

Christ and His Brethren

by H.J. Vine

The sermon explores the significance of Christ's Incarnation, priesthood, and glory, and how God's purpose is to bring many sons to glory and to make Christ the Firstborn among many brethren.

Scripture: John 1:1, Romans 8:29, Colossians 3:4, Hebrews 2:11, Hebrews 4:16

Topics: "Christ's Glory", "Divine Grace"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the wonderful grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, emphasizing the reverence and honor due to Him despite the inimitable favor He bestows upon us. Through His divine grace, Jesus sympathizes with and saves those who are being brought to glory, exemplifying His perfect journey from sufferings to enthronement. The grace of Christ, ministered to us now, surpasses the law of Moses, revealing His role as both Apostle and High Priest, offering words of eternal life and interceding for us before God. The sermon delves into Christ's grace and glory, highlighting the eternal purpose of God in Christ and the predestination of believers to be conformed to His image, culminating in the glorification of the many brethren with the Firstborn among them.

Transcript

1. His grace for them now

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is wonderful. Those who know it have reason to rejoice for "He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11), yet they should not presume upon such inimitable favour on His part, or overlook the honour which is due to Him; for, though He has secured their eternal salvation, made them His co-heirs--members of His body--sons of God--His fellows or companions--calling them brethren--it is becoming on their part that they reverently call Him LORD; and where the Holy Spirit leads and teaches this will characterize them, for "No man can say, LORD JESUS, but by the Holy Ghost."

His divine grace brought Him first of all into our circumstances, and it will bring us into His own circumstances of incomparable glory and blessedness. He has passed through sufferings here in all perfectness, and now, enthroned on high, He graciously aids, succours, sympathizes with, and saves to the uttermost, those who are being brought to the glory where He is. The trials are over for Him. We are still beset with them. He is glorified on high. We shall soon be glorified with Him. Meanwhile, His grace is for us on the way. Neither the grace nor the glory can fail. Divine wisdom and love have ordered both.

The grace which brought the Son of God here as a man amongst men is commonly spoken of as "Incarnation." This expression, though well meaning, is not a Scriptural one, and comes short, I believe, of that which the Spirit signifies, when He speaks of the Word--who is God eternally--becoming flesh (John 1:1, 14). That such an One "became" flesh is a miracle which outstrips finite comprehension, and yet it has been so plainly manifested and proven in Him, whose personal distinction was, the only begotten Son with the Father, that those who are taught by the Holy Spirit, worship and adore Him intelligently and affectionately as they contemplate His surpassing grace.

The glory, on the other hand, to which divine favour is bringing the sons of God, is correctly expressed by the Scriptural term "predestination." If the former speaks of our Lord Jesus Christ coming here in lowliness "full of grace and truth," the latter points on to our being brought to Him in the destined glory--"conformed to the image" of God's Son. The former has to do with His being like unto us, in view of our deliverance and sanctification; the latter with our being made like Him in glory. It was for this that God called us according to His purpose; "for whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). Christ in grace was like to His brethren here, and His brethren shall be like unto Him in glory there--the "many sons" conformed to the image of the "Son of God!" It is this which predestination has to do with. By making it a matter of salvation, instead of the sonship of which the Holy Spirit speaks, hyper-calvinists fall into error and hardness.

"Christ's Grace"

At the present time "grace upon grace" is ministered to those who receive the gospel of God concerning His Son. If, as we have seen, He became flesh, it necessarily follows, "grace and truth subsist through Jesus Christ." It was law by Moses, but Christ is full of grace and truth. Of old Moses spake the words of the law to Israel, and Aaron represented the people before the Lord in the sanctuary. Israel desired of Jehovah at Horeb that they should not again see the great fire, nor hear His voice as at that time; and He said to Moses, "They have well spoken that which they have spoken. A Prophet will I raise up unto them from among their brethren, LIKE UNTO THEE, and will put My words in His mouth." God's word to Moses was fulfilled when the Word became flesh and tabernacled amongst us: He fully declared God, speaking the very words of God. Moreover, surpassing the priestly order of Aaron, Jesus is our High Priest after the order of Melchisedek, being both King and Priest, having gone "into heaven itself, now to appeal before the face of God for us," after He had first of all put away sin by His sacrifice. In the presence of the pre-eminence of Christ, we may gladly heed the exhortation of the Spirit, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the APOSTLE and HIGH PRIEST of our confession, JESUS."

