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HEAVEN'S QUEST FOR A MAN LIKE GOD

"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."
(Genesis 1: 26).

Nothing in human annals is quite as thrilling as the history of the Messianic hope in the Hebrew heart down the long years of Old Testament history. It was fore-felt and foreseen and foretold for 4,000 years through the Old and was fulfilled in the New.

The insight of faith in the hearts of sons of the twilight hours saw the Day Star shining in the darkness of the midnight and followed it through the ages. Above the confusion and terrors of their times the prophets held to a triumphant hope and clung to a stubborn faith that their tortured hearts would not surrender. They had hope in the everlasting Covenant and trusted that God would lift the fallen race again to these high intentions that He had in the beginning.

They remembered the deliberations of Deity in the Creation story, and never ceased to thrill to the divine possibilities suggested in those first words, "Let us make man in our own image and after our likeness."

That Godlikeness was lost by the Fall, but the hope and faith that God must yet accomplish His high purpose for humanity was never lost. The belief that He would reestablish that likeness never ceased to burn brightly in the sensitive souls

of those holy-minded people of the past. The faith they had in God gave them a faith in human possibilities.

Those holy sky gazers, standing by, seeing their people sink into sin, immorality and heathen worship, never lost hope that out of the race would come that Man in the image and likeness of God.

They remembered that God, coming on the battlefield where Satan had slain his victim and standing there among the ravages of the vanquished, had spoken a word of hope. With a mighty wave of His hand, He gathered up the fragments and declared that out of that distorted and disfigured remains of His likeness He would raise up another. He would raise up another Son that would bear the image and likeness of His Father.

The ages rolled by and sin with its ruthless ravages marred and scarred the sons of Adam. But always in the mingled tragedy, the faith of the prophets filled the midnight sky with stars.

It still staggers the human imagination to ponder the problem of God the Creator forming man, the creature, like Himself.

From the heights of immortal glory to the depths of decadent clay, God moved down to span the bridgeless gulf between Creator and creature; and formed a being whereby creature and Creator may have things in common. This marvelous likeness made it possible for man to walk and talk with God; that both may receive a mutual joy in that fellowship.

The visage of the creature was marred. The supreme tragedy of the ages was the result of that Fall. The creature lost the image of the Creator. Driven out of the garden with the mark of sin and punishment, he began that descent to hell and from that pedestal of Godlikeness, he

began to form a likeness to Satan. He traveled downward, a sinful transgressor to become a demon at last.

Opening the age of Conscience, God in the promise of a Redeemer in substance repeated His first words, "Let us make man in our image and likeness."

Throughout the 4,000 years that followed amid the sin, bondage, famine, war, and terror, the undertones of this divine purpose never disappeared from the earth and were never lost from the mind of God.

Clothing man in the animal skins was God's first symbol of the work begun. Slaying the animal with His own hands was the sign that by His own right hand He would again accomplish His high and holy purpose.

In the nature of the promise of a deliverer, it is clear that God would not create another from the dust; that He would not go beyond the pale of His original pattern of reproduction; but from the blood-stream of His first creature would come another who would be holy and like God.

The careful maneuvering of God to accomplish that end is beautifully matched by the light of faith in the hearts of the good and great for four thousand years. God, standing in the shadows keeping watch above His own found an echo in the hearts of the Hebrew prophets, and like deep calling to deep, they answered back to say: "We believe and are sure that Messiah will come."

Abel, kneeling by his altar.

Enoch, walking with God.

Abraham, clinging to the promise while Isaac lay on the altar, and exclaiming, "My son, God will provide for himself a lamb."

Noah, worshiping beneath the golden arch of the rainbow.

Joseph, dreaming of kingdoms, thrones and crowns.

Rachel, crying: "Give me a child or I'll die."

Jochebed, gazing into the eyes of her infant son, Moses, and seeing there a proper child.

Balaam, standing up to cry, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel."

Old dying Jacob, leaning on his staff, blessing his sons, turned to Judah to say: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

Job, rising out of the pits of despair, from the gloom of his darkest night when decay and death were clawing at the mainsprings of his life, cried out to say: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth."

Isaiah, coming to the pulpit of prophecy at a time when men were doubting the promise, cried out against their unbelief to say: "Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" From there he goes on to give in detail the description of the perfect sacrifice of that man who would offer himself without spot to God. Isaiah cried, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him . . . And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins."

Isaiah goes even further to announce the birth of Christ many years before the angelic announcement in Bethlehem: "Unto us a child is born:

unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end."

