

"GREATER"
CHRIST EXALTED

Outline:-

1. "A Greater than Solomon"
2. "A Greater than Jonah"
3. "One Greater than the temple"
4. "Greater than Abraham", John 8.53.
5. "Greater than Jacob", John 4.12.
6. "He That is less", Christ's wonderful humility.
7. A practical word, - "The servant is not greater than his Lord".

Scripture is full of parallels and contrasts. Parallels may be parallels only in one portion, contrasts in another portion. For example, when we have the kingdom of heaven likened to various things, there are undoubtedly in these parables certain contrasts, because types fall short, indeed everything of earth must fall short, to picture that which is in heaven. In the verses we are about to consider this is more definitely marked, for the very word "Greater than" implies not only a comparison, but a distinction. Every comparative has this

wrapped up in it. Oh, that as we meditate upon many of the words of the Lord Jesus which He spoke contrasting Himself with others, we may realize the tones of love and power with which He uttered those true and unfading words. It is deeply important to realize that no man would have so characterised himself, and so attracted attention to himself. Either the Lord Jesus is God humbled, or He is man wrongly exalted, - there is no alternative. Those of us who by grace realize the prophecies of Scripture and their gracious fulfilment, know that He was in truth the Mighty God, Who nevertheless became a Child born, and consequently would always speak as "the Son of man Who is IN heaven". It is interesting to notice in the Earlier Scriptures, and in other contexts we find the words "Greater than" - for example Jethro acknowledges there was none greater than the Lord, Israel were told they would occupy the land of a people greater than themselves, and we read of the glory of the latter house, of the temple, being greater than the glory of the former house. But it is in the Later Scriptures that our study is centred this afternoon, and we begin with the words "A Greater than Solomon". We have just read them in Matt. 12.42. The Queen of the south came up to Jerusalem from her distant Ethiopia that she might have her problems answered, and might satisfy her curiosity concerning the far-famed greatness of that far-famed king; but the nation of Israel (I mean the remnant of that nation to be found in Palestine when Christ walked up and down that land), the nation of Israel had no journey to go, He was in the midst, and yet they repented not, they believed not. The majority turned from Him. Well might the enthusiasm of the Gentile queen be contrasted with the callousness of the Jewish people. The context speaks of Solomon's wisdom, and Christ was "a greater than Solomon" in this respect. Elsewhere we read of Solomon's glory. The crimson anemone was beyond Solomon's glory, so the Lord Jesus said, and doubtless the words glance, although secondarily, back to the Song of Solomon where the crimson anemone is His own Name, or one of His many names. And Solomon's glory was not only less than all plants in nature, but infinitely less than the glory of Him Who though He was God, condescended to become man. Both in glory and in wisdom Christ was beyond Solomon, and this is marked out in the passage we have before us. Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs, he was wiser than all men, for he asked wisdom and God gave it to him. But Christ was the Wisdom of God, not only did He have wisdom, He was concentrated wisdom. "Christ Jesus Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption". Well may we realize His greatness in wisdom for "in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". But this passage also brings before us Christ as KING. I have already hinted that

by referring to His glory. But the word 'glory' suggests a state, the word 'king' lays a stress on position. It is remarkable as we shall see, that Christ sets Himself forth as greater than prophet, priest, and king. We have taken the greater than Solomon first, but we might have, from another standpoint, taken it last, for He will COME BACK as the greater than Solomon, when, "of the increase of His government there shall be no end", for He shall reign and rule until the end of earth's history, and then He will still be exalted for ever and ever. It is precious to remember our beloved Lord as the great King. Earth's ruin is very marked, but the prospect of That Day is very real. "He That shall come will come and will not tarry". We look for the Saviour Who shall not only change this body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned anew like unto His body of glory, Who shall not only bring wondrous advantages, wondrous blessings to His tired and wearied people, but Who shall also make manifest that earth which has rebelled against Him must be placed in subjection to that mighty control. It is precious to think that the near return of our beloved Lord, will be as earth's King to set earth's ruin right.

