

## THE SEARCH IS OVER, YET IT CONTINUES

It's called the EURion constellation. It appears not in the sky, but on various denominations of currency throughout the world. A pattern of five little circles communicates to printers and copiers that what they are reproducing is money and they stop the process. Obviously there are those who still manage to produce counterfeit bills, but this pattern is helping to prevent fraud.

Knowing what is real is important because if we can't identify what's real we may be taken in by something or someone false. Advertisements warn us to "Accept no imitations" or we will be disappointed by an inferior product. We are in no danger of mistaking a real savior for a false one, at least I hope we won't, but when Jesus was here on earth the possibility was likely. As Pontius Pilate sings in the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, "Who is this Jesus? Why is He different? You Jews produce Messiahs by the sackful."

Because the promise of the Messiah was so much a part of Judaism it would be crucial for the Jews to recognize the real thing. Unfortunately for most of them they refused to acknowledge Jesus' authenticity because He did not match their expectations. It was also unfortunate that after His death and resurrection and ascension there were tentative Jewish converts to Christianity, known as The Way at that time, who still wanted to cling to their practices rather than accept Jesus as the complete fulfillment of both God's promise and His law.

This is how the book of Hebrews, author unknown, has come to be a great resource for those looking to believe in all that Christ accomplished for us. It begins by revealing the critical truth about Jesus, that up to the time He came to earth God had been speaking by means of prophets but once Christ arrived He brought the word of God to life, literally. He speaks for God as the exact representation of God's being.

Not a replica, but a representation. In the process known as democracy, born so many centuries ago in ancient Greece, voters elect someone to represent them. They can't all be present, so they choose someone to act on their behalf, carrying all their hopes and fears, their needs and aspirations, in his or her own person. Jesus represents God in the physical realm, even though God is spirit and needs no body to exist, but He knew we would relate better to a human being as a tangible form of Himself.

This is not a new concept, for it appears in the opening of John's gospel and in the book of Colossians as well. John used it to describe how Christ created all things and that He took on human flesh and lived among us. Paul wrote in Colossians "*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the one who is first over all creation.*"

Imagine, if you can, that you are an immortal, all-powerful creator and you wanted to communicate face to face with your creation. How would you want to be seen by them, as a magnificent, supreme being who would command fear and reverence, or as someone whom

they could relate to, who would inspire love and devotion? Although He had every right to appear to His people in the first scenario, God chose to lower Himself to the status of His creations and appear to them as one of them, so that we might listen and believe without being overwhelmed.

Christ also represents us, the whole human race, not only in His experience of life and death, but in terms of our status before God. Though He is the creator of the universe, He lived for a time in the same way we do in order to restore our status. Recounting the words of Psalm 8, the author of Hebrews asks *“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? You have made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet.”*

Here's what those verses are telling us; humankind is God's creation, and yet there is a question as to why we are noticed by God when there are so many reasons for us to be overlooked compared to His other creations, like angels. And yet God is mindful of us, very mindful in fact, because He allowed Himself to become a son of man, ordinary yet extraordinary, in order to return us to our original state of honor and glory in God's creation.

There's that curious phrase that tells us we are made a little lower than the angels, and since they are supremely powerful creatures, we might think that puts us on a humbler scale. However, God has placed everything under our feet; that is to say, as He did in creating the world by giving humans dominion over all things, He has returned to us our position of authority.

Well, not completely because though we are saved we are still flawed. Eventually when Jesus returns to renew heaven and earth we will be restored to our previous condition of glory. We have to take notice that Jesus has a position superior to the angels and is now seated at the right hand of God, as He should be.

There is no shame in us being made a little lower than the angels if Jesus is superior to the angels, because for a while Jesus too was made lower than the angels. This is only right and proper, but there are some philosophies that would have us believe we can reverse our position and achieve a godlike status. This is what the Mormon doctrine teaches: *“As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be.”* The idea behind this statement is that God was once a man who became elevated to His divine status, and because of this all people may aspire to become gods as well.

This is obviously not biblical, which makes the book of Hebrews all the more valuable. It's vital that we know our place in God's world, and that we recognize Jesus as His Son and His equal. We were created by God through His own desire to show us love and give us worth and purpose. God cared enough about humankind to make provisions for Adam and Eve to be spared after their wrong choice to disobey Him.

