

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRIST (Heb. 1:1-3)

We have been looking at the opening verses of the letter to the Hebrews. This is a fascinating book. It is steeped in the principles of the Old Testament priesthood and ceremonies. It was written by an unknown author, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, primarily to Jews who had become Christians. They most probably lived outside Israel. They had never met Jesus. Everything they knew about Him they had received 'second-hand' from others. They did not have a New Testament for it had not yet been compiled. They would have been 'second generation' Christians.

This letter would also have been of great benefit to Jews who understood *intellectually* that Jesus was the Messiah but had not yet come to know Him personally by faith.

As we previously noticed, the writer begins the letter by illustrating the *preparation* for Jesus in the Old Testament, **Heb. 1:1** *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets ... and the presentation* of Christ in the New Testament, **2** *Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son ...* God introduced the new covenant in Christ to replace the old covenant He gave to Moses, - that is what 'testament' means, 'covenant'. ... And it is not that the old covenant was wrong, but it pointed forward to *the pre-eminence of Christ*. He fulfilled what the Law in the Old Testament institutions, rituals, sacrifices, and ceremonies awaited, and this was how Jeremiah prophesied the Messiah would inaugurate the new covenant, **Jer. 31:31** *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: **32** Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: **33** But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

The *pre-eminence* of Christ is described, **2** ... *whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; **3** Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power ...* Following on, the next description concerns His work of redemption, *when he had by himself purged our sins ...* He removed our sins by paying an inestimable price to purchase us for Himself. The term was specifically used in the slave trade. Obviously, the slave did not have his own means to pay the price for his freedom, - he could not afford it. Instead, someone was required to come to the marketplace, choose him out, and from their own resources pay the full price to

‘redeem’ the slave, and set him free. ... Then the slave would be released, his chains taken off, washed and cleansed, clothed and fed ... a new person, the old way of life gone, and a new life beginning.

When *the Lord Jesus* had by himself purged our sins we have been ‘redeemed’, ‘purchased’ by what He did for us at Calvary, **Gal. 3:13** Christ hath *redeemed* us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us [*He took our place*] ... **5:4** But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, ⁵ To *redeem* them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. ... He Himself did all that was necessary to purge our sins, in accordance with His Father’s plan for our salvation. We are saved because Christ died for us.

In the Old Testament, the Jews were required to *continuously* offer sacrifices for their sins, - one sacrifice was never enough. ... They would have needed to sacrifice hour after hour, day after day, month after month, year after year. They dare not have stopped the seemingly endless sacrifices their sins required because they needed *atonement* to avert God’s judgment. Atonement means being reconciled to God, and according to the Old Testament sacrificial system the man brought his lamb to the altar, handed it over to the priest who would kill it in front of him, and the animal’s blood was poured out, - as it were, - to ‘pay the price’ to God for the sins of the person who brought the offering. ... So again, how much did atonement cost? It cost the lives of every lamb sacrificed for the sinner because one sacrifice was never enough to atone for all the sins the man committed.

... Imagine if our salvation depended on having to make a sacrifice every time we sinned. If that was the case, you would never be sure of a place in Heaven because getting there depended upon whether you have been able to make restitution before God in time. ... If you sinned and you didn’t immediately repent and you died, you would go to a lost eternity! ... That was how the Old Testament Law worked, - for every sin you had to make atonement.

Contrast that with what we have in Christ, - His *one* sacrifice atones for all our sins, **I Peter 3:18** For Christ also hath *once* suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. ... That is how certain it is, **Heb. 9:26** but now *once* in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ... The sacrifice Jesus offered on Calvary is sufficient for all who believe, and never needs to be repeated. His sacrifice was *enough!*

What the man in the Old Testament needed was a perfect priest to offer a perfect sacrifice. He needed someone to mediate thoroughly on his behalf, and he also needed a sacrifice so faultless that no more sacrifices would ever be required. ... But such a hope lay beyond the Old Testament era for you have to come into the New Testament to discover how God fulfilled the promises of the old covenant and provided the perfect Priest and the perfect Sacrifice in the Lord Jesus Christ, **Heb. 1:1** God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, ² Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, or as the writer explains in chapter ten, it is how we are sanctified [*made pure, cleansed*] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once* for all (Heb. 10:10) ... That is the fulfilment, - the *promise*, - of what was foreshadowed in the Old Testament, **Heb. 10:14** For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. That is how Jesus saved you through His sacrifice on the cross.

