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Jesus Christ, the Revelation of God.

A SERMON

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[*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 on the right hand of the Majesty on high.]—Hebrews i: 3.

THE discourse of the author of this epistle institutes a parallel, and sets forth a contrast, between the revelation of God in connection with the mission of the ancient prophets and the manifestation of God in the last times in the person and by the ministry of His Son. It maintains that both, proceeding from the same source and tending to the same end, are in substantial agreement, and yet abundantly shows that the latter surpasses the former in the fullness of its substance and the excellence of its form. The first was the shadow, the second the reality; the one was the illustration, the other the fact.

The grandeur of the latter discovery of God was derived from two views of a person. This person was not only a revealer, as all prophets were revealers of God, but he was in himself the revelation of God. The prophets spake concerning God and a coming Messiah. He spake concerning God and himself. Rather, he also spake of God when he spake of himself. Nay, more, when he did not speak, but simply stood forth and wrought, so as to be seen and known, even then he most fully disclosed the nature and the character of God. He had only to say, "I and my Father are one," "Whoso hath seen me hath seen the Father," and then to stand still or move along before the eyes of men to be looked upon, in order to make manifest to men all of God that they could comprehend.

This person was known in heaven and from eternity as the Son of God; on earth and in time as Jesus Christ, the anointed Saviour of men. The writer first exalts the gospel above the law by setting forth the exaltation of the Son of God, its messenger and its message. He is above Moses, a faithful servant in God's house, because He is a Son in his Father's house. He is above angels, because He hath a more excellent name than they;

because He is set forth to be worshiped by them ; because He is Lord in the kingdom in which they are but ministers, even as the winds and flames of fire, to do His bidding ; because He is Creator, and they are creatures ; because He is Eternal, and they are the offspring of time. But in this chiefly is He above all men and all angels, that He is the brightness of the glory and the express image of the person of God. It is to this view of Him that we now direct our thoughts. The Hebrew word which we translate glory signifies that which is heavy, massive, and grand and sublime. It conveys a conception and feeling of the majesty of God. The Greek word for the same expresses that which one thinks of another, and so his estimate and appreciation of him. It then comes to signify the ground of this estimate, the excellence, honorableness of another. This word, therefore, conveys the notion of God's excellence.

In both the old Scripture and the new, whatever may be the word for the divine glory, its symbol is always light. God is light, He is a sun, He dwelleth in light, He clothes Himself with light as with a garment. The light in the cloud was the token of His presence, the light of the Shekinah was the proof of His indwelling, the light in the temple was the sign of His majestic appearing to the prophet. Then, again, in the New Scripture, God is light, He is the father of lights, a sun without variableness or shadow of turning, the effulgence that causes the night to cease in heaven and the sun to be needless to the eternal day. From this symbol of the divine grandeur and excellence we receive our expressive word glory. It conveys the conception of outshining splendor.

Gathering together all the thought in these associated words, we conceive God as grand in His nature, perfect in His character, and beautiful in every manifestation of Himself to the view of intelligent and sensitive beings. The grandeur of His nature consists in His being an eternal and infinite spirit, limitless in presence, in knowledge, in wisdom, in power. The perfection of His character consists in His righteousness, His goodness, His truth. His beauty is that undefinable yet most real quality of His variously manifested excellence which is discovered by the subtle sense, and felt in the peculiar sensibility with which God has gifted all spirits. It is the cause of profoundest joy to all who know and love and worship Him. Of this glory of God, "Jesus Christ, his Son," is said to be "the brightness."

The original word is formed from a verb which signifies "*to flash out.*" It may be interpreted accordingly as "an out-flashing." The glory of God is as light, and the Son as its flash forth into view. You will get the idea if you conceive an intense light enclosed in a dark lantern, which is suddenly opened so that the rays dart out into the surrounding black-

ness. The flash is not something different from the light, but the light let out of limits and acting on the darkness. The Son of God is not represented as uncovering the glory of the Father. He is not the mere hand which draws the slide of the lantern so that the light breaks through. He is the light. It is not said of Him, "who" disclosing or showing, but "who *being* the brightness of His glory." Expanding the idea, the ancient creed declared Him "light of light," "very God of very God."

