

The Unanswered Question

by H.J. Vine

The sermon explores the significance of Jesus' question to the Pharisees, revealing the true nature of the Christ and challenging the Pharisees' understanding of Him.

Scripture: Matthew 22:41, John 1:1, John 20:31, Acts 13:38, 1 Timothy 2:5

Topics: "Christology", "Divine Nature"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the profound question Jesus posed to the Pharisees regarding the identity of the Christ, emphasizing the divine inspiration of David's words and the significance of recognizing Jesus as both the Son of David and the Son of God. Believers are encouraged to seek the beauty of the Lord, to receive His life-giving words, and to grow in the knowledge of Christ, who is the Man Christ Jesus, truly human yet exalted in glory. The sermon delves into the mystery of the Word becoming flesh, the Creator becoming the Son, and the importance of acknowledging Jesus as both David's Son and David's Lord.

Transcript

"While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose Son is He? They say unto Him, The Son of David. He says unto them, How then doth David in Spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on My right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call Him Lord, how is He his son? And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions" (Matthew 22:41-46).

The soul which has experienced the personal love of our Lord Jesus Christ delights to linger near Him and to drink in His own words which are a well-spring of life. Such an one has learnt about the completed work of Christ upon the cross, and that His precious blood shed there has cleansed him from every sin. Peace with God is his, and he is justified by faith! Furthermore he knows that sin itself has been put away by the atoning sacrifice of his Saviour, and has been made meet for the bright home of the Father where Jesus has gone!

What more can he desire until he is actually taken to be with Him? There is one thing he desires, and that is to behold the beauty of the Lord in the nearness given to him, and in faith to receive the life-giving words (like Mary did of yore) which the holy lips of our Lord poured forth so graciously. Jesus is known as the Son of God who loved him and gave Himself for him. In truth he gladly says, "Thou hast the words of eternal life!" The Father has said, "Hear ye Him," and it brings present peace and blessing to do so. Interruptions and grievous embarrassments may be experienced in a groaning and sinful world like this,

but, thank God, it is to the One who loves us with a divine and everlasting love to whom our redeemed souls instinctively turn, and this becomes increasingly true as we prove His grace and grow in the surpassingly excellent knowledge of Himself.

Concerning the Christ

They were His own words which propounded the unanswered question at the head of this paper, and it is recorded, "From that day forth" those who had till then arraigned Him asked Him no more questions (Matt. 22:46). Various important enquiries had been made, but the greatest of all was that raised by our Saviour. It was THE question of all questions, for it was concerning HIMSELF--concerning the Messiah, which being interpreted is the Christ. Involved in this is the establishment of all promised blessedness and the vast range of earthly, heavenly, universal glory, for the good pleasure of our God and Father. By definite prophecy and inspired type the Spirit of God had clearly pointed on in the sacred Scriptures to the rich glories which should surround Him, and since His work of redeeming love has been finished through the sufferings of the cross, and since His bodily resurrection and His ascension to the throne on high, the Holy Spirit has made known the very mystery of God's will, to centre up "all things in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth" (Eph. 1:10). Men could give no answer to His own question in regard to Himself, and no wonder.

Before He ascended to the Father, He told His own that the Spirit would be sent to them, and He would on the one hand expose the sinful state of an unbelieving world and on the other glorify the Son of God, showing His things and the Father's things to our rejoicing hearts. When our souls are in true freedom before Him therefore, this is what He delights to do, and the Lord Himself, like His words of divine import, becomes livingly real to us.

Those who gathered to question the Lord Jesus, at the time we have referred to were connected with the place of Jehovah's Name. To them the question which silenced all questions was put. They had previously asked Jesus by what authority He did what He did, but, being answered, they "held a council how they might ensnare Him in speaking," and they sent out their disciples along with the Herodians. These raised the serious matter of giving "tribute to Caesar." His answer sent them back full of wonder. The Sadducees then enquired concerning marriage and the resurrection only to be proved ignorant of both "the Scriptures and the power of God." The Pharisees therefore "having heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence," gathered together, and "one of them, a lawyer, demanded, tempting Him, and saying, Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" The answer regarding love to God and love to our neighbour called forth the admission, "Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth!" Their questions had all been met perfectly by the Lord: first, concerning divine authority; second, concerning political authority and tribute; third, regarding marriage and the resurrection; fourth, as to the Law's great commandment; and now Jesus Himself raises the question of all questions. We will quote it in full from the valued New Translation of late J.N.Darby: "What think ye concerning the Christ? Whose Son is He? They say to Him David's. He says to them, How then does David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit on My right hand until I put Thine enemies under Thy feet? IF THEREFORE DAVID CALL HIM LORD, HOW IS HE HIS SON? And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did any one dare from that day to question Him any more."

