



THE NEW SHOFAR

I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father. John 16:28

February 19th

Who is Jesus and why do we call God “Father”?

We have been chatting recently about moves by the Church of England to switch to more gender neutral language when celebrating liturgies and in biblical translations. Whatever of their decision, it did invite some significant discussion around the traps. As we are still moving through Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, it is worth pausing to remind ourselves of the authority behind this teaching. By what authority does he teach in this way – questions quite reasonably raised by the Jewish religious leaders.

The first, and perhaps one of the more significant realities is the way the New Testament speaks of the Son as being God, someone *higher than the angels*. The Letter to the Hebrews speaks of the Son being enthroned as Messiah, the King appointed to the role by God. At the basis of this belief sits the early Church’s adoption of Psalm 110. The Son fulfilled the prophesy found in that psalm...*sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool*.

Psalm 110 is called a “messianic psalm” and speaks of the way the Son will subject his enemies beneath his feet, a reality also celebrated by Psalm 2:7. See also 2:5; 45:6-7,8-9. I have added these extra references to remind ourselves of one of the ways the Hebrew writers would link together a list of “chain quotations” as a way of affirming the authority of what is being claimed. No book in the New Testament does this more completely than Hebrews. They end up with too much evidence for those listening to deny the truth of the declarations.

There is no one else like the Son

Even prior to the Christian era, Judaism seems to have developed the idea of the Messiah being the Son of God. The clearest examples here are found in the writings of the Dead Sea scrolls. We know too from the Gospels how the Son has a unique relationship with God, unique enough to adopt the language of Father – Jesus presents God as *my Father*. This language of Jesus being Son formed a key part of the earliest teachings of the Christian community. Paul, for example, when in the synagogue in Damascus preached *He is the Son of God*.

Psalm 2 has a magnificent image of the salvation that is to come at the hands of God. As the nations rise up in rebellion against the Almighty and the One he has anointed, the King enthroned (in Mount Sion – Jerusalem) by the same God will lash out and destroy them. For the early communities, this psalm pointed to Jesus in his role as Messiah. The victory over the rebels in Psalm 2 was seen as a guarantee of victory of the Church over those who were oppressing believers (cf. Acts 4:23-33; 13:33-34). It was at his resurrection and ascension that Jesus was inducted into this position of royal power and authority. He ***reigns; he is reigning*** as king of the Universe and his kingdom is an eternal kingdom. For Christians this is our hope. This is why we can live and should be living in a world that is transformed by heavenly power, a world in which the Evil One has no hold over us. Nothing in heaven or on earth can resist this divine outpouring of loving mercy.

Jesus as the firstborn (prototokon)

This term *firstborn* was a deeply religious term, referring to someone who has been consecrated to Yahweh. Such boys held a unique place in their father's heart and took a share in the authority of the father. Eventually, he would inherit the bulk of the properties left behind. When the term is used in the New Testament it is a title for Christ. He is the firstborn from the dead, and where he has gone before us, we too will one day follow – our resurrection from the grave. He is also the firstborn Son of God the Heavenly Father.

But the Christ also has a share in the authority of the Father, which is why the angels are exhorted to worship the Son. Why? Because the Son is God...*All worshippers of images are put to shame, those who make their boast in worthless idols; all gods bow down before him* (Psalm 97:7).

Psalm 110

We can come back to Psalm 110 once again as one of the highpoints in New Testament reflections on Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. 110:1 declares...*Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.* The Fathers says this of the Son, and one of the key roles of the reigning Son is the defeat of God's enemies, and the enemies of his anointed. All things are placed beneath his all-conquering feet. One more, as we see in Hebrews, nothing can compare to the power and position of the enthroned Son, and all of the heavenly hosts worship him.

This authority comes about because of the unique relationship between Father and Son. This was later on affirmed by the Council of Nicea (325) in response to the claims of the heretic Arian who insisted that the Son had a point of beginning, that he was not eternal. The Council further interpreted the idea of *begetting* to mean the Son was of *the same essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of True God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father.*

The Son came into inheritance of all the rights and authority of his filial relationship to the father when he was enthroned at God's right hand.

Is this really that important to us today?

Yes, it is vital today as we live in a world sociologists describe as being in the midst of a crisis of authority. To whom or what should we listen in order to find out what to believe and how to order our lives? Is this not why we have an abundance of New Age books, crystals, psychics and all kinds of strange "spiritualities". With the rising power of woke philosophies, even science and maths are under question. Others see in science and human technologies the only hope for the future and for solving the world's problems. Sadly, this illness has infected the Church itself, with the authority of Scripture and our Traditions being challenged.

It is in Jesus the Son of God, the Risen and Reigning Messiah that we can place our trust. It is because he is the Father's Son that we have a rock on which we can build our lives. When other reference points keep shifting, the Jesus who taught us the Sermon on the Mount, guarantees certainty, promises endless grace upon grace, peace, happiness, a genuine sense of belonging, forgiveness and an unparalleled Love. And victory. If this was not so, we are fools! But it is a Truth, a Reality that requires only that we live what we profess. The teachings we find in the Gospels, across the New Testament come to us with all of this heavenly power and authority.