

The Excellency of Christ Part I By Jonathan Edwards



Jonathan Edwards (October 5, 1703 – March 22, 1758) was an American revivalist preacher, philosopher, and Congregationalist theologian. He was also the 3rd President of Princeton University! (Source: Wikipedia.)

Preachers in the 18th century really knew how to teach *from* the Bible. They didn't add their own biases or agendas to the Bible. They just taught what the Bible says. This was when Protestantism was still strong in America before the Jesuits were able to derail it like today.

I really liked this message by Jonathan Edwards and hope you do too.

And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain.— Rev. 5:5-6

Introduction

The visions and revelations the apostle John had of the future events of God's providence, are here introduced with a vision of the book of God's decrees, by which those events were fore-ordained. This is represented (Revelation 5:1) as a book in the right hand of him who sat on the throne, "*written within and on the back side, and sealed with seven seals.*" Books, in the form in which they were wont of old to be made, were broad leaves of parchment or paper, or something of that nature, joined together at one edge, and so rolled up together, and then sealed, or some way fastened together, to prevent their unfolding and opening. Hence we read of the roll of a book Jer. 36:2. It seems to have been such a book that John had a vision of here; and therefore it is said to be "*written within and on the back side,*" i. e. on the inside pages, and also on one of the outside pages, namely, that which it was rolled in, in rolling the book up together. And it is said to be "*sealed with seven seals,*" to signify that what was written in it was perfectly hidden and secret; or that God's decrees of future events are sealed, and shut up from all possibility of being discovered by creatures, till God is pleased to make them known. We find that seven is often used in Scripture as the number of perfection, to signify the superlative or most perfect degree

of anything, which probably arose from this, that on the seventh day God beheld the works of creation finished, and rested and rejoiced in them, as being complete and perfect.

When John saw this book, he tells us, he

" saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon."

And that he wept much, because

" no man was found worthy to open and read the book, neither to look thereon."

And then tells us how his tears were dried up, namely, that

" one of the elders said unto him, "Weep not, Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed"

etc. as in the text. Though no man nor angel, nor any mere creature, was found either able to loose the seals, or worthy to be admitted to the privilege of reading the book, yet this was declared, for the comfort of this beloved disciple, that Christ was found both able and worthy. And we have an account in the succeeding chapters how he actually did it, opening the seals in order, first one, and then another, revealing what God had decreed should come to pass hereafter. And we have an account in this chapter, of his coming and taking the book out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne, and of the joyful praises that were sung to him in heaven and earth on that occasion.

Many things might be observed in the words of the text; but it is to my present purpose only to take notice of the two distinct appellations here given to Christ.

1. He is called **a Lion**. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He seems to be called the Lion of the tribe of Judah, in allusion to what Jacob said in his blessing of the tribe on his death-bed; who, when he came to bless Judah, compares him to a lion, Gen. 49:9.

" Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?"

And also to the standard of the camp of Judah in the wilderness on which was displayed a lion, according to the ancient tradition of the Jews. It is much on account of the valiant acts of David that the tribe of Judah, of which David was, is in Jacob's prophetic blessing compared to a lion; but more especially with an eye to Jesus Christ, who also was of that tribe, and was descended of David, and is in our text called *" the Root of David"*; and therefore Christ is here called *" the Lion of the tribe of Judah."*

2. He is called **a Lamb**. John was told of a Lion that had prevailed to open

the book, and probably expected to see a lion in his vision; but while he is expecting, behold a Lamb appears to open the book, an exceeding diverse kind of creature from a lion. A lion is a devourer, one that is wont to make terrible slaughter of others; and no creature more easily falls a prey to him than a lamb. And Christ is here represented not only as a Lamb, a creature very liable to be slain, but a "*Lamb as it had been slain*," that is, with the marks of its deadly wounds appearing on it.

That which I would observe from the words, for the subject of my present discourse, is this, namely –

There is an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies in Jesus Christ.