"The Man Christ Jesus"

Remaining in darkness till this very day, they are strangers to the redemption which is in Christ, therefore this great and grave question remains unanswered by them; with the veil of unbelief upon their hearts--not having seen the glory of the Lord--not having received the Holy Spirit which Christ gives to those who trust in Him--long and profound has been their silence as to whose Son "THE CHRIST" truly is! This, however, may not be said of those who are redeemed by His precious blood, for to them the Spirit has come and to them He has made it known.

At first the Lord's words appear to set aside the fact that the Christ is David's Son, yet it may be clearly seen that this is not so. Deeper and higher and greater thoughts are intended to be awakened by the question concerning His personal glory. The New Testament beautifully opens by showing us His generation, beginning with "Son of David" and "Son of Abraham." Ten times in Matthew is He designated "Son of David," though in the first chapter He is named Jesus or Jehovah-Saviour, also Emmanuel, or God with us, but that does not set aside the other. If He be David's Lord He is His Son too, if He be the Root of David He is likewise His Offspring (Rev. 22:16). The foundation teaching of the gospel of God is given in Romans 1:3 "Concerning His Son [come of David's seed according to flesh, marked out Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of (the) dead] Jesus Christ our Lord" (N.Tr.). Nor must the word of the apostle to the young servant of the Lord be overlooked, for amidst the trials of faithful service on His behalf he is to "remember Jesus Christ raised from among the dead, of the seed of David, "according to my gospel (2 Tim. 2:8). The sure mercies promised of God are secured in David's line by the One who is both his Son and his Lord.

The Spirit of God discloses Him as Man, as Lord, yea, and as "God with us." If, as we have seen, He is shown to be Son of Abraham as well as Son of David in Matthew 1:1, He is also traced right back to the first man in Luke 3:38, being "of Seth, of Adam, of God." This was essential if in man's place He was to "taste death," "sufferings," "the suffering of death," and deliver the children of God from bondage, bringing them along with Himself as the "many sons to glory." Therefore the full answer (according to the counsels of God) to the question, "WHAT IS MAN?" is found in the words "We see Jesus . . . crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:6, 9), for, as the Son of Man, He is exalted, and all things are placed wider His feet, though not yet seen publicly. When here on earth it was shown that He was truly Man. We are told that God never wearies, but He was weary at the well side!--that God never slumbers or sleeps, but He slept on a pillow in the boat! He hungered, He thirsted, His soul was troubled, He was "the Man of sorrows," He groaned in spirit, His sweat was as blood, He poured out His soul unto death, expecting to see the fruit of the travail of His soul, for His soul was made an offering for sin (Isa. 53:10-12). In the Virgin's womb He had been "conceived," and He was "born" of Mary. She "brought forth her first-born Son." He was the "child born." "He was in subjection" to Joseph and Mary, and "Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men" (Luke 2:7, 51-52). To the Jews He said He was "A MAN" who had spoken the truth to them (John 8:40)! Yet the same One said (v. 58), "Before Abraham was, I AM!" Little surprise therefore overtakes us when the royal, evangelical prophet, Isaiah, by the Spirit spells out His five-fold "NAME": "Wonderful--Counsellor--Mighty God--Father of Eternity--Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6)! And, be it carefully noted, this One is to sit upon "the throne of David," for He was the Child born, the Son given, of that regal line as promised.

Even upon the cross one of the thieves owned Him as Lord and spake of His kingdom. And, though He laid down His life, having cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" yet He could not beholden of death, He arose in the power of an endless life! But we must guard against the error, common to many, that actual, physical resurrection did not take place, for, it was when He was a real risen Man, He

said to His own, "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as ye see Me having" (Luke 24:29). Yes, we must hold fast to the fact that He is truly Man still, though His precious blood has been poured out to secure our eternal redemption. On the other hand, true homage was rendered when He showed the actual wounds still visible in His body, and Thomas said, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28); and yet He is nevertheless Man today in His place of exaltation at God's right hand, even as it is written, "God is one, and the Mediator of God and men one, THE MAN CHRIST JESUS" (1 Tim. 2:5, N.Tr.).

