. All of this is a result of the voluntary descent of "the word"—the Son of God. Because he came, mankind can be elevated to God.

The life of Christ illustrates plainly how he possessed all power and authority over every created thing in heaven and earth. He was able to carry out the will of God in us completely having in himself the omnipotence of the creator. The prophet David described it this way: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet" (Ps 8:4-6).

This overwhelming power was in Christ as the gospel records and Paul testifies:

"that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:18-23).

For the believer, this authority of Christ which gives him power over all things, both seen and unseen, serves one purpose. He has removed the sentence of death from us,

redeeming us from the power of Satan and ultimate destruction. We are being prepared to be raised up to be a new spiritual creation worthy of the kingdom of God.

In this way, Christ transforms us, by his surpassing power, from slaves to sons. We become a new, glorified humanity with Christ himself as our head.

This amazing work of Christ in raising us up from earthy to heavenly citizenship was accomplished by his incarnation, his death and his resurrection. It has now become the secret of the joy of heaven as the prophet of old stated: "Rejoice, ye heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship him" (Deut 32:43). This is exactly like the hymn sung by the angels that first Christmas morning as they were accompanied by the heavenly host: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace among men with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:14). This is the same hymn sung by the entire creation at the end of the era of salvation.

"And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth.' Then I looked and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!' " (Rev 5:9-12).

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