But there is yet another expression, the meaning and force of which we need to understand and feel. "The express image of His person." For the phrase "express image" there is a single word in the original, a word transferred and familiar in our own language, viz., character. It is formed from a word signifying to sharpen, then to scratch or furrow with a sharp instrument, to write, to engrave. Our term, therefore, means a writing or engraving, and in this sense we often use it. So also as a form is engraven on a seal and then stamped upon wax, the word indicates a figure enstamped upon wax or soft metal. The figure impressed is precisely like the graving which determines it. The word accordingly signifies likeness. Then, from the notion of likeness, it extends to that of sameness, so that we say of one's combined qualities, they constitute his character, and more emphatically the character is the man. It is the man revealed and known.

The Son of God is, then, the revelation of the person of God. And to this term person, in the language of the New Testament, we do not attach the later metaphysical notion. It is simply equivalent to "self."

We have now the whole thought in this pregnant phrase: Jesus Christ is God's very self revealed and known. He could say of Himself truly, as He said, "He that seeth me seeth Him that sent Me." Paul declared Him to the Corinthians, "the image of God," and to the Colossians, "the image of the invisible God." And all this was but a repetition of the witnessing of the Baptist when he "cried, saying" . . . "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him," or, in his own expressive utterance, "led him forth" to view.

The sum of the whole, then, is this: the glorious nature of God is perceived and known in Jesus Christ. He is simply "God manifest in the flesh."

We are by no means to forget that there is a person—God, our Father. We are not to cease to seek, to know, to love, to worship and obey Him. The Son has come to make Him known; to stand as a mediator between Him and us; to reconcile us to Him by His blood, to adopt us into His family, and to inspire in us the spirit of adoption by the Holy Ghost. The manifestation of Christ to us is ineffectual, His work for

us is incomplete, if we fail to come to God by Him, crying, Abba! Father! But this we must remember, that God can only be known in and by the Son. We can behold "the glory of God" alone "in the face of Jesus Christ." "He is the true light, which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world."

Does any man say, God is seen and known in nature? We must respond, something, nay, much of God may be perceived and felt in the earth and the heavens. "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." But who "laid the foundations of the earth," who "stretched out the heavens as a curtain, and spread them out as a tent to dwell in?" Who "hath created these things," who hath "brought out their host by numbers?" "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thine hands." So answers the Father, addressing the Son, "by whom He made the worlds," the word made flesh, "by whom all things were made, and without whom, was not anything made that was made."

But some man will say, God is seen and known in His providence. This we must concede. To those who look for Him He will be manifest in the stability of things, the order of the seasons, the life of nature, the course of events, the history of men. But who sustains the fixedness of things, and moves the circles of nature, and guides the current of events, and shapes the destinies of peoples? Let the word of truth answer: "By Him all things consist, who, upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, who hath given Him to be the head over all things to the church."

Yet, however clearly God is manifest in the works and providence of His Son, He is not seen. When men knew God they glorified Him not as God. They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. They "changed the truth of God into a lie; they worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator. And God gave them over to a reprobate mind and to vile affections, until darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people." A revelation was needful, a manifestation of a personal God. A light supernatural must shine into the dismal blackness of the natural. God must come out of His hiding-place. The light of nature covered Him as a garment. The vesture must be rent, and the brightness, the out-flashing of His glory must be seen; the character of His person, Himself, must be manifest.

But more than this we must assert. Even if man had preserved an open eye, an attentive and understanding mind, a sensitive, responsive heart, the whole of God could not have been seen and felt in His works and His providence. His

moral nature could not be set forth in material products, in the developments of the life of men. Nature could not reveal His justice, the whole of His goodness. Providence could not demonstrate them in its progress, and if it might reveal them in its winding up, it would be forever too late for the benefit of man. How do we stand confused, amazed and dumb before God's dealings with the full light of revelation blazing on us—faith our only resource, hope in the final issue our only comfort! There must be more for men than the science that interprets nature, the philosophy of history which unwinds the thread of providence, if they shall ever know the character of God.

And yet more. And here we touch our inmost sensibility and express our profoundest need when we say, there is nothing in nature, there is nothing in common providence to offer hope to man the sinner. Study nature as you will, it returns you nothing but force and law. Obey its law, and its force will serve you. Disobey its law, and its force will smite you. The man who walks obeys the law of gravitation, and gravity sustains him. The innocently mistaken child who steps from the window disobeys the law, and gravity dashes him to pieces on the stones below. There is no appeal from law to favor. There is no mercy to weaken or annul or counteract the force. Transgression is ruin.