When Jesus had spoken "the words of God" (John 3:34), and fed the five thousand in a desert place, the men said, "This is truly the Prophet" (6:14). Again, when some of the crowd heard His gracious invitation to thirsty souls, "Come unto Me and drink," they said, "Truly this is the Prophet!" Yes, there stood before them the greater than Moses, feeding them with "the bread of life," giving them "the words of eternal life" (6:68). "Never man spake like this Man!"

The letter to the Hebrews names Him "THE APOSTLE . . . of our confession!" and tells us that God has spoken to us "in the SON" or SON-wise. 2 Peter 3:15 informs us that it was Paul who had such "wisdom" given him to so write to the saved from amongst the nation of Israel, but in the epistle itself Paul leaves the One who is greater than all others before the rejoicing hearts of the saints of God. When we think of the greatness of the One who came to speak of God to men, we marvel not when we are told that they

wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. Even the exulting singer of Psalm 45 sang sweetly of the divine One, whom he hailed prophetically, saying,

"Thou art fairer than the sons of men;

GRACE IS Poured INTO THY LIPS!"

When, however, we meditate upon Him as the "HIGH PRIEST of our confession," we are at once confronted with the glorious fact that He fulfils that precious function for us as glorified on high; for, we read, "If He were on earth He should not be a priest" (Heb. 8:4). The family of Aaron had given to them the earthly priesthood. Christ's brethren partake of the heavenly calling, as we have seen; therefore no one less than God's own Son could fittingly fill such a place for them. It might truly be said, only He could becomingly be High Priest before God; but how gracious and how wonderful and how cheering is the truth conveyed to us by the words, "Such a High Priest BECAME US! . . . became higher than the heavens" (7:26). Nor can we happily accustom our hearts to the thought, "became us," until we gratefully lay bold of the stable fact that we have been called "in Christ's grace," not only to salvation, but to sonship. The many sons who are being brought to glory, He speaks of as brethren; and it is in the sense of the gracious dignity thus bestowed upon us we may rejoice in the words, "Such a High Priest became us."

We are told also what BECAME GOD in regard to the same One, and those who are His brethren. "It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make perfect the Leader of their salvation through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10, N.Tr.). Because those who are journeying heavenward know trials and temptations on their way, their Leader passed through all in like manner, apart from sin, and suffered Himself, being tempted. Therefore in perfection He now is able to help those who are tried, for He is exalted on high. What a Leader Jesus is! It became God to provide Him in this way! He was truly like unto Moses, as we have seen, but in all things He was like to His brethren. To be made thus here on earth is that which BEHOVED HIM, in view of His becoming on high our High Priest; as it is said, "Wherefore it behoved Him in all things to be made like to His brethren" (2:17). Truly the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is wonderful indeed! Because we partake of flesh and blood, He also in like manner took part in the same, that through death He might set us free from the slavish fear of death. By the grace of God He tasted "death for everything," because He is to inherit all things; but, in a special way, He made "propitiation for the sins of the people," and then, purification of sins having been made, He set Himself down on the throne's right hand above. We see in the manner He passed through our circumstances here, what BECAME GOD; and in the grace which brought Him there like His brethren, that which BEHOVED HIM; while He Himself, Jesus, our High Priest, become higher than the heavens, is the One who BECOMES US. We may well praise the grace which is exceedingly abundant, and rejoice in the love of Him who exercises on our behalf an unchangeable priesthood.

"Within the veil, Thou dost prevail,

Our souls for worship fitting;

Encompassed here with failure,

Thy name alone avails us.

In Thee we trace sustaining grace,

And strength that never fails us."

The very throne upon which He now sits is called "the throne of grace" (4:16). Grace for seasonable help is to be found by those who boldly approach. And this we may do without misgiving, for what could be more suitable to us in our present need than grace? Israel had a movable "mercy seat," we have an established "throne of grace." Grace reigns today, because the One who was made like to His brethren here is now enthroned there. He reached that place through sorest trials. Help, succour, sympathy and salvation, as we said, are therefore supplied by Him today for His own who are going on to the glory. We may sing to Him in truth:

"Thy tender heart doth take its part

With those Thy grace befriended;

Thy sympathy, how precious!