We must remember, however, when speaking of man, the expression is used by the Holy Spirit in various connections. Truly the race of man as known on earth began with Adam first--"the first man Adam." Angels were created spirits--"He maketh His angels spirits," yet they are spoken of as men in Acts 1:10 and elsewhere. We read too of "the man Gabriel," who was an angel (Dan. 9:21). Again, we are told, "GOD is a Spirit," He is "the invisible GOD"; but in Genesis 18 it is said, JEHOVAH appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre! Three men stood near him, whom Abraham addressed as ADONNAY (plural, Lords: it is ADON in Psalm 110:1). The three "men" ate what Abraham and Sarah provided for them. Afterwards they rose up and looked toward Sodom (Gen. 18:8, 16). Later, two of them, called "the two angels," came to Sodom at even (Gen. 19:1), and "JEHOVAH" went away when He had ended speaking to Abraham (Gen. 18:33). Now although the Scriptures cited show that the term "man" is variously used, it should again be carefully observed that "the Christ" is "of Adam, of God" (Luke 3:38)--of the woman's seed (Gen. 3:15) of Abraham (Matt. 1:1)--of "David His father" (Luke 1:3), whose throne He is to have--of Mary, the Virgin (Matt. 1:33). Of that line He took part in flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14), taking hold of the seed of Abraham, not of angels (v. 16), but was truly Man. And, as we have seen, He is still Man in exaltation and glory today; therefore, as our High Priest, become higher than the heavens, He is able to sympathize with our infirmities, for He first passed through sufferings on earth Himself, and was tempted in like manner as ourselves, sin apart; moreover this great fact gives the ring of gladness to the gospel of God's grace as it sounds joyfully forth, "Be it known . . . through THIS MAN is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins!" (Acts 13:38). The resounding music in the glad tidings proclaimed by Paul is, as recorded in this chapter, of David's seed the Saviour has come, not having seen corruption, He has been raised from among the dead; the faithful mercies of David are consequently given of God, being made sure by the death and resurrection of Jesus, fulfilling God's Word spoken through David, "Thou wilt not suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption" (v. 35), this One is God's Son (v. 33).

David's Lord

This prepares us to further consider our Saviour's own question, "If therefore David call Him LORD (see Ps. 110:1), how is He his SON?" We have seen how the Holy Spirit abundantly shows Him to be truly David's Son, but much more also. In a special way today, when those who are called out of the world by the gospel are granted the privileges and intimacies connected with Christ's assembly and God's children, we are guided by the Spirit to behold the personal glory and beauty of the Son of God. Peter confessed Him to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Paul proclaimed Him in the gospel of God which called us "into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Gifts are given from the ascended Christ in view of our coming to "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." But it is in what has been given to us through John that the rich lustre of the truth shines forth, answering, as we shall see, the unanswered question--"THE CHRIST, WHOSE SON IS HE?" There we are told the object of the signs (which were specially chosen and recorded in John's Gospel) was "that ye may believe that Jesus is THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD" (John 20:31), adding--thanks be to God--"and that believing ye might have

life in His Name." It was when the Jews said of Him to Pilate, "He made Himself Son of God," having heard that word, "he was the rather afraid, and went into the praetorium again and says to Jesus, whence art Thou?"

To lay stress on the words of the Lord recorded in the first three Gospels concerning Psalm 110:1, and upon the importance divinely given to them, we will point out what is said in each as to the truth of their inspiration. (1) Matthew 22:43; (2) Mark 12:36; (3) Luke 20:42.

1. "David in spirit calls Him (the Christ) Lord."
2. "David himself said (speaking in the Holy Spirit) the Lord said to my Lord."
3. "David himself says in the book of Psalms," etc.

These words, coming to us with our Lord's own authority, emphasize in a striking manner the great facts of divine inspiration and give enlightenment as to the manner of it. First, we see that David spake in spirit concerning the dignity of the Christ. Second, that David actually uttered the saying in or by the Holy Spirit. Third, that the whole book of Psalms is, by inference, put on the same level of inspiration, and that David himself used those wonderful words as to "the Christ," showing that the instrument (inspired in the Spirit to so speak of Him) was "himself" then conscious of the glorious fact which he pronounced. These verities ought to awaken serious thoughts and heart-searchings in those who question divine inspiration.

