

"This is my beloved son, listen to him"

By Pastor Zhang Cheng

¹ Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; ² He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. ³ For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.

⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; ⁶ but Christ [was faithful] as a Son over His house--whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (Heb 3:1-6)

This passage has mentioned the words “house” many times, which is from the Greek word *oikos*; and it has also mentioned about God, Jesus Christ and Moses. The Hebrews Writer compares Christ with Moses to help us know the honourable status of Jesus.

According to the description of the Book of Hebrews, who is Jesus actually? If one looks at this passage from the Trinitarian stance, Jesus is God. How to prove it? The proof is as follows:

V3 says that “... he has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.” This is followed by v4, which says, “For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.” This emphasizes that God is the builder of all things, which proves that Jesus being the builder of the house is God. Agree?

This simple demonstration proves how easily we focus on one or two particular verses while neglecting the whole picture. If we want to avoid that, we must pay attention to the context when reading the Bible, instead of just focusing on a particular verse. What does this passage want to tell us about who Jesus was?

Note how v1 introduces Jesus: *Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.* “apostle” is *apostolos* in Greek. Jesus is God’s apostle, a representative appointed by God; and He is also the high priest instituted by God, to be the mediator of sinners. V6 says that Jesus manages the house of God as a son. The Hebrews Writer did not say that Jesus was God. He introduced Jesus as God’s apostle, high priest and son.

V2 talks about the similarities between Jesus and Moses, ‘*He was faithful to Him who appointed him, as Moses also was in all His house.*’ Both Jesus and Moses were faithful apostles. In terms of being faithful in their appointment, Jesus was like Moses, who were both commended.

V3 contrasts Moses with Jesus: Moses was like the house and Jesus was like the builder, so Jesus was worthy of more honour than Moses.

V4 contrasts Jesus with God: all houses are built by man (Jesus was like a builder), but God is the builder of all things. Notice that it is not equating “Jesus” to “God”, but putting a contrast instead. The Writer emphasizes that Jesus is the builder of houses while God is the builder of all things; God is obviously above Jesus and both cannot be spoken on par.

Why does it have to emphasize “*but the builder of all things is God*”? That is because God is the source of all things, and everything originates from Him, just as how Moses and Jesus were both instituted by God. V2 says, “*...to Him who appointed him..*”. Who was the one that appointed Jesus as the apostle and the high priest? That is the God who built all things because Jesus did not institute himself.

This passage is mainly making comparison of Jesus with Moses. What is the difference between Jesus and Moses? The difference is: Moses as servant (v5) while Jesus as son (v6). That is actually the focus of this passage. V4 is to highlight the honourable status of Jesus – that he is the son of God, the builder of the house.

“*House*” specifically refers to the house of God (cf. v2, 5 and 6) which is the Church. The Hebrew writer described Christ as the builder of the house because the Church was formed through the sacrifice of Christ. That is why Christ is worthy of more honour than Moses, just as how the builder is more honourable than the house.

The Writer has already emphasized the honorable status of Jesus in Chapter 1. He was comparing Jesus with the angels in Chapter 1. We can read ***Heb 1: 4-5***.

⁴having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. ⁵For to which of the angels did He ever say, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"?

The Writer wants to tell the readers that Jesus was not angels but that his status was more honorable than the angels, in fact, way above the angels because God called him as “my son” (v5). God has never addressed angels in that way directly, and that is the special honor that God conferred upon Jesus. V4 says that Jesus inherited the honourable name. The word “inherit” shows that his honourable status was given by God, not originated from himself. It was because Jesus faithfully fulfilled God’s will, so God crowned him with honour and glory (***Heb 2:9***).

The Writer compared Jesus with the angels not for the purpose of proving Jesus as God, but to prove that Jesus being a man, had a status more honourable than the angels because God granted to him an intimate relationship, “I will be his father and he will be my son.” This is quoted from ***2 Sam 7:14***, “*I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men*”. This was the promise that God gave to David; that God would choose a descendant of David to build the temple for Him, that God would regard him as his son and God would even discipline him out of His love for him. This descendant of David was the Jesus Christ.

