

LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #74

"The Ascension: Its Significance for Jesus" (Scriptures from NKJV)

Philippians 2:5-11:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

INTRODUCTION: In the last lesson, we looked at the objections which those have to the ascension of Jesus as held by those who deny the existence of the supernatural. These are known as "naturalists." They hold that all truth must be confined to the natural realm which is capable of being proven and explained by scientific observation.

In the previous lessons, we have defined the ascension of Christ as being the transferal of the resurrection body of Jesus from this seen world into the world of the unseen known as heaven. The event of Christ's ascension carries rich theological significance. It was confirmed and verified by eyewitnesses. Its meaning is conveyed to us in propositional revelation given by Jesus and the Apostles as preserved in the reliable accounts in the inspired Scriptures. These tenets or teachings are multiple in number.

We looked at the ascension of Christ as it (1) relates to the laws of nature; (2) Its location within the spiritual world of the unseen; (3) Its relation to historical verification.

We now move to consider the significance of the ascension as it relates to the being of Jesus Christ. We will divide the material under four headings. The first is:

A. CHRIST'S ASCENSION MARKED OUT THE END OF HIS INCARNATE APPEARANCES AND TEACHING MINISTRY ON EARTH.

Hebrews 1:3 - *"Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."*

This dramatic event was necessary so that the disciples would not be kept in suspense, anticipating more appearances and revelations. It would keep them from wondering what finally became of their Lord. While Paul and Stephen either heard or saw

Him, He did not leave His throne to reveal Himself to them. Furthermore it ended His prophetic ministry on earth for this age. He would not appear visibly to people on earth until His second coming in power and glory. Thus, alleged visions of Christ during this present age must be rejected as fraudulent and deceptive. Some alleged appearances of Christ are the fabrications of religious con-artists, and others are produced by evil or demonic spirits.

Until His second coming, Jesus sits at the Father's right hand. In Hebrews 1:3, we are informed that **"when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."** This seated position or "session" as referred to by theologians, indicates the completeness of His incarnate work on earth and the assumption of His authority as King. This clearly means that He has chosen not to appear visibly on earth until His second coming.

The Holy Spirit now draws attention to this exalted Christ and to the truth of what He has taught, but the Holy Spirit does not add new content to the divine revelations given through accredited prophetic and apostolic spokes-people in the Scriptures