The context before us likewise speaks of Christ as Greater than Jonah. Yet once more we have Gentiles repenting. The men of Nineveh were parallel with the queen of the south, and this passage thus becomes one to be compared with Luke 4, where we have the Gentile widow of Sarepta and the Gentile leper Naaman. As here, so there, Christ gives two examples, suggesting a witness. The number 'two' is very prominent. We know how parables are sometimes together in two's, for example, - the parable of the rag with the piece of cloth placed on it, is associated with that concerning the wine-skins. The parable of the leaven is linked on with that of the mustard seed. Scripture has many pairs. We cannot easily separate the treasure hid in the field and the pearl of great price, both of which were bought at extreme cost. Here then the Lord brings before us two classes, but both Gentiles. Nineveh, northern; the queen of the south (as her description implies) in the opposite direction. A man, or men, and a woman. Likewise is it in Luke 4, although there we have the widow woman and not the queen, - a great man of Syria, and not the ordinary people of Nineveh, who are here mainly brought before us, for we know that although the king rose from his throne in Nineveh, much of the repentance in that city was particularly associated with the common people. Thus the Lord would show the Jews their evil and adulterous condition, their despising of Him. The people of Nineveh had repented at the preaching of Jonah, but a greater than Jonah was there. Jonah the Galilean prophet, born at Gath-Hepher, so near to Nazareth

where Christ was brought up, - Jonah, the prophet who was caused, VIA a type of death and resurrection, to be a messenger to the Ninevites, was himself a prophecy of our beloved Lord, Who through death and resurrection is the Saviour of Gentiles as well as Jews. Jonah, before he passed through that type, was the minister of the circumcision. Likewise was it with our beloved Lord, though He was greater, not only in Deity, but also in His wondrous obedience. Jonah's life is sullied with sin and failure, but no defects mar the perfectness of the character of our beloved Lord. Truly the greater than Jonah was there, and yet they not only refused Him when He stood in their midst, the One they knew not, but after He was raised from the dead His citizens hated Him, and sent a message after Him saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. Thus is it ever. Men by nature despise the Lord. The great Prophet and the Great King is refused. You will notice the link between His prophetic position and His kingly dignity in this passage, for the Lord Jesus is not in this immediate context referring to His priestly work. His priestly work has been mentioned before - and despised - and it comes again very definitely in the next chapter when He turns aside from the nation to those, who doing the will of His Father, prove themselves begotten into a heavenly family.

And this leads us on to consider those striking words "Greater than the temple". If we turn back to the BEGINNING of Matthew 12 we read this statement, "Have ye not read in the law how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath and are blameless? But I say unto you, that in this place is One Greater than the temple". This, you will notice is before the other passages. The Lord Jesus referred to His priestly character ~~even~~ as far back as the ministry to Nicodemus. He had referred there to His sacrificial death. Here at the beginning of this discourse in Matt. 12, He speaks of One Greater than the temple. In experience, those of us who know Him by grace, know Him in the order that this chapter sets forth. First we learn of Him as the Priestly Sacrifice, then we understand Him as the Prophet to instruct us in the way of truth, and soon we shall know Him as earth's King, when together with Him His faithful people will reign. We should have expected that verse 6 would have read "But I say unto you that in this place is One Greater than the priests", for the priest's action is mentioned in verse 5, but the changed language implies that the temple was greater than the priests, and that He therefore, as Greater than the temple was far greater than the priests. The greatness of the temple is again and again emphasized. We recollect in Matt. 23, the Lord Jesus unmask the

hypocritical reasoning of those who opposed Him. "Woe unto you" says verse 16. "ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple it is nothing: but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind, for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And whosoever shall swear by the altar it is nothing, but whosoever shall swear by the gift that is upon it he is guilty. Ye fools and blind, for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whosoever therefore shall swear by the altar sweareth by it and by all things thereon. And whosoever shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by Him That dwelleth therein". Here we have then brought before us that it was common among the Jews to speak of the greatness of the temple, and to emphasize that the temple was greater than many other things with which it was contrasted. The Lord Jesus, referring to this, reminds the people how illogical was Pharisaic casuistry. How easy it was for men to make up their theories and arrangements and yet to deny the true teaching of God. But the Lord Jesus was Greater than the great temple, Greater than the greatest building on earth, for when He spoke of the temple of His body, He spoke of that which was not like unto the temple of earth, to be taken down through sin, but that which was to be laid down in His wondrous sinless life for His sinning people whom He saves from their sins. It is precious to realize our beloved Lord as the glorious and great Priest, and as the One Greater than the temple in connection with the argument of Matt. 12. The ordinary persons of Israel dare not do their ordinary occupation on the sabbath day outside the temple, but those who were in the priestly family INSIDE the temple were treated entirely differently from others. If we are in the One Greater than the temple, we are entirely different from those who are not in Him, and our attitude and actions are to be entirely distinct, and to make manifest the wondrous grace and mercy which we have freely received. Never are we 'free' from this service: To be 'free' would be slavery. Greater than the temple! Oh how precious it is to realize the Lord Jesus Christ as the One Who sanctifies our gifts, for if the temple sanctified the gift that was within it, how much more does He Who is our Lord sanctify not only our gold, but all that is of us, and ourselves too.