God built His temple (Church) through him. That was why the Hebrew Writer described Jesus Christ as “the house builder”.

Another phrase, ‘*You are My Son, Today I have begotten You*’ was quoted from **Psa 2:7**, “*I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'*”

Ps 2 talks about the close relationship between Yahweh God and His anointed, God called him “My son”. Ps 2 is a well-known messianic psalm which prophesizes that God has chosen and conferred Jesus as the Messianic king. The word “*Today*” in “*Today I have begotten you*” was specifically referring to the day of Jesus’ resurrection. God had raised Jesus from the dead, proving that he was the anointed Messianic king that God has instituted. Paul in **Ac 13:33** has confirmed this point:

that God has fulfilled this [promise] to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.'

This phrase, “*you are my son, today I have begotten you*” is specifically referring to the resurrected Jesus. God addressed Jesus as “*my son*”, which meant that he was the son of God. “*God’s son*” carries a double meaning. It not only has the meaning of “*Messiah*” (God Chosen, anointed one), it also emphasizes on the special relationship with God. Hence, we can see that the Hebrews Writer compared Jesus with the angels was to emphasize that Jesus was the son of God, instituted by God as the messianic king and that his status was more honourable than the angels.

In Chapter 3, the Writer compared Jesus with Moses to emphasize that Jesus was the son of God, who was more worthy of glory than Moses as a servant. Then, what is the emphasis of the difference between a son and a servant? It was to emphasize that the relationship of Moses’ relationship with God was different from that of Jesus with God. Jesus rules the house of God as a son (v6). His relationship with God was very intimate, like father and son.

Let us first look at some of Moses’ characteristics. Let’s read **Deut 34:10**.

Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.

It emphasizes here that Moses’ relationship with Yahweh was very extraordinary; he was one whom God knew face to face. This was the outstanding part of Moses. We can see this from **Exo 7:1**.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.

God wanted Moses to speak to Pharaoh on His behalf. What does it mean? That is to say that God had authorized Moses to be his sole representative to deal with Pharaoh, that Moses was like God in the eyes of the Egyptians. The first part of **Exo 7:2** says, ‘*You shall speak all*

that I command you ...' Moses became God's spokesman; all that God commanded, he would speak. Moses' honour was extraordinary. Let's read **Deut 18:15**.

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.

Moses told a prophecy here. He said, "*Yahweh your God would raise up a prophet like me from among you*". This prophet who was to come would be raised from among the brothers. Moses seriously admonished the Israelites to "*listen to him*". This command was very important because it was God's command, which is in v18-19:

¹⁸ I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. ¹⁹ It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require [it] of him.

These were words of God to Moses personally and they were the detailed version of v15. God wanted to confer this prophet to be His spokesperson, conveying His words to His people. He was speaking in the name of Yahweh, the authorized representative of God. Hence, the people must listen to him. Otherwise, God would go after their sins. Who was this prophet? Let us see what **Ac 3:22-23** says.

Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to him you shall give heed to everything he says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'

The apostles cited the verse that we saw just now, saying, "*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you ...*". "me" referred to Moses, then who was the prophet? Let's read v26.

For you first, God raised up His servant and sent him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.

V26 tells us that God raised up His servant (or "son"), who had to call everyone to repent and return to God. This servant was Jesus. God commanded that we listen to him. "... *every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.*" (**Ac 3:23**). The Hebrews Writer had also warned the Israelites in the same way. Let's read Heb 2:3.

how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard...

This salvation was spoken by the Lord (Jesus). Those who heard (e.g. the apostles, preachers) witnessed it to us. Those of us who heard must listen attentively, think carefully. If we were to ignore or reject the ways of salvation, the consequences will be terrifying.

This is similar to what John said in **Jn 3:36**, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

That was the apostles' understanding of what Moses said. Such a prophecy of Moses had already been fulfilled in Jesus. This prophet who was to come was Jesus. The most similar characteristic he shared with Moses lied in his very special relationship with God. His relationship with God was in fact even closer than Moses' with God because Yahweh called him "My son". This is also the emphasis of the four gospels. Let's see **Mt 17:1-8**.

