

Jesus was and is the first-born of a new creation. He was the first of a great company to be raised and given immortality (1 Cor. 15:20; Rev. 1:5; 3:14).

- It is apparent that the literal heavens and earth are not being spoken of here; reference is not being made to aspects of the physical creation that we see around us, but rather to thrones, dominions, principalities and powers, that is, people and rulers, over which Christ now has control as he sits at the right hand of God: “. . . who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1 Pet. 3:22; cf. Mt. 28:18). The parallel passage in Ephesians 1:20-23 confirms this key point of interpretation. The use of heaven and earth (Col. 1:16) is a common

Scriptural idiom to speak of people, the rulers and the ruled (Gen. 37:9,10; Deut. 32:1; Ps. 96:10,11; Isa. 1:2, Mt. 24:29,30; Eph. 1:10; Jude v. 13). This responsibility of ruling over the powers of the world will be extended to the redeemed in the age to come; see, for example, Matthew 19:28 and Daniel 7:27.

- The word “consist” in the phrase “by him all things consist” (Col. 1:17) means ‘to set together’, and is usually translated ‘commend’ in the New Testament: “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Clearly, reference is being made to spiritual values within a new creation, and would be quite inappropriate if the context was dealing with the literal Creation in Genesis.

Simeon Guntrip

“Declared to be the Son of God with power”

John Nicholls

IN HIS EXPOSITION in *Eureka* of the letter to Pergamos, Brother Thomas discusses those in that ecclesia who had held fast to the name of Jesus (Rev. 2:13). He points out that in the Gospels the “name” of Jesus, the “gospel” and the “kingdom of God” are used interchangeably (Mt. 19:29; Mk. 10:29; Lk. 18:29). The faithful in this ecclesia were enduring tribulation for the Kingdom of God’s sake, and therefore did not deny the name of Jesus. In contrast, the Nicolaitans in Pergamos were teaching false doctrine and therefore denied the name of Christ.

‘Nicolaitan’ means ‘vanquisher of the people’, and Brother Thomas suggests that they were the beginning of the Gentile apostasy, which even in the days of the apostles was working its leaven in the ecclesias. In the Epistles of John, the doctrine that Christ was not come in the flesh was making headway in the ecclesia (2 Jno. v. 7). This Nicolaitan doctrine eventually led to the full flowering of the doctrine of the Trinity, as described in the church creeds. The true doctrine that Christ did indeed come in the flesh is dealt with in the article, “The man Christ Jesus” (p. 158). The present article deals with the teach-

ing of Scripture that Jesus *is* the Son of God. Whilst we rightly stress the mortality of Christ, his fleshly descent from Adam, Abraham and David, and the need for Christ to have shared our nature in order that he should be able to “[condemn] sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3), it is right that we should stress equally the Divine origin of the Lord.

The title of this article is taken from Romans 1:4. In this passage the Apostle Paul says he is writing “concerning . . . Jesus Christ our Lord, which was . . . declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (vv. 3,4). Here we are told that there are three ways in which Jesus was ‘marked out’, ‘defined’, ‘distinguished’ (so means the Greek word translated “declared” here) as the Son of God.

“Declared to be the Son of God with power”

The first way was with **power**. Power was evident in the birth of the Lord Jesus. What human strength could not achieve, God’s power was able to accomplish. Mary said: “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Lk. 1:34). But the

angel replied: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (v. 35). The same Spirit that moved upon the face of the waters, which were covered with darkness at Creation, was now to bring about a unique conception, the Son of God, in the womb of the handmaid of the Lord.

Nine months later, when she brought forth her first-born son, the only begotten Son of the Father, and laid him wrapped in swaddling clothes in that manger, power was revealed again in the multitude of the heavenly host, who sang before the awestruck shepherds: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (2:14).

When Jesus was about thirty years of age, the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him. Thus, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with *power*: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

When Lazarus fell seriously ill, Jesus said to his disciples: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (Jno. 11:4). The graveside prayer that the Lord uttered at this time carried the same thought, that the power about to be shown should mark him out as being of Divine origin: "And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me. And I knew that Thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent me" (vv. 41,42).