These prophecies unite and identify the Son as a man like God.

Again Isaiah tells of His birth: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," meaning God with us.

Zechariah also caught the vision and cried: "Behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH."

Every Jewish mother, expecting to be the mother of that perfect child, kept alive the hope in womankind. This hope was reflected in *Eve's* exultant cry when Cain was born, "I have gotten a man from the Lord." *Sarah* giving Hagar to Abraham, tried to hasten that promise.

Here and there a man left the multitude and gave promise of becoming that man like God:

Enoch, walking with God, came so near to that perfection till he went home with God.

Moses, hiding forty days and nights in Sinai talking with God, came down from the mount with his face shining above the brightness of the sun.

Elijah, hiding by the brook Cherith came forth with miracles falling from his fingertips like raindrops from the trees.

Joseph's purity in pagan Egypt and *Daniel* undefiled in Babylon, both gave promise that the man like God would yet be a reality.

Job, the perfect man.

Samuel, the sainted prophet.

Caleb, the man who fully followed God.

All these attained to a high and lofty state; all of these were making their way back up the ladder striving to reach that image and likeness of God; but they could not perpetuate or transmit that goodness to another. It belonged to them alone.

The lamb without spot, dying on a Jewish altar; the dove and the pigeon dying without blemish, testified to the perfect sacrifice of the man who would be like God.

The prophets rolled up their scrolls and wrapped their mantles about them and passed behind the curtain of the silent past. Four hundred years no voice was heard; but the hope never died in the human heart.

The angel *Gabriel*, speaking to Mary, explained the conditions of the incarnation: angels singing at midnight; shepherds and wisemen worshiping by the manger crib; a peasant mother with her husband and child are climbing the steps to the temple bringing two turtle doves as an offering of purification as she presents her babe before the Lord.

The silence of the centuries was broken, echoing from the Garden of Eden. Again that voice was heard; "Let us make man in our own image and likeness."

Mary, standing in the temple holding a man child up to God was the mother of the man like God.

Simeon, the aged, waiting for the consolation of Israel took the child in his arms and blessed God, saying: "Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

Old Anna, the prophetess standing by, sang and gave thanks to God because redemption had

come to Jerusalem. These two aged saints had kept alive the hope until He came.

Thirty-three years Jesus lived among men.

All hell converged to slay Him.

Sin reached out its slimy hand to mar Him.

The world with its charm swept by to tempt Him.

But when His life and labors were weighed in the eyes of justice and God's holiness, God the Father said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased."

The Samaritan woman cried from a grateful heart: "Come see a man."

The authoritative voice of Pilate demanded: "Behold the man."

The Roman Empire gave its verdict: "I find no fault in Him."

The man who knew Him best, in the throes of death, declared: "I have betrayed innocent blood."

Well did John, the apostle, write: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Christ testified to His sonship and agelessness by saying, "I am older than Abraham for before Abraham was, I am." He testified to His likeness to God by saying, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also and from henceforth ye know him and have seen him. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father also."

This proves His likeness to God and His birth proves His kinship to mankind. He was not part man and part God; but He was very God and perfect man. In Him was fulfilled at last the high expectation of God for man when He said,

"Let us make man in our own image and our own likeness."

Seven hundred years before He was born, Isaiah prophesied saying, "And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind; a covert from the tempest; rivers of water in a dry place; a shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

In Him we do not see the end of divine likeness and sonship; but in Him there is the beginning of a new generation; the head of a new creation. With such words as "We're members of his body, of his flesh and his bone." In Him,

Human sin becomes the righteousness of God.

Human weakness is replaced by the strength of God.

Human imperfections are replaced by the perfection of God.

Human degradation is replaced by the glory of God.

He did not only bring the divine down to earth to dwell in the temple of decadent clay; but He lifted a distorted and disfigured race out of their misery and out of their blindness until they can bear the image of the heavenly and the likeness of God, their Father.

In that immortal prayer He said, "Father, they are one even as we are one." This is done through the sanctification of the hearts of men by the truth.

"For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren."

Thank God, we're on our way back to the eternal union with God in whose presence we can one day stand as heirs of God and joint heirs of Jesus Christ.

Man still longs to be like God. David strums his

harp and raises his voice to God: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

The ultimate attainment of this longed-for perfection is seen but dimly by mortal man; but John, in a moment of inspiration caught a glimpse of the fulfillment of God's promise to those who meet the requirements. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."