

Front Page - November 2023

The Deity of The Lord - Part 2

Introduction

In a meditation on the Lord, there are shadows in the Old Testament for which we apparently have very little to guide our understanding of their significance. I submit this could be for several reasons:

- a) Possibly because it is unnecessary for us to know and would not aid us spiritually if we did know. For instance, there is great debate over who wrote Hebrews. Now since the Spirit of God informs the readers of the New Testament who wrote Romans, Jude or Revelation, the very fact that we are not told is because it is irrelevant who wrote it. The message of the book is profound and would knowing who the writer is enrich the book by any means?
- b) It could be because that which is being represented is so incomprehensible to our present minds and, even in eternity will never be able to fully enter into.
- c) In the study of the sweet spices that were combined and put on the golden altar and carried in the priest's hands into the Holiest of all on the day of Atonement, we find this very reality. We know what myrrh, frankincense and olive oil are and what they signify, but what about galbanum and onycha? (Ex. 30:34). It is easy to take a seemingly informed answer from the origin of the words, but nowhere do we have a direct arrow of direction as to what they signify.
- d) It is on two focused questions of the Lord we, in part, get the answer. Those questions are:
 - i) "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? (Matt. 16:13-15)
 - ii) "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matt. 22:42)

Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

For any ordinary man who presents this question, paraphrased, "What do you think of my preaching?", the immediate thought is that is a self-centred individual whose whole world revolves around his ego. So why did the Lord ask it? Was He feeling a bit depressed and needed a word of encouragement, or perhaps was he not aware of what men thought of Him? Both of these are dreadfully wrong for love "seeketh not her own" (1 Cor. 13:5); "charity (love) vaunted not itself" (1 Cor. 13:4); and the Lord was and is the personification of love. He is God and "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). That is His very character. Furthermore, He who "knew all men" (Jn. 2:24) and knew "what was in man" (Jn. 2:25) could never be said to be unaware of any individual or situation. It must be abundantly clear that the words of the Psalmist were true concerning our Lord (Psa. 139:1-3).

Where did the Lord ask the question, "Whom do men say that I am?" Particular notice is taken of the place, which was Caesarea Philippi. This was the geographical line of demarcation between Judaism and paganism. One side was worldwide degradation and on the other, a professed God-fearing population. It was, as it were, between Jew and Gentile, and to all humanity the question comes, "Whom do you the Jews think I am?" and "Whom do you the Gentiles think I am?" All humanity, irrespective of culture, religious background, wealth, education, and status in society must face and answer this question.

- a) Was He just another travelling evangelist? However, His words were gracious and authoritative. He presented the highest teachings but presented himself as the centre of the teaching. He was unique in the absoluteness of His teachings. He not only knew and fully understood His subjects but lived them. He used rural illustrations so that people would understand so perfectly what He was saying. He patiently taught the disciples as they developed in understanding, and never once did He ever say "It seems to me, I suggest, or I think". Clarity and certainty marked His teachings. He was a magnificent teacher, but was He more than that?
- b) He was, as His works authenticated, a teacher sent from God (Jn. 3:2), but was He more than a miracle worker? His miracles were, apart from the two miracles when men were given sight, in two stages for a particular reason. They were all instantaneous and double miracles. If we consider the man who lay in the pool of Bethsaida for 38 years, the Lord told him to rise and lift his bed. Now it is a reality that if one is lying for some time the muscles go into atrophy and balance is off. Yet this man stood up and bent over. His back was given strength, his balance was perfected, his legs and feet were stable, and he was healed. That was indeed a miracle. Again, the Lord went to the tomb of Lazarus. Now we know that within minutes the body begins to decompose, and in the warmth of the east the decomposition is quite rapid. When Lazarus was dead for four days, the sisters were dealing with realism, "he stinketh". The word

Front Page - November 2023

The Deity of The Lord - Part 2

translated “stinketh” is only used in John 11:39, the body was giving a foul odour. The Lord comes to the tomb and in one's mind's eye folk could be seen covering their faces and turning aside from what they expected to see. The Lord says, “Lazarus, come forth” (Jn. 11:43). Out of the tomb Lazarus came, walking and fully cognizant of being alive and being set free. This was a stupendous miracle, brain fully functioning, muscles restrengthened and to all appearances, looking very well. When the Lord asked, “Who do men say that I the Son of man am?”, was the answer that He was an unparalleled miracle worker and nothing else?

The First Observation

We so often think of the word “Messiah” as a title, which it was, but it was more. Thinking as a Jew, when the Lord was here the question is, “When the Lord said, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?”, it was a declaration of His deity, for Daniel wrote, “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14). One is sure this is that which came to mind when the Lord said, “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). They understood that He was claiming to be the Messiah and the Son of God. Messiahship refers to His placement in the economy of God. As “Son of Man” it is an assertion of His deity.

- a) However, someone will respond that Ezekiel was called the “Son of man” (Ezek. 2:1, 3, 6, 8) and so is Daniel (Dan. 7:13; 8:17). Were they also deities?

What was the answer the Lord was looking for?

Observe this was not a question concerning His work as the carpenter (Mk. 6:3), neither was it that He was a teacher (Jn. 3:2); nor that He was not a sinner (Jn. 9:16); nor that He was “Jesus of Nazareth” (Mk. 14:67); nor even “a prophet mighty in deed” (Lk. 24:19). “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). The answer was the response of Peter when the Lord asked, “Whom say ye that I am?” and Peter said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt. 16:16). Thus was the confession of His Messiahship, the acknowledging that He was the God-appointed Prophet of whom Moses spoke, the Anointed whom Isaiah spoke of (Isa. 61:1) and the King (Psa. 2:6).

What was meant by Christ the Son of the Living God?

So far we have indicated that the answer from Peter indicated the place God had appointed for the Lord and the relationship. I suggest the question of the Lord goes deeper. If I were to ask anyone: “What do people say I am?” The answers would be different. To my children I am dad, in the assembly, I am a brother, so to others I am a friend, but who am I in my deepest being? The Lord was asking what is man's understanding of who I am, not just what I am or what is my relationship with God, but what is my essential being. This individual who has taken on humanity, become a real human being, who was weary, thirsty and hungry, suffered in the body, cried and prayed, but who is He? It is not if He is Messiah or if he is the Son of God”, it is an undeniable fact. What then is meant by these terms? They are indicators that this man, the carpenter, is the framer of the worlds and all creation, this miracle worker is the Source of all life and energy, this Nazarite is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, this man who took a child in His arms cradled the world. Whom do men say that I am? He is God manifest in flesh. He is not a representative of God. He is not only a manifestation of God, He is God. The baby born in Bethlehem is the Everlasting Father, or in Hebrew, the Father of eternity (Isa. 9:6).

... Rowan Jennings