So in common providence. There are laws and forces. The keen-witted perceive the laws; the practical connect their projects with the forces, and they are lifted on to success. The ignorant and unwise, the incautious and the reckless, miss the rule and cross the path of the power, and are hurled to the earth and traveled over. There is no elasticity of law, there is no grace in force.

Let a man bring this interpretation of God into the moral sphere. Let him know the law that will not cease to rule in his conscience and in his spiritual nature. Let him learn by experience that obedience is joy and disobedience is suffering. Then let him feel that there is no appeal from law, there is no removal of destructive power from its awful work within his soul, and all his knowledge must conduce to terrible, irremediable despair. There is no revelation of mercy in nature to the sinner. There is but one awful inference from nature for the sinner. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." If God shall be known as a God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sin, He must come forth in person, show us His glory, cause all His goodness to pass before, and proclaim His name, "Jehovah! Jehovah! God merciful and gracious!" This God has done, but ever by the person and the word of His only-begotten Son. He alone hath

declared Him. The Jehovah of the olden time was therefore the Son of God. The Jesus of the latter time was proclaimed at Jordan the Son of God. The Lord Jehovah, and the Lord Jesus, one and the same, is the radiance of the glory, the character of the person, of God."

We come, then, to this most practical point. You who will know God seek Him in His Son. Behold Him walking as the angel Jehovah in the ancient church, behold Him walking as the Christ in the midst of His disciples. God is not other than you see Him here; God is just what you see Him here. There is no hidden element of the divine nature slumbering in the Father in heaven while other elements are manifest in Jesus Christ. Mysteriously, yet most really, is the Father in the Son and the Son in the Father.

"Here the whole deity is known." You who will know what God is to the sinner, seek Him in His Son. There is not a hidden mind in the Father and another in the Son. There is not one heart in the Father and another in Jesus. Whatever disposition in look, or word, or act Jesus Christ has ever shown toward sinners is the entire and entirely fixed disposition of the whole nature of God to you.

This is a truth we need constantly to affirm to you. You are wont to think of the wrath of God against sinners as somehow held in reserve in the bosom of the Father, and the love of God as throbbing in the bosom of Jesus. You seem sometimes to feel that Jesus, as mediator dying a sacrifice, as intercessor urging an appeal, is somehow in antagonism with the Father and the Father hiding His face from the persistent and unrepentant sinner as in opposition to the Son. You think you see all the severity in the one, all the goodness in the other. Make haste to be undeceived. As the God of our faith and the Son of His love are indivisible in being, so are they blended in feeling.

Do you say God has stern regard for His law? So has Jesus. Did He not reaffirm the law? Did He not whet the second blade of it in its interior demands, and make it the two-edged sword piercing even to the joints of our inmost frame, and touching the marrow of our thought and feeling? Did He not declare that until heaven and earth pass, not one jot or tittle of it should fail till all shall be fulfilled? As for Himself, He was made under the law; He magnified it and made it honorable. Knowing it could not be recalled, rather than it should be violated He invoked justice to transfer its condemnation from His people to Himself, to recall its curse from them and expend it to the full on Him, to lift the shaft of vengeance glittering in wrathful light above their heads and thrust it deep within His heart.

Do you say God is severe to mark iniquity? So is Jesus Christ. Bring before your mind the group of sullen Scribes and

Pharisees, scowling upon Him in the cruel hatred of unveiled hypocrisy and crushed pride and fathomed shallowness, and hear His burning words of conviction, recrimination and doom: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

Do you remember that "God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil"? Then remember also that it is the Son of man who is to come in His glory and sit upon His throne, and gather all nations and separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. It is He who shall say, Depart, ye cursed. Do you feel that God will pour out His wrath upon the ungodly on the great day? You may read in the gospel of Jesus Christ of the wrath of the Lamb and of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

In a word, there is no manifestation of the nature of God in opposition to sin and in retribution against the incorrigibly ungodly so calm, determined, decided, severe and awful as that which is made in the words and yet will be made in the person of that Man by whom He will judge the world.

And in like manner, on the other hand, the Father is in fullest sympathy with the Son in every expression of His divine-human mercy, compassion, tenderness and grace to repenting, returning and pleading souls. If the Son of God from the beginning longed for the salvation of men, God the Father from eternity loved the world. If the Son of God so loved the world that He gave His life a ransom for the many, God the Father so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but might have everlasting life. If Jesus suffered unutterable agonies on the cross for us and our salvation, God the Father witnessed and felt the sacrifice. If Jesus Christ spoke words of ineffable kindness and gentleness, how often and how emphatically did He declare, "The words that I speak I speak not of myself," but "as my Father has taught me, I speak these things"? If Jesus Christ wrought innumerable works of mercy and grace, how constantly and decidedly did He affirm, "The Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works," "I do always those things that please Him"? If His life of teaching and example and suffering was one continuous surrender and employment of Himself for our eternal salvation and blessedness, did He not close it to ascend to His Father, crying, "I have glorified Thee on the earth, I have finished the work thou gavest me to do"?