Your works has nothing to do with Jesus saving you. You could be the most upright person in the world, and yet not saved because you cannot save yourself. Jesus did not look at you and find something about you worth saving. You weren't any special type of a person because the Bible makes it clear, **Rom. 3:22** ... there is no difference: ²³ For all have sinned. ... And that is why *Jesus* died ... to save you, because you could never have saved yourself ... in just the same way the slave could never have paid the price for his ransom. ... *Jesus had by himself purged our sins*. Church membership has nothing to do with it, nor baptism. Salvation is through Christ's work alone. Jesus went to the cross, bore our sin, died our death, suffered the penalty of our sin ... and He did it *all* by Himself! And because you are trusting in Him, **Phil. 1:6** he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ ... He Who was appointed the heir of all things, He Who created all things, He Who is the brightness of God's glory, the express image of God, Who upholds all things by the word of His power, *He* died for you ... and *he* ... *by himself purged our sins*.

Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied –
For every sin on Him was laid ...
In Christ alone, my hope is found.

That's how Jude wrote in his epistle, ²⁴ Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, ²⁵ To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. It is what Paul wrote too, **Rom. 8:32** He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all

things? ³³ Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. ... ³⁷ ... we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Daily sacrifices were ended when Jesus died, - that's how powerful His death was. In His death He defeated sin and He defeated its hold over you. ... In Judaism, the Orthodox Jews today want to recommence the old sacrificial system ... why? ... because they refuse to accept Jesus as their Messiah, the perfect Lamb of God, the complete Sacrifice for sin, the fulfilment of all the Old Testament offerings foretold ... They will not accept Him!

In Roman Catholicism they have what they call, 'transubstantiation'. "Transubstantiation is the process by which the bread and wine of the Eucharist is transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. ... The Eucharist is really and truly the body, blood, soul, and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. it is not just a symbol or representation." In the Roman Catholic Mass there is the sound of a bell ('epiclesis') and it is when the priest invokes the Holy Spirit to change the bread into the literal body and the literal blood of the Lord Jesus ... and then the body is broken, - which they now believe is the *actual* body of Jesus, ... and the blood is poured, - which they now believe is the *actual* blood of Jesus. ... Each time they celebrate the Mass, they crucify Jesus all over again.

But Jesus did not die many times, - that finished when the *new* covenant in Christ took over from the *old* covenant of the Law. Under the *new* covenant, Jesus died only once, **Heb. 7:26** For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; ²⁷ Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. ... That is how Jesus is pre-eminent! There has never been another like Him and there never will be! ... Creating the heavens and the earth is one thing, but His greater work was the salvation He purchased for His people at Calvary, **Heb. 9:12** Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained *eternal* redemption for us.

And that is why Jesus went to the cross to save you, to take away from you, believer, everlasting punishment in Hell because you could never have done it on your own. That is what Jesus died to save you from! That's why He came into this world and was arrested and spat upon and humiliated. That's why He endured the crown of thorns, the beatings, the mocking, the nails in His hands and feet ... That is why He went through the gates of Hell for you and suffered the wrath of God. ... He loves you with an everlasting love, - He loved you

before you loved Him, and He proved it by dying on the cross in your place, ¹
Peter 1:18 ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ... ¹⁹ But with
 the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

God in eternity, - before creation began, - loved you and set out in His plan to
 save you. He knew you and I could not do it on our own, so He sent His perfect
 and sinless Son, **Rom. 5:8** God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were
 yet sinners, Christ died for us ... ¹⁰ ... we were reconciled to God by the death of his
 Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And Jesus did it by
 Himself, for even His Father forsook Him. The angels in Heaven dare not have
 gone to give Him relief,

Alone upon the cross He hung
 That others He might save;
 Forsaken then by God and man.
 Alone, His life He gave.

That is what Jesus did for you. He died for you, in your place. To save you from
 the wrath of God, He took that wrath upon Himself and, **when he had by himself
 purged our sins.** ... He wiped them out, He washed them all away,

Oh! precious is the flow
 That makes me white as snow;
 No other fount I know,
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

His death was a *vicarious* death for He died in our place ... His death was also
 a *victorious* death for on the third day, He rose from the dead and forty days
 later He ascended into Heaven ... *That* is where He is today, seated **on the right
 hand of the Majesty on high.** ... And that is the wonderful theme with which we
 shall continue in our next study concerning *the pre-eminence of Christ.* Amen.