The lion and the lamb, though very diverse kinds of creatures, yet have each their peculiar excellencies. The lion excels in strength, and in the majesty of his appearance and voice: the lamb excels in meekness and patience, besides the excellent nature of the creature as good for food, and yielding that which is fit for our clothing and being suitable to be offered in sacrifice to God. But we see that Christ is in the text compared to both, because the diverse excellencies of both wonderfully meet in him, – In handling this subject I would

First, Show wherein there is an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies in Christ.

Second, Show how this admirable conjunction of excellencies appear in Christ's acts.

Third, make application.

Part One

First, I would show wherein there is an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies in Jesus Christ. which appears in three things:

A) There is a conjunction of such excellencies in Christ, as, in our manner of conceiving, are very diverse one from another.

B) There is in him a conjunction of such really diverse excellencies, as otherwise would have seemed to us utterly incompatible in the same subject.

C) Such diverse excellencies are exercised in him towards men that otherwise would have seemed impossible to be exercised towards the same object.

A) There is a conjunction of such excellencies in Christ as, in our manner of conceiving, are very diverse one from another. Such are the various divine perfections and excellencies that Christ is possessed of. Christ is a divine person, and therefore has all the attributes of God. The difference between these is chiefly relative, and in our manner of conceiving them. And those which, in this sense, are most diverse, meet in the person of Christ. I shall mention two instances.

1. There do meet in Jesus Christ infinite highness and infinite

condescension. Christ, as he is God, is infinitely great and high above all. He is higher than the kings of the earth; for he is King of kings, and Lord of lords. He is higher than the heavens, and higher than the highest angels of heaven. So great is he, that all men, all kings and princes, are as worms of the dust before him; all nations are as the drop of the bucket, and the light dust of the balance; yea, and angels themselves are as nothing before him. He is so high, that he is infinitely above any need of us; above our reach, that we cannot be profitable to him; and above our conceptions, that we cannot comprehend him. Prov. 30:4 "What is his name, and what is his Son's name, if thou canst tell?" Our understandings, if we stretch them never so far, cannot reach up to his divine glory. Job 11:8 "It is high as heaven, what canst thou do?" Christ is the Creator and great Possessor of heaven and earth. He is sovereign Lord of all. He rules over the whole universe, and doth whatsoever pleaseth him. His knowledge is without bound. His wisdom is perfect, and what none can circumvent. His power is infinite, and none can resist Him. His riches are immense and inexhaustible. His majesty is infinitely awful.

And yet he is one of infinite condescension. None are so low or inferior, but Christ's condescension is sufficient to take a gracious notice of them. He condescends not only to the angels, humbling himself to behold the things that are done in heaven, but he also condescends to such poor creatures as men; and that not only so as to take notice of princes and great men, but of those that are of meanest rank and degree, "the poor of the world," James 2:5. Such as are commonly despised by their fellow creatures, Christ does not despise. I Cor. 1:28 "Base things of the world, and things that are despised, hath God chosen." Christ condescends to take notice of beggars Luke 16:22 and people of the most despised nations. In Christ Jesus is neither "Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free" (Col. 3:11). He that is thus high condescends to take a gracious notice of little children Matt. 19:14. "Suffer little children to come unto me." Yea, which is more, his condescension is sufficient to take a gracious notice of the most unworthy, sinful creatures, those that have no good deservings, and those that have infinite ill deservings.

Yea, so great is his condescension, that it is not only sufficient to take some gracious notice of such as these, but sufficient for every thing that is an act of condescension. His condescension is great enough to become their friend, to become their companion, to unite their souls to him in spiritual marriage. It is enough to take their nature upon him, to become one of them, that he may be one with them. Yea, it is great enough to abase himself yet lower for them, even to expose himself to shame and spitting; yea, to yield up himself to an ignominious death for them. And what act of condescension can be conceived of greater? Yet such an act as this, has his condescension yielded to, for those that are so low and mean, despicable and unworthy!