In John's gospel we have the Lord Jesus brought before us as greater than the two patriarchs. In each case the question is asked tauntingly. "Art Thou Greater than our father Abraham?" is the thought that awhile occupies the mind of many of those of the nation of Israel in that 6th chapter; they say "Abraham is dead, the prophets are dead:

Whom maketh Thou Thyself?" The precious fact was, not that He made Himself great, but that He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant. Greater than Abraham? Undoubtedly, greater than Abraham in His antiquity; for though Abraham was the beginning of the Jews, He was THE BEGINNING. And in the beginning was the Word. Greater in His dignity, for Abraham was a creature, and Christ the Creator. Indeed in this connection we remember the precious argument in Hebrews 7 as to Melchisedec. Melchisedec meets Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and Abraham acknowledges Melchisedec, and receives Melchisedec's blessing, and without any contradiction the less is blessed of the greater. Melchisedec is greater than Abraham. Melchisedec is a type of Christ, "Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec". Yes, in every way "Greater". In ancient glory and in exaltation upon this earth, Christ transcends Abraham, and yet He was the Man of sorrows, Whose visage was so marred more than any man's, and when He walked this earth men saw no beauty that they should desire Him, but they turned from Him as if He seemed loathsome in their sight. They desired One Who would come and make manifest Himself as their Deliverer from the yoke of the Romans. They did not rejoice in One Whose face betokened a hatred of sin, and Who grieved for the affliction of Judah and Who wept over the despising cities. But if the Jews said "Art Thou greater than our father Abraham?" the semi-gentile Samaritan woman said "Art Thou Greater than our father Jacob?" The Samaritans laid a great stress upon Jacob, for Jacob's well was found in the centre of their district. Yes, the Lord Jesus was greater than Jacob. Jacob was a man, and a very faltering man. The Lord Jesus as God was perfect, and as a Man also was perfect. But that is not the thought in John 4. The point is, Art Thou Greater than our father Jacob in getting water? And as to this we can answer, Yes, verily. Jacob could but dig a well. I suppose only those who have lived in Eastern lands can enter into the value of a well. We are so used to having everything brought into our houses, so used to continual preservation from famine and drought, that we little realize the value of these continual gifts, and continual mercies of our unchanging God. But in that land when the rainfall is withheld, those who have depended upon it are indeed in despair, and how precious at such a time is not only a cistern unbroken, which will hold water, but an un-failing well. There are some wells which never seem to run dry in that land of Palestine, but others prove false. "Art Thou Greater than our father Jacob?" Jacob digged this well, Hast Thou digged a well? Jacob drank thereof himself, and his sons and his cattle. Ah, Greater twice over: He not only digged a well; but He Who came into this world

for poor guilty sinners IS the well, the Smitten Rock from which there are rivers of Living Water. Greater in that He needs not to drink of it Himself, He is the Supplier, and not the supplied. He is the One Who meets all needs, and has no needs to be met. Glorious is the dignity of our beloved Lord, greater than Jacob in EVERY way. But though the Lord is thus exalted in His dignity as well as in His Deity, we are continually reminded that He took upon Him the form of a servant. In such a context the words ring out with precious force "My Father is greater than I". He Who said these words was the Mighty God, yet He had humbled Himself, and as the perfect servant of the LORD, Who ever spoke abasing Himself, He set an example to His oft-times proud people; for if One Who had everything in Himself, and available for Himself gladly laid this aside and did not speak of Himself, how can we who have nothing and who are by nature nothing, yet have received everything, how can we do aught but praise Him from Whom the everything comes, and in Whom the everything is still found?