When Jesus fed the five thousand with the loaves and fishes, he said to his disciples that he was "the living bread which came down from heaven" (6:51).

When Jesus restored the sight of the man blind from birth at the pool of Siloam in Jerusalem, the Jews tried hard to get round the (to them) uncomfortable fact that it was Jesus who had performed the healing. The healed man said to the Jews concerning Jesus: "Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing" (9:32,33). And afterwards, Jesus asked the man: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"; to which question the man replied affirmatively, and, the record says, "worshipped him" (vv. 35,38).

When Jesus was asleep in the stern of the boat during a great storm on the Sea of Galilee, his disciples awoke him in great consternation. It took just three words from their Master to quell the storm and produce a great calm. The disciples "feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mk. 4:37-41). What manner of man indeed!—declared to be the Son of God with power.

A "spirit of holiness"

Not only was it Jesus's power that marked him out as the Son of God, but also his **spirit of holiness**. The word for "spirit" here can refer to *character*. He was sinless, without fault before God, unlike all other men descended from Adam. He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. His Divine parentage would have given him a heightened awareness of sin, for his Father, we are told, is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and [cannot] look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13). Nevertheless, the intensity of the struggle between "the law of sin . . . in [his] members" and "the law of God . . . [in his] inward man" (Rom. 7:22,23) was as great, perhaps greater, than for any man. The description of his prayers in the garden of Gethsemane shows this plainly.

And so in his discourse with the Jews in John 8 Jesus accuses them of murderous intent, and says: "I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father" (vv. 37,38). Jesus goes on to say, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do . . ." (v. 44), and then issues a breathtaking challenge: "Which of you convinceth [convicteth] me of sin?" (v. 46). They were unable to do so. And Jesus goes on to say why: "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God" (v. 47). His sinlessness proved that he was of God, and his holiness of character marks him out as the Son of God.

By the resurrection from the dead

The Sonship of Christ is further established by his **resurrection**. In his exposition of the Letter to the Romans Brother John Carter says: "First it must be noticed that when he cleansed the temple, calling it his Father's house, and he was asked by what sign he would shew his authority to do that, he answered, 'You destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John 2:19). John explains that he spake of the temple

of his body. The resurrection of that body was the sign of his authority to cleanse his Father's house; in other words, his resurrection shews that he was the Son of God, Who was the owner of the house".¹

In the Scriptures there are several accounts of resurrection from the dead. Those resurrections were carried out to confirm the credentials of the men through whom the miracle was performed. Thus the raising of the widow of Zarephath's son showed that Elijah was a man of God (1 Kgs. 17:24). But Christ's resurrection took place because of the obedience of Christ: "[Him] God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:24). His perfect obedience ensured his resurrection from the dead.

The promises of the seed who should defeat sin and death involved a Son. Abraham knew that God would "provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (Gen. 22:8). The Almighty said to David of his seed: "I will be his father, and he shall be My son" (2 Sam. 7:14). Jesus is therefore marked out as Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. God's promises and plans depended on a Son, and the resurrection of Christ sealed the promises and confirmed our Lord as Son of God.

The Word made Flesh

The Gospel of John was written in order that readers "might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing . . . might have life through his name" (20:31). It is this Gospel that commences, not with the birth of Christ, but with his conception in His Father's mind, way back in the beginning, before the world as we know it was created (Prov. 8:22,23). The Word of God produced the created world we live in (Ps. 33:6; Heb. 11:3; Gen. 1:3). The Law of Moses was a foreshadowing of Christ. All the Scriptures—the Law of Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets—spoke of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow (Lk. 24:26,27,44-46). All the prophets witnessed to Christ (Acts 10:43).

And so the Gospel of John commences with the words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (1:1,2,14).

The purpose of Christ that God had in the beginning, recorded in the Scriptures from Genesis onwards, now began to be fulfilled in the birth and ministry of Christ. Hebrews 1:1,2 says: "God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son". He was the Word made flesh, Son of God and Son of man. At the early age of twelve Jesus understood that God was his Father. He told his parents, who were anxiously seeking him, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lk. 2:49, RV).