Such a conjunction of infinite highness and low condescension, in the same person, is admirable. We see, by manifold instances, what a tendency a high station has in men, to make them to be of a quite contrary disposition. If one worm be a little exalted above another, by having more dust, or a bigger dunghill, how much does he make of himself! What a distance does he keep from

those that are below him! And a little condescension is what he expects should be made much of, and greatly acknowledged. Christ condescends to wash our feet; but how would great men, (or rather the bigger worms,) account themselves debased by acts of far less condescension!

2. There meet in Jesus Christ, infinite justice and infinite grace.

As Christ is a divine person, he is infinitely holy and just, hating sin, and disposed to execute condign punishment for sin. He is the Judge of the world, and the infinitely just Judge of it, and will not at all acquit the wicked, or by any means clear the guilty.

And yet he is infinitely gracious and merciful. Though his justice be so strict with respect to all sin, and every breach of the law, yet he has grace sufficient for every sinner, and even the chief of sinners. And it is not only sufficient for the most unworthy to show them mercy, and bestow some good upon them, but to bestow the greatest good; yea, it is sufficient to bestow all good upon them, and to do all things for them. There is no benefit or blessing that they can receive, so great but the grace of Christ is sufficient to bestow it on the greatest sinner that ever lived. And not only so, but so great is his grace, that nothing is too much as the means of this good. It is sufficient not only to do great things, but also to suffer in order to do it, and not only to suffer, but to suffer most extremely even unto death, the most terrible of natural evils; and not only death, but the most ignominious and tormenting, and every way the most terrible that men could inflict; yea, and greater sufferings than men could inflict, who could only torment the body. He had sufferings in his soul, that were the more immediate fruits of the wrath of God against the sins of those he undertakes for.

B) There do meet in the person of Christ such really diverse excellencies, which otherwise would have been thought utterly incompatible in the same subject; such as are conjoined in no other person whatever, either divine, human, or angelical; and such as neither men nor angels would ever have imagined could have met together in the same person, had it not been seen in the person of Christ. I would give some instances.

1. In the person of Christ do meet together infinite glory and lowest humility. Infinite glory, and the virtue of humility, meet in no other person but Christ. They meet in no created person; for no created person has infinite glory, and they meet in no other divine person but Christ. For though the divine nature be infinitely abhorrent to pride, yet humility is not properly predicable of God the Father, and the Holy Ghost, that exist only in the divine nature; because it is a proper excellency only of a created nature; for it consists radically in a sense of a comparative lowness and littleness before God, or the great distance between God and the subject of this virtue; but it would be a contradiction to suppose any such thing in God.

But in Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, those two diverse excellencies are sweetly united. He is a person infinitely exalted in glory and dignity. Phil. 2:6. " Being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal

with God." There is equal honor due to him with the Father. John 5:23. " That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." God himself says to him, " thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," Heb. 1:8. And there is the same supreme respect and divine worship paid to him by the angels of heaven, as to God the Father, ver. 6. " Let all the angels of God worship him."

But however he is thus above all, yet he is lowest of all in humility. There never was so great an instance of this virtue among either men or angels, as Jesus. None ever was so sensible of the distance between God and him, or had a heart so lowly before God, as the man Christ Jesus. Matt. 11:29. What a wonderful spirit of humility appeared in him, when he was here upon earth, in all his behavior! In his contentment in his mean outward condition, contentedly living in the family of Joseph the carpenter, and Mary his mother, for thirty years together, and afterwards choosing outward meanness, poverty, and contempt, rather than earthly greatness; in his washing his disciples' feet, and in all his speeches and deportment towards them; in his cheerfully sustaining the form of a servant through his whole life, and submitting to such immense humiliation at death!

2. In the person of Christ do meet together infinite majesty and transcendent meekness. These again are two qualifications that meet together in no other person but Christ. Meekness, properly so called, is a virtue proper only to the creature: we scarcely ever find meekness mentioned as a divine attribute in Scripture; at least not in the New Testament; for thereby seems to be signified, a calmness and quietness of spirit, arising from humility in mutable beings that are naturally liable to be put into a ruffle by the assaults of a tempestuous and injurious world. But Christ, being both God and man, hath both infinite majesty and superlative meekness.

