

365 “So great a salvation”

The Epistle to the Hebrews is written to clarify the precise identity of Jesus, for some Jesus-believing Jews were thinking that Jesus was only some sort of super-angel, special in His way but certainly not divine. This was but one of the debates which arose during the first centuries of the Christian Church, still sometimes heard today, which focus on the key question, “Who exactly was Jesus?”. Some argued that, “boil it all down”, Jesus was only a man, albeit with some notable gifts and abilities. Others took the opposite view, that Jesus was in fact only God Himself, “dressed up” to look like a man but in reality still 100% divine.

Why did, and does, any of this matter? It matters more than anything else could possibly matter in terms of our salvation! For Jesus’ sacrificial death on that awful cross to be effective, first of all He, as “the seed of the woman” and “the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world” (Genesis 3.15 / John 1.29), had to be completely human so that any other human could claim forgiveness from sin from God the Father on account of Jesus’ death in our place. If Jesus was in reality “only” divine, then the penalty of human sin would not have been addressed by His self-sacrifice, because, despite appearances, He was not really “one of us”.

But secondly, Jesus had also to be completely divine as well, for this is the only way by which God the Father could get in place on this earth a perfect, sin-free human being, “the last Adam” (I Corinthians 15.45), who was thus capable, in His own sinlessness, of fully paying the price for the sins of everyone else. Had Jesus been only conceived in the normal way He would have been born, like the rest of us, infected with “original sin” from a human father, which meant that His death, when it came, would have been justly deserved on His own sinful behalf and so could not count for anyone else.

Here too therefore is the key to why the “virgin birth” of Jesus is no fancy fairy tale but rather a critical stage in God the Father opening “the gate of glory that all may go in” as the old hymn puts it, through the sinless death of His only Son. Now the way of forgiveness and salvation is wide open for any who respond to God’s call and accept this amazing forgiveness, won at such appalling cost by Jesus the Son of God, at the behest of Almighty God His heavenly Father (egs., Luke 22.39-44 / John 3.14-19, 35-36; 6.35-47 / Acts 2.38-39; 16.25-33 / Romans 3.21-26; 5.1-21; 10.9-13 / II Corinthians 5.17-21 / Galatians 2.20 / and many more, thanks be to God).

The fact is: Jesus has to be both fully human and fully divine, for His death to apply to anyone beyond Himself.

Hence in Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, the Holy Spirit emphasises in no uncertain terms that Jesus is no mere “super-angel”. Jesus is God’s Son, appointed as “the heir of all things and by whom also God the Father made the worlds” (1.2); and “the brightness of the Father’s glory, the express image of His person, now upholding all things by the word of His power” (1.3). He has indeed “purged our sins”, and is now “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels ...” (from 1.3-4).

To all these great truths about Jesus, as preached by the first apostles, God the Father has borne witness, “with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will” (from 2.3-4). It was the Father’s intention that Jesus “by the grace of God should taste death for every man” thereby “bringing many sons unto glory” (from 2.9-10). Jesus duly became a partaker “of flesh and blood ... that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (from 2.14-15).

The Holy Spirit urges the readers, of both then and now, “to give more earnest heed” to these wonderful truths and achievements, “... lest at any time we should let them slip”, for - “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation ...?” (from 2.1 & 3).

We are well aware that the true nature of Jesus is still downplayed, denied or ignored today, with this “so great a salvation” being casually neglected by so many who remain in such dire need of it.

But these Jesus Facts, Jesus Truths, Jesus Achievements and Jesus Implications remain as vital and as solidly-founded as ever. We go forward into this New Year in good heart! - keeping in mind Jesus’ precious words, “Freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10.8b).

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