It is clear from the Gospels and Letters that Jesus's character developed; although God was his Father, it was his sufferings and experience of life that shaped his character (Lk. 2:52; Heb. 5:7), which became like that of his Father in heaven. Thus he could say to his disciples: "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Jno. 14:9); and: "I and my Father are one" (10:30).

The teaching of the Word made flesh cuts across the idea that Christ existed before he was born. Until Jesus was born he had no existence, except as a plan in God's mind. When he was born, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (the Jews), as John says. Jesus said: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev. 1:18). Jesus could not have died if he had pre-existed and was already eternal. But Jesus did truly die, and was raised from the dead to everlasting life.

There are several scriptures which at first sight appear to support the idea of the pre-existence of Christ. But the doctrine of the Word made flesh helps us to see these scriptures in the right perspective. Just as God knew Jeremiah before he was conceived (Jer. 1:5), so He knew and loved His Son (Jno. 17:24). That His Son would be a sacrifice was known to God right at the beginning (Rev. 13:8; 1 Pet. 1:19,20). Everything about the Son of God was known to the Father at the commencement of time. Everything was mapped out—the birth, the sacrifice and the glory that will follow in the Kingdom—so that Jesus could truly speak of the glory he had with God before the world was (Jno. 17:5).

Lastly, we must note the change in attitude of the disciples to their Lord after the resurrection

1. *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Birmingham, 1942 edition, p. 4.

and ascension: "we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel" (Lk. 24:21), they said, expecting him to expel the Romans and set up the Kingdom. The Spirit-guided apostles wrote the Gospels, which clearly show the Lord Jesus to be the Son of God, particularly the Gospel of John. Their understanding of the work of God through His Son increased as the Holy

Spirit brought to their remembrance his words and deeds.

Belief in the risen Son of God can also bring life to us, who live in an unbelieving, irreligious, irreverent and cynical age. May we truly believe that Jesus ('He Who will be will save') is the Christ ('the Anointed'), the Son of God, so that, believing, we might have life through his name.

"Christ . . . sacrificed for us"

Harry Tennant

IN THE RECORD in Mark 12 there is a most interesting encounter between Jesus and one of the scribes. The Lord had answered with stunning penetration some age-old conundrums raised by the rabbis. With this in mind, the scribe, perhaps genuinely, asked, "Which is the first commandment of all?" (v. 28).

We recall that the Lord replied that fully to love the Lord, and one's neighbour as oneself, were the greatest of the commandments (vv. 30,31). Matthew adds: "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (22:40). The scribe, now certainly genuinely, opened his heart and revealed an understanding that eluded most of his contemporaries: "Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but He: and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:32,33). To this Jesus added: "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God" (v. 34). Both the scribe and the Lord were speaking in terms of profound interpretative truth. They had burst through the inadequacies of law into the way to eternal life.

What saith the Scripture?

The same beautiful truth occurs in at least three places in the Old Testament. Here are two of them:

"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22);
 "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hos. 6:6).

These significant verses teach the superiority of comprehensive truth over the whole sacrificial system contained in the Law of Moses.

Whereas sacrifices spoke of something other than themselves, in a representative or symbolic manner, these verses speak about actual qualities themselves: obedience, hearkening, mercy and knowledge. They are words that speak of man's saving relationship to the Lord God and his fellow man.

Similarly, Jeremiah told Judah: "let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the LORD Which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD" (9:24).

The Lord Jesus Christ

What, then, of the third place in the Old Testament where there are significant verses concerning sacrifice? This is Psalm 40, unmistakably a Messianic psalm: "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; mine ears hast Thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart" (vv. 6-8).

Notice how many of the significant words from the earlier verses are now expressed prophetically of the Lord himself. For him the law was not written on stone and contained within a gold-covered wooden box, but in the heart of man. In other words, what Jesus would come to do would be 'for real', and not simply by symbol or type.

A problem

There is a problem, however, regarding sacrifices and offerings. What are the words, "Thou didst not desire", intended to mean? Were sacrifices not commanded under the Law of Moses?