Christ was a person of infinite majesty. It is he that is spoken of, Psalm 45:3. " Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty." It is he that is mighty, that rideth on the heavens, and his excellency on the sky. It is he that is terrible out of his holy places; who is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea: before whom a fire goeth, and burneth up his enemies round about; at whose presence the earth quakes, and the hills melt; who sitteth on the circle of the earth, and all the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers, who rebukes the sea, and maketh it dry and drieth up the rivers, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, from whose presence, and from the glory of whose power, the wicked shall be punished with everlasting destruction; who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who hath heaven for his throne, and the earth for his footstool, and is the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and of whose dominion there is no end. And yet he was the most marvellous instance of meekness, and humble quietness of spirit, that ever was; agreeable to the prophecies of him, Matthew 21:4f " All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." And, agreeable to what Christ declares of himself, Matt. 11:29. " I am meek and lowly in heart." And agreeable to what was manifest in his behavior: for there never was such an instance seen on earth,

of a meek behavior, under injuries and reproaches, and towards enemies; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. He had a wonderful spirit of forgiveness, was ready to forgive his worst enemies, and prayed for them with fervent and effectual prayers. With what meekness did he appear in the ring of soldiers that were contemning and mocking him; he was silent, and opened not his mouth, but went as a lamb to the slaughter. Thus is Christ a Lion in majesty and a Lamb in meekness.

3. There meet in the person of Christ the deepest reverence towards God and equality with God. Christ, when on earth, appeared full of holy reverence towards the Father. He paid the most reverential worship to him, praying to him with postures of reverence. Thus we read of his " kneeling down and praying," Luke 22:41. This became Christ, as one who had taken on him the human nature, but at the same time he existed in the divine nature; whereby his person was in all respects equal to the person of the Father. God the Father hath no attribute or perfection that the Son hath not, in equal degree, and equal glory. These things meet in no other person but Jesus Christ.

4. There are conjoined in the person of Christ infinite worthiness of good, and the greatest patience under sufferings of evil.

He was perfectly innocent, and deserved no suffering. He deserved nothing from God by any guilt of his own, and he deserved no ill from men. Yea, he was not only harmless and undeserving of suffering, but he was infinitely worthy; worthy of the infinite love of the Father, worthy of infinite and eternal happiness, and infinitely worthy of all possible esteem, love, and service from all men.

And yet he was perfectly patient under the greatest sufferings that ever were endured in this world. Heb. 12:2. " He endured the cross, despising the shame." He suffered not from his Father for his faults, but ours; and he suffered from men not for his faults but for those things on account of which he was infinitely worthy of their love and honor, which made his patience the more wonderful and the more glorious. 1 Pet. 2:20, " For what glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently, but if when ye do well. and suffer for it, ye take it patiently; this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." There is no such conjunction of innocence, worthiness, and patience under sufferings, as in the person of Christ.

5. In the person of Christ are conjoined an exceeding spirit of obedience, with supreme dominion over heaven and earth.

Christ is the Lord of all things in two respects: he is so, as God-man and Mediator, and thus his dominion is appointed, and given him of the Father. Having it by delegation from God, he is as it were the Father's vicegerent. But he is Lord of all things in another respect, namely, as he is (by his

original nature) God; and so he is by natural right the Lord of all, and supreme over all as much as the Father. Thus, he has dominion over the world, not by delegation, but in his own right. He is not an under God, as the Arians (People who believe that Christ was created by the Father before time.) suppose, but to all intents and purposes supreme God.