Thou succourest in sorrow,

And bidst us cheer, while pilgrims here,

And haste the hopeful morrow."

The competency and the grace of Jesus were fully proven here, and He is perfectly able to aid us now that He is glorified there, while He sustains the many sons on their pathway heavenward. He was made like His brethren here--they shall soon be like Him there.

Christ's Glory

When God called Israel, His national son, out of Egypt, He did so in view of the promised land; and when God called us in grace by the gospel at the present time, He did so in view of His purpose concerning Christ's glory. Aaron was Israel's high priest on the way, as they passed through the desert. He failed, and did not enter the land. Christ is now our High Priest: He cares for us on the way. He cannot fail. For His own glory, as well as for theirs through grace, all those He is not ashamed to call brethren, shall surely share with Him the glorious inheritance which has been secured by His redeeming blood, according to the counsels of divine love and wisdom. Failure in this is as impossible as it would be for God Himself to fail, or for the perfect work of our Lord Jesus Christ to fail. On the ground of human responsibility we see failure in the case of Israel, but that which rests upon the sure foundation of God's sovereignty and Christ's sacrifice can know no breakdown; and the exaltation of the Son of God amidst His brethren in glory, for the good pleasure of God, will soon display the truth of this. Meanwhile, the gracious priesthood of Jesus being ours, having been "marked out beforehand according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His own will--that we should be to the praise of His glory"--He is leading us on to that day of designed splendour, holy pleasure, faultless favour and divine rejoicing.

If Hebrews 2:17 tells us that it behoved our most gracious and glorious Lord "in all things to be made like to His brethren," when He was here on earth, Romans 8:29 speaks of our being like Him in heavenly glory, that He might be pre-eminent there, "so that He should be the Firstborn among many brethren." He was like us in lowly grace--we shall be like Him in exalted glory. To understand this rightly, however, it is necessary for us to allow the Holy Spirit to raise our thoughts to God's own viewpoint. Leaving, therefore, the consideration of the priestly grace ministered to us on our journey, and of the testings and trials which call for this, we are definitely engaged with God's own thoughts made known in the inspired Scriptures, and are given to see that which is definitely before His own holy mind for His own good pleasure.

The previous verse closes with the word "PURPOSE" (v. 28). That carries us far away back into eternity when that purpose was formed. Much is counselled according to it, and many wonderful details are necessarily provided for, but originally the eternal purpose which God "purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" was before Him; and even the creation of all things, together with the assigned place of the assembly, are said to be according to it also (Eph. 3:9-11). Then in eternity to come we are shown the most blessed fruition of that purpose in the glory of the Son of God amidst His well-loved brethren.

"God's eternal, gracious purpose,

Now to us in Christ is shown,

Purpose fraught with richest blessing

For the sons He had foreknown."

The singer of these words rightly says that purpose is fraught with blessing, but the purpose itself centres in Christ's own glory, as we shall see. Ephesians 1 tells us of much that is "according to it," but all is rightly understood in relation to what was the purpose of God in Christ. Before the foundation of the world He had (1) "CHOSEN US IN HIM" (v. 4)! That was not our choosing the Saviour! It was God choosing us before we were born! We rise up to God's own thoughts, thoughts of love. And then, (2) "MARKED OUT BEFOREHAND" according to the purpose of God (v. 11). Also (3) to "HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN CHRIST" (v. 10) according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, for all sprang from the fountain of eternal love. Oh! what rest of heart and mind this yields to the loved of the Lord! How becoming and right it is that the choice, the counsel and the consummation in glory should all find their source in Him--the Father of glory!

Ephesians shows us the vast range of counselled magnificence which centres in Christ on the ground of redemption through His blood, but the foundation Epistle to the Romans--giving the forensic basis of the gospel of God--takes us right up to the top-stone of purpose after assuring our hearts that "all things work together for good" to those who are called according to it (8:28)! Let us therefore mark this carefully--God's purpose came first, and "whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified" (vv. 29-30). Here then we behold that which reaches from eternity to eternity; from the purpose purposed right on to the purpose in result; and yet reaching down to us in time, and taking us up in accordance with it!

