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Christ is greater than...

Matthew 12; John 4 and 8

We will consider five direct comparisons made in the Gospels between the Lord Jesus and another; in all of these comparisons the Lord Jesus shows Himself to be greater. Three of these comparisons are brought to us by the Lord Himself. In the other two the Lord is asked whether He is greater than another and He shows that He is.

(1) He is greater than Abraham (John 8:51-59). Christ is the great I AM, the self-existent God.

Among other truths the Lord tells the Jews that anyone who kept His word would never see death. This seemed absurd to the Jews as Abraham and the prophets were dead, so they asked Him “Are You greater than our father Abraham?” and the Lord proved that He was far greater than Abraham. “Before Abraham was, I am”, a clear claim to deity as shown in Exodus 3:13-14.

The power of the Lord Jesus’ declaration that He is the I AM is seen in the Garden of Gethsemane. He said to those who had come to arrest Him: “Whom do you seek?” They said “Jesus of Nazareth” and He replied “I AM”, and they drew back and fell to the ground (John 18:4-8). The Lord Jesus Christ *is*; there are no caveats, He needs no justification. He is the self-existent God.

(2) He is greater than the temple (Matt. 12:1-8). The Lord Jesus is the one in whom God lives and who would take away sin.

The Lord Jesus and His disciples walked through a cornfield on a Sabbath day. The disciples, being hungry, took some of the corn and ate it. The Pharisees objected: “Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!” In this account in Matthew the Lord gives four reasons why they were wrong to find fault.

- (a) A thousand years earlier God’s anointed king, David, rejected by the authorities, on the run from Saul, was hungry. In that state of national disorder David and his companions ate the consecrated bread that according to the law only priests should have eaten. The Lord implies a parallel. He, God’s King, was there among them, but rejected. If David’s hungry companions could break the letter of the Law and eat the consecrated bread, His hungry companions could pick and eat grain on the Sabbath.
- (b) The Lord points out that the Law demanded that the priests in the temple work on the Sabbath. They were required to offer sacrifices (see, e.g., Num. 28:9-10). Sacrifices were required because of sin. The temple was where God dwelt with His people, where sacrifices for sin were made and where sins were covered (but not removed). The Lord Jesus, personally God, who would completely deal with sin and make us acceptable to God, infinitely greater than the temple, was there living among them.
- (c) The Lord quoted from Hosea 6.6: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice”. This is an oft repeated principle that observance of the letter of the law’s regulations cannot be accepted by God, if His desires and principles are violated. There are many passages, including 1 Samuel 15.22, Psalm 50, Proverbs 15.8, 21.3, Isaiah 1.10-15, Jeremiah 6.6-20, Micah 6.6-8, Malachi 1. Sacrifices don’t make up for deliberate unrepentant disobedience. The Pharisees in the Lord’s day were legalistic about some of the regulations, but ignored far more important matters (Matt. 23.23).
- (d) The Lord Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath – as God, the Creator of all and Originator of the Sabbath, the Sabbath is under His authority.

(3) He is greater than Jonah (Matt. 12.38-41). The Lord Jesus is *the* Prophet, the Messiah, the One who perfectly spoke God’s word.

The teachers of the Law asked Jesus for a miraculous sign. The Lord Jesus told them that the only sign to be given to that wicked and adulterous generation was

the sign of Jonah – three days and three nights in the belly of the huge fish. So Jesus would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”.

Jonah was a prophet sent by God, and the inhabitants of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, had repented at his preaching. The Lord Jesus was *the* Prophet as foretold by Moses (Deut. 18.15-18, Acts 7.37), the Messiah, God’s Son, but the Jews would not repent of their sins when they heard Him. A true prophet spoke God’s words; the Lord Jesus spoke God’s words always and to perfection. A greater than Jonah was among the Jews, but they rejected Him and His words.

(4) He is greater than Solomon (Matt. 12.42). The Lord Jesus is the personification of wisdom.

The Lord Jesus also compared Himself to the wisest of all kings, Solomon – and said that He is greater than Solomon. Solomon was given wisdom by God, but he made many serious mistakes; everything the Lord Jesus said and did displayed perfect wisdom. On every occasion what the Lord Jesus did or said was the wisest. He could do no other, He is the personification of wisdom. This gives us enormous scope for meditation, contemplation and reflection. Wherever we read of the Lord Jesus, we can think about how the Lord spoke and behaved, and why He responded in the way that He did.

In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2.3). Christ Jesus became for us wisdom from God (1 Cor. 1.30). He is wisdom personified and there is in Him a source of perfect wisdom for us.

(5) He is greater than Jacob (John 4.10-14). The Lord Jesus is the giver of living water, the Holy Spirit.

This comparison between the Lord Jesus and an Old Testament saint was not initiated by the Lord himself, but by a Samaritan woman. Jacob had dug a well at Sychar, so providing water in an arid land, and nearly two thousand years later the people were still benefitting. The Lord Jesus surprised the woman with a statement that He could provide her with *living* water. She didn’t understand and asked the Lord whether He was greater than Jacob?

The Lord told her that the one who drinks from Him will be given living water which will become a fountain springing up into eternal life. John 7.39 shows that the Lord Jesus was talking about the giving of the Holy Spirit. Jacob had provided

water to deal with a physical need. The Lord Jesus provides living water to deal with a spiritual need, to quench a spiritual thirst – God the Holy Spirit to live in us.

We also considered the importance of meditation, not as practiced in eastern religions, of course, but meditation with a definite focus. David in Psalm 119 meditated on God's precepts (v.15,78), God's statutes (v.23,48), God's law (v.97), God's testimonies (v.99) and God's word (v.148). He also meditated on God's works (v.27) where the David uses the same word as in the other seven verses. He always has a focus for his meditation: primarily what God says and writes, but also what He does. Colossians 3.2, Philippians 4.8, Hebrews 12.2-3 are New Testament verses encouraging us to meditate on Christ.

So we have in these truths brought out by the Lord Jesus when He compared Himself with others, much food for meditation. He is:

- the great I AM, the self-existent God;
 - the one in whom God lives and who would take away sin;
 - *the* Prophet, clearly the Messiah, as foretold by Moses, the One who perfectly spoke God's word;
 - the personification of wisdom;
 - the giver of living water, the Holy Spirit.
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Oude Sporen 2016