Within all of us there is a longing for the one who created us. Not everyone can acknowledge this longing or even name it as something outside themselves. Regardless of our ability to speak to this desire, it is simply a part of us because of how we are made. A third-century bishop named St. Augustine wrote, “Thou hast created us for Thyself and we are restless until we rest fully in Thee.”

As well, this statement from the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church says, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” Scripture also reveals this truth in Revelation 4:11, “*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.*”

For us to fully respond to God means we have to fully open ourselves up to what God has to speak to us. In order to do that we need to strip away all the barriers to hearing and experiencing God. Many people look for something to fill what has been called a ‘God-shaped hole’ in our lives but they look in the wrong places. Emptiness is a terrible thing to live with, but it’s worse to substitute the unending love of God with material things or unsatisfying relationships or substances.

We leave the world the same way we entered it; bereft of all our belongings and leaving those who make up our lives. The only constant in our lives is God. Not having a relationship with Him, with Jesus, with the Holy Spirit is opening ourselves up to the influences of the world, not all of which are obviously healthy and helpful.

How do we begin to find that place in our hearts where God can be made known? Let’s return to the opening statement of Hebrews where we read that in the past God spoke through prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us through His Son. A Son who left glory for human flesh and having accomplished and obeyed His Father’s will, was returned to glory and given the name that is above all names and the position that is superior to all.

Jesus is the only way for us to be in the presence of God. We can experience God through His grace which comes along side of us even before we have acknowledged our need for His grace or His love. He does not need an invitation to extend love to us or care for us. Love is His nature. But it is through Jesus alone that we are drawn to God in response to our own sense of sinfulness, our own need for forgiveness.

Jesus lived this exemplary life in which He was tempted as we are but without committing sin. How do we know this? By the witness of apostles and by the sure and certain truth that He now resides in the place He told His disciples He was going to prepare for them and us and everyone who confesses and believes in Him to live forever.

Hebrews tells us that through the grace of God Jesus tasted death for everyone. This is a unique way of saying that Christ died in the place of everyone in the world. Not just a select few, not only the twelve, but everyone who would accept or reject Him. I love the way this

book of the Bible talks about salvation as bringing many sons and daughters to glory. It's not really the glory that encourages us to look to God, it's the experience of being in His presence.

If you've watched as much British television as I have, you've probably heard that old expression they used when one king died and another king took his place. "The king is dead. Long live the king." A declaration of ascension from the death of a king to his successor, indicating the line of the throne continued. In the case of Jesus this statement became literal and true. The king died, but the same king lives on. That could not be true of any human king, only Jesus, a holy and divine king.

We have a long way to go from being dead in our sins to holiness and perfection, but thankfully we have Jesus, called the pioneer of our salvation. Living on the plains as we do, we can appreciate both the spirit and the role of the pioneer. To go and make a way for others to follow, to brave harsh conditions and uncertainties so that others can have a better future is a noble ambition.

To quote one author, "The wilderness was the whole world of suffering, pain, sin and death. Nobody had ever gone there before and come out the other side. When He did it, He opened the way into God's new world."<sup>1</sup> Because of what He suffered Jesus was made perfect. This statement sets us back a bit because we know that Christ was always perfect, the only truly perfect person who ever lived a human life. This perfection is a completeness, a job well done, a mission accomplished.

We who have yet to be made perfect should take our cue from the way Christ lived on earth. Even though He suffered, even though He was betrayed and even though His followers repeatedly failed to get the point, He persevered and graciously allowed them another chance. As people who one day will have all things subjected to our authority we would do well to express grace and patience and understanding to those who share our world.

Doing so will make us much better suited to the honor and glory God will once again return to us. It may be difficult for us to imagine that one day we will share the privileges that Christ now possesses, but remember that God intended for us to live in His presence always, and if sin hadn't entered the world we would have experienced a very different life.

As we continue in the book of Hebrews we will discover much about what Christ meant to the people of Israel and what He means to us. Let us be bold in our declaration that we are God's people, living in God's kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup>Wright, N.T., *Hebrews for Everyone*, pg. 19