Again in this connection we remember the words of Luke 22, the Lord Jesus is gathered with His disciples at the "last-first" Supper, and the 27th verse reads "Whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth. Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as He That serveth". Precious are these words. The Lord Jesus was not only speaking of the Father as greater than Himself, not only did He say that He was One Who was brought very low, but He contrasted Himself in this passage even with His disciples. He did not say that He was less than they were in the sense in which it would be blasphemy to suggest it. He was always their Lord. "Ye call Me Teacher and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am". When He girded Himself He was still Lord and Teacher. I am among you AS one that serveth. The "AS" is very suggestive. He provided the banquet. He was the Head of the table, Himself was typified in the banquet, Himself was the Serving One in the banquet. Christ was ALL at that first-last supper. Yet in the usual way, "Greater is he that sitteth at meat". Oh, into what greatness He has brought His people! Wondrous greatness! He was brought into the dust of death that they might go their way, and be lifted from the dust of death. He was brought to judgment that they might never come into judgment. He was brought to wrath, that they might be for ever free from wrath. How great are His people! "Made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus", "For now God hath highly exalted Him". The word 'exalted' implies His humiliation. "God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name - the Name - which is above every name; that in the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in

heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father".

In THIS context we notice the words on our outline "He That is less". They come in Matt. 11. The Lord just declared that among all the family of men there hath not arisen one greater than John the Baptist. John the Baptist was indeed a wondrous servant of the Lord, whose faith held out amid bitter opposition and peculiar dangers, but the Lord Jesus adds, "He that is less in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he". Our English Version reads in verse 11 "He that is least", but actually it is "He that is less". I suppose that the primary thought is concerning the Lord Jesus. The secondary thought, - the general principle - is this: If you can find one that is less than John the Baptist, if you can find one that is humbler than John the Baptist, you have found one that is greater. In proportion to humility is the raising up. In proportion to the laying low is the exalting. How often we grasp at the things of earth and grasp at the honours that fade, and thus dash to the ground those that are lasting. How often we seek after certain things, and because we seek them we lose them. If we sought them not, but sought their contrasts we should receive them. God works by contrasts and those who humble themselves know His exalting hand. "Humble yourselves under the Mighty Hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time". But beyond the reference to a general principle, we think once more of Christ. He was the "Less One" in fullest degree, for if John was humble as a man, Christ's humility was without parallel, and therefore He was marked out as Greater than John. Not only is He greater in His Deity, but in His perfect obedience He deserves a reward for transcending that which is accomplished by any of His servants. If we for one moment put on one side the Deity of Christ, though we can never put it on one side, and think only of His humanity in the perfectness of THAT, He is the One to be highly exalted in that coming kingdom. If the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth, what recompense shall there be to the absolutely righteous One Who never by one sin or failure interfered with that perfect communion which He had with the Father, and that perfect obedience which He had for the will of God? Christ is the Glorious One as Man, even as He is the glorious One as God.

And so, beloved friends, we come to a practical word that may, I trust, reach our hearts. We need to be humbled. We need to remember a "not greater than". "The servant is not greater than his

Lord", "The disciple is not greater than his Master". It is enough to be as the Lord. As He is, so are we in this world, with a perfect righteousness because it is His obedience acknowledged by the Father, and we are in union with Him, raised from the dead. As He walked, so should we walk. If they have despised and rejected Him, we should be rejected too. The disciple is not above his Lord. He that is sent is not greater than the Sender. Oh that we may realize more our responsibility, if born from above, to our gracious Lord. Our responsibility to Him, to show Whose we are and Whom we serve. Now while we are speaking of Him and His greatness, He is beyond all our speaking of Him. Now at the right hand of God He is thinking of us more than we are thinking of Him, and our Father is well-pleased that we are in measure exalting Him, but all our exaltation can add nothing unto that exaltation which is beyond all exaltation. There, at the right hand of God, He remembers us, and here on earth we should seek to remember and represent Him. "AS HE WALKED". Oh how solemn are these words. Walking is continuous, walking is progressive, walking is the evidence of life, walking is with an object, and if we walk as He walked we must have an object in view. Daily bearing the cross, with the goal(it may be) even of physical death, amid persecution, at the end. AH! but beyond that end, a looking off, beyond that which earth can do in its worst cruelty, to the recompense of the reward. He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God. The joy that was set before Him was a very real joy, and how His blood-bought people can rejoice that there is a joy set in front of them, the joy of seeing their Lord, "Whom having not seen they love, - in Whom though now they see Him not, but believing, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of their faith, even salvation of their souls". Oh, how wondrous, precious, and glorious is the prospect of the redeemed of the Lord! Oh that we might live in the light of this prospect! live in the light of that Day, - live as those who realize, in the Holy Spirit, the Lord's greatness, our own nothingness, and that we have everything in HIM, that we may represent HIM.

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