¹ Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. ² And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. ³ And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. ⁴ Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" ⁶ When the disciples heard [this,] they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. ⁷ And Jesus came to [them] and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." ⁸ And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone.

Jesus' transfiguration was a very important revelation to the disciples. The disciples saw that Moses, Elijah and Jesus were talking. Moses and Elijah were very extremely respected spiritual giants of the Jewish people. One represented the Laws while the other the Prophets.

There was a voice from the clouds saying, "*This is my beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased; listen to him.*" This was what God had witnessed to the disciples that Jesus was a son that He was pleased with and that the disciples had to listen to him.

Why did Moses and Elijah disappear after the voice from Heaven? V8 says, "*they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.*" This was literally telling the disciples that God wanted them to focus on Jesus and listen to him wholeheartedly.

Moses had a very high status in the hearts of the Jews which no other great man could replace. Although the disciples saw Jesus as the Messiah, they dared not mention Jesus with Moses together easily, let alone surpassing Moses. Through the revelation of the transfiguration, God directed the disciples' focus from the Laws (Moses) and Prophets (Elijah) to Jesus. From this, Jesus had become the focus and representative of the Gospel because all those who listened to him will receive the eternal life.

Paul said that Christ is the sum-up of the Laws and the Prophets (**Ro 9:4**) because the responsibility of the Laws and the Prophets was to direct us to Jesus Christ and have us listened to him. Listening to Jesus is to follow him and be his disciples. John the Baptist was the last prophet of the Old Testament (**Lk 16:16**). He pointed at Jesus and witnessed to

the disciples (Simon Peter and Andrew), saying, “Behold! This is the Lamb of God”, and they bade farewell to John and followed Jesus (**Jn 1:40**).

God’s testimony and Moses’ words (**Deut 18:15**) were consistent, both emphasizing that “listen to him”. God’s will is for us to respect his son in the same way as we respect God (**Jn 5: 35**). That is the correct way of serving God and pleasing Him.

In **Mt 17:5**, God introduced Jesus in this way, “*This is my beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased*”. God did not only regard Jesus as son, but addressed him as “beloved son” as well, which means “dear son”. The word “dear” tells us that Jesus’ relationship with God is very intimate whereby God treats him as a father to his dear son. That is why **Heb 3:6** says that Jesus manages God’s family like a son of God (instead of a servant).

Why is God so pleased with him? That is because Jesus obeyed God’s will wholeheartedly while he was still on earth. Despite sufferings and crucifixion, he did not care. Thus, God is pleased with him and respect him and regards him as dear son and publicly confesses that He was His father.

God’s self-introduction in the Old Testament was “*I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*”. When it comes to the New Testament age, God would introduce Himself as “*I am the God and Father of Jesus Christ*”, because the New Testament called God as “*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (**2 Co 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3 and 1 Pt 1:3**). This was how God exalted Jesus as the highest (**Eph 2:9**).

How does the New Testament describe the relationship between Jesus and God? The Gospel of John says that Jesus is the only begotten son in God’s bosom (**Jn 1:18**). “In the bosom” expresses an intimate relationship, just like how the apostle John reclined near to the bosom of Jesus (**Jn 13:23**) ; and the word “only begotten” emphasizes the meaning of being “unique” and “extraordinary”. All such expressions are illustrating the intimate relationship between Jesus and God. God dwells in Jesus, speaks, work and manifests Himself through him. Hence, Jesus says, “...*The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.*” (**Jn 14:10**). This was how Jesus manifested God to the world (**Jn 1:18**). This was the difference between Jesus and Moses.

In the same way, this also reminds those of us who follow Jesus that we have also inherited the sonship of God. Our responsibility is not merely in evangelism, but more so, that we have to imitate Christ to let God’s Spirit dwell within us and lead us to live out the image and glory of God. No matter how beautiful your preaching sounds, it would not attract anyone to go before God unless your lives can manifest the glory of God as how a son of God should. This was Jesus’ mission on earth, it is also ours.