For ourselves, rejoicing in the truth of it, and gladly acknowledging the object of it--to point us to the Christ Himself in all the inspired writings (see Luke 24:27-44)--we would unreservedly allow the Spirit (who dwells in the redeemed and who gave us the Scriptures) to lead us to behold more and more of the Saviour's grace and glory, to guide us into that which centres in the One who is "The Way, and the Truth, and the Life." Avoiding questionable definitions, mere theological terminology and ecclesiastical argumentations or dogmatism, we desire to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be everlasting glory. Amen. One of old said, "Surely I count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my LORD."

"True God"

Does the Holy Spirit carry our thoughts back to the beginning when all things received being? At once, in John 1:1, He stays our minds upon One who was there when that beginning took place--"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Does the Spirit of God give us to see the sinfulness of sin and the hopelessness of the world, again He rest our gaze upon the Word, who was God, become flesh, tabernacling amongst us (v. 14). We wonder at this miracle of miracles! We could not define or analyse ourselves, much less the workings of divine power in David's Lord, opening blind eyes, unstopping deaf ears, loosening dumb tongues, healing all manner of sicknesses, raising the dead, calming the raging of the winds and the waves! We may find peace and joy in believing. Near to Himself, in the grace and love of the Spirit, we may so learn of Him and His words that the heart must find relief in praise and worship in His presence; but who could be so unwise as to think he is wise enough to define this surpassing miracle--the Creator Word become flesh? Who could be audacious enough to confound himself by attempting it? Who could so lean to his own understanding as to prove himself thus to be a fool in his pride? To gaze into the ark brought divine displeasure (1 Sam. 6:19). What must the infinite Creator think of the finite creature who assays to comprehend and then define the magnificent mystery of this most wonderful of all miracles? It is wonderful in our eyes! He is wonderful in working! One part of His five-fold

Name already quoted is "Wonderful!" We praise the love and beauty of it all! To our faith it is both gracious and reasonable, for we clearly see all plainly proven by what was said and done by Him by His words and His works! We see every day the unmistakable proof of human life in men's speakings and actings, yet who can tell us what life itself really is save the One who is "the Originator of life"? (Acts 3:15, N.Tr.). "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men"; yet it is said concerning Himself as "THE SON," in all the profound depths of His own infinite and personal glory, "No man knows THE SON, but the Father" (Matt. 11:27). Much is known, and much more may be known in the Holy Spirit's power, for He is here to lead us into all truth, but this which is said as to "THE SON" and "THE FATHER" remains alone in solitary and incontrovertible sufficiency, causing thereby the hearts of lowly believers to rejoice greatly that such an One is fully comprehended by the Father Himself, now revealed by the Son as our Father and our God.

It was the Creator Word, the Logos, who became flesh, yet the world knew Him not. Apart from new birth and the gift of the Spirit, the creature knew not the world's Creator. His divine glory was not apprehended. Even John Baptist, it is twice said, "knew him not" (John 1:31, 33) till he saw the Spirit as a dove descending and abiding on Him. Then he said, "This is the Son of God!" John told the Jews, "In the midst of you stands, whom ye do not know" (v. 26). Yet "those who contemplated His glory", saw "a glory as of an only-begotten with a father" (v. 14). John Baptist (come on earth six months before Jesus) said again, "A MAN comes after me," but who, in regard to honour and dignity, "takes a place before me," because, as to His eternal existence, "He was before me" (see verses 15 and 30, N.Tr.). We may understand and rejoice in what is said as to His exalted place, but who shall attempt to explain that a "MAN" the Word become flesh--who came "after" John was also "before" him? Yet we know this to be a divinely revealed fact.

Moreover, the unanswered question, to which we have referred, is not only answered in the truth made known, as we have seen, but still more! Even Nathanael said to Jesus, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the king of Israel" (v. 49). This went beyond what is said in verse 41, "We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, THE CHRIST," for, like John, Nathanael owns Him to be "THE SON OF GOD." If the King of Israel be the Christ, David's Son, we may easily grasp that, being the Son of God, He is also David's LORD.

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