We might reverently speak of this in symbol as a golden chain chased by divine grace and workmanship. The two extremes are of God (the first), and for God (the last), being eternal and everlasting; namely, THE PURPOSE FORMED, and finally THE PURPOSE FULFILLED. The diamond set in this golden chain is that the purpose was

"PURPOSED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD,"

and, finally, He Himself as the Son of God will shine resplendent as

"FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BRETHREN."

The divine links of pure gold connected with this are the number of divine grace--five! Allied immediately with God's purpose are His foreknowledge and predestination. Yet they are quite distinct things in themselves, as we read, "whom he did (1) foreknow, He also did (2) predestinate." These are the two first precious links of the five in the unbreakable chain which is firmly fastened to eternal purpose. In Second Timothy days like these we are well reminded that God "hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace," for the next two links in the chain come down to us in our lost and sinful position and condition: "Whom He did predestinate, them He also (3) called: and whom He called, them He also (4) justified." Grace came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Christ died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification! Therefore being called and justified in time by divine grace, the last link of that chain cannot but reach right up to where the One who died for us is now honoured, and so we read, "Whom He justified, them He also (5) glorified." From eternity to eternity all is complete.

There is not--there could not be--a single flaw or break in this golden chain of beautiful grace, for it is altogether of God, whose thoughts in regard to Christ and His brethren are indeed wonderful. He purposed! He foreknew! He predestinated! He called! He justified! Nor could He leave over the completion. He glorified! For He who is the Object and purpose is the FIRSTBORN from among the dead, the Head of the assembly even now; and soon among His many brethren He shall shine in rightful and gracious pre-eminence--the fulfilment of God's glorious purpose in Him, also of God's predestination in regard to us. Purpose had the glory of the Son of God in view. Predestination had His brethren in view. When all are like Him in glory as predestinated, the glory of God's Son will be manifested among the sons of God as purposed. The one is therefore the complement of the other. God's purpose as to His Son made predestination necessary as to us, and the predestinated were foreknown by Him. They were sinners by nature and by practice, it was therefore equally necessary that they should be called and justified before they could be glorified along with and like God's beloved Son. Rich and everlasting praise to our God and Father shall result; yet, even now, faith beholds what God's grace has designed.

"And we our great Forerunner see

In his own glory there,

Yet not ashamed with such as we

As FIRSTBORN all to share."

That which is so real to faith now will soon be actually entered upon by the "many sons" who are nearing the end of the road to glory. They are the "brethren" who shall surround the Son of God in His Father's house soon. They, conformed to His image, shall reflect Himself--His name shall light up their foreheads. His beauty shall be theirs; but the profound rejoicing, and the exalted blessedness of that purposed and predestinated loveliness, words fail to express. The poet seems to have felt this when he sang of it thus:

"Like Jesus in that place of light and love supreme,

Once Man of Sorrows full of grace,

Heaven's blest and endless theme.

Like Him! O grace supreme! Like Him before Thy face,

Like Him to know that glory-beam

Unhindered face to face."

Ah, but what shall the joy be then of the One who once knew sufferings beyond measure when in all things He was made like to His brethren? Comparable only to His own love and His own glory it shall exceed in divine perfectness! The revered One, the honoured One, the beloved One, among His brethren! in glory, love and joy. His pre-eminence shall be their everlasting praise! Then indeed the Word will be verified in our glad experience, "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

He Himself looks forward to that precious time! We also long for its blessed consummation! And, though the groaning creation anxiously looks for the revelation of the sons of God--the brethren of the Son of God--our longing must be satisfied first by the coming of Jesus, our Saviour, FOR US. Then, having been caught up to be for ever with the Lord, He will come forth WITH US in power and blessing, for "when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear WITH HIM in glory" (Col. 3:4). He shall "come to be glorified in His saints, and wondered at in all that have believed!" With Him and like Him first, we shall then adequately radiate His wondrous grace and glory.

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