Yes, in the person and mission of Jesus Christ, whatever in God is arrayed against the sinner, and whatever is patient, and long-suffering, and merciful, and gracious, and helpful, and saving for the sinner, is manifest equally and as fully in Jesus Christ.

"Here the whole deity is known,
Nor dares a creature guess
Which of the glories brighter shone,
The justice or the Grace."

But we are not yet exposed to the severity of justice ; we are invited to the leniency of grace. Let us behold, then, the grace of God in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Can you even doubt the willingness of God to save you when you behold the Son, in human flesh, humbled by the fellowship of our nature in its narrowness and feebleness, exposed to the penalty of our sin in its guilt and shamefulness, agonizing in the garden of Golgotha, mantled with shame in Pilate's hall and dying on the cross ? Can you doubt the willingness of God to receive you when you hear his Son inviting, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"; telling with divinely human pathos the story of the prodigal son ; when you see Him looking with sad reproof on the erring Peter, and behold the smile of pardoning love illuminate the face shadowed with sorrow as it turns to the penitent thief ? Can you doubt the gentleness of God when you behold His Son sitting at Bethany with Mary at His feet, and at supper with John on His bosom ; when you gaze with wonder on the submissive surrender of His feet to the tears and kiss of the woman which was a sinner, and hear His benediction on that other woman who touched the hem of His garment, and His eulogy ever memorial of that other one still who would not ask the children's bread, but the waste and fallen crumbs of blessing ? Can you doubt God's readiness most freely to forgive when you hear echoing forever through the gospel those eager words of Jesus, "Son, daughter, go in peace, thy sins be forgiven thee" ? Can you doubt God's willingness to forget the past guilt and shame of your sinful life when you see the Son of man appearing to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, and hear his call to the chiefest dignity of the apostleship, and see him thenceforth the most cherished and blessed among His servants, and regard him now as the immortal teacher of the truth, the equal of the beloved evangelist, and second only to the Lord in the memory and reverence of all spiritual souls ?

If you have ever risen from the perusal of the gospel, saying to yourself, I could go to Him, if He were only here I would dare to confess to Him all my sin and shame, and hope in His mercy and grace, expect His sympathy and support ; then know, that as you would come to Him were He on the earth, so may you come to Him now, and when you come to Him, you come to God by Him. There is nothing concealed, there is nothing partially revealed in Him. He is the brightness of the glory, the character of the person, of God.

Who, then, conscious of his sin, judging his ill-desert, ashamed

of his defilement, will yet be afraid of God? Who need be afraid of Emmanuel, God with us? Who need reluctantly approach the Lord of Mary and the Syrophenician woman, of Saul and the penitent thief?

Is there one trembling soul in this place to-day thirsting after God and yet striving to hide from His face for fear of Him? Is there one orphaned spirit here longing for the Father's love and the Father's house, and in sad misgiving still wandering in a far country? Oh! look into the face of Jesus Christ and be reassured, and make haste to rise up and go to your Father, and say unto Him, Father, I have sinned! I have sinned!

And with the glowing picture which our Lord has lined upon the imagination of man forever, radiant with promise and welcome in your view, believe that, while yet a great way off, the Father will have compassion on you, and be swift to meet you and ready to cover you with the new robe of the Saviour's righteousness, and put upon your feet the sandals of prompt obedience, and set upon your uplifted hand the signet ring of heirship, and spread before you the festal board of welcome and of joy!

I seem to hear the voice of Jesus saying, Come! As an ambassador for God I stand, beseeching you in Christ's stead, and echo, Come! The Spirit in your heart is whispering, Come! The bride, the Church, is crying, with myriad tongues, Come. Hark! there are voices in the air, as of the multitude of the redeemed, shouting, Come! Floating on outspread wings around this hallowed place, ten thousand thousand angels are singing, Come! We pause, we wait, we listen! From the stillness of your yet reluctant soul shall we not hear the plaintive but confident response, I come, I come?