And yet in the same person is found the greatest spirit of obedience to the commands and laws of God that ever was in the universe; which was manifest in his obedience here in this world. John 14:31 "As the Father gave me commandment, even so I do." – John 15:10. "Even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." The greatness of his obedience appears in its perfection, and in his obeying commands of such exceeding difficulty. Never any one received commands from God of such difficulty, and that were so great a trial of obedience, as Jesus Christ. One of God's commands to him was, that he should yield himself to those dreadful sufferings that he underwent. See John 10:18. "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." "This commandment received I of my Father." And Christ was thoroughly obedient to this command of God. Heb. 5:8. "Though he were a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things that he suffered." Philip. 2:8. "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Never was there such an instance of obedience in man or angel as this, though he was at the same time supreme Lord of both angels and men.

6. In the person of Christ are conjoined absolute sovereignty and perfect resignation. This is another unparalleled conjunction.

Christ, as he is God, is the absolute sovereign of the world, the sovereign disposer of all events. The decrees of God are all his sovereign decrees; and the work of creation, and all God's works of providence, are his sovereign works. It is he that worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. Col 1:16f. "By him, and through him, and to him, are all things." John 5:17. "The Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Matt. 8:3. "I will, be thou clean." But yet Christ was the most wonderful instance of resignation that ever appeared in the world. He was absolutely and perfectly resigned when he had a near and immediate prospect of his terrible sufferings, and the dreadful cup that he was to drink. The idea and expectation of this made his soul exceeding sorrowful even unto death, and put him into such an agony, that his sweat was as it were great drops or clots of blood, falling down to the ground. But in such circumstances he was wholly resigned to the will of God. Matt 26:39. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt". Verse 42. "O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done."

7. In Christ do meet together self-sufficiency, and an entire trust and reliance on God, which is another conjunction peculiar to the person of Christ.

As he is a divine person, he is self-sufficient, standing in need of nothing. All creatures are dependent on him, but he is dependent on none, but is absolutely independent. His proceeding from the Father, in his eternal generation, argues no proper dependence on the will of the Father; for that proceeding was natural and necessary, and not arbitrary. But yet Christ entirely trusted in God: – his enemies say that of him, "He

trusted in God that he would deliver him," Matt. 27:43. And the apostle testifies, I Pet. 2:23. " That he committed himself God."

C) Such diverse excellencies are expressed in him towards men, that otherwise would have seemed impossible to be exercised towards the same object; as particularly these three, justice, mercy, and truth. The same that are mentioned in Psalm 85:10. " Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

The strict justice of God, and even his revenging justice, and that against the sins of men, never was so gloriously manifested. as in Christ. He manifested an infinite regard to the attribute of God's justice, in that, when he had a mind to save sinners, he was willing to undergo such extreme sufferings, rather than that their salvation should be to the injury of the honor of that attribute. And as he is the Judge of the world, he doth himself exercise strict justice, he will not clear the guilty, nor at all acquit the wicked in judgment.

Yet how wonderfully is infinite mercy towards sinners displayed in him! And what glorious and ineffable grace and love have been and are exercised by him, towards sinful men! Though he be the just Judge of a sinful world, yet he is also the Savior of the world. Though he be a consuming fire to sin, yet he is the light and life of sinners. Rom. 3:25. " Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

So the immutable truth of God, in the threatenings of his law against the sins of men, was never so manifested as it is in Jesus Christ, for there never was any other so great a trial of the unalterableness of the truth of God in those threatenings, as when sin came to be imputed to his own Son. And then in Christ has been seen already an actual complete accomplishment of those threatenings, which never has been nor will be seen in any other instance; because the eternity that will be taken up in fulfilling those threatenings on others, never will be finished. Christ manifested an infinite regard to this truth of God in his sufferings. And, in his judging the world, he makes the covenant of works, that contains those dreadful threatenings, his rule of judgement. He will see to it, that it is not infringed in the least jot or tittle: he will do nothing contrary to the threatenings of the law, and their complete fulfilment. And yet in him we have many great and precious promises, promises of perfect deliverance from the penalty of the law. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. And in him are all the promises of God yea, and Amen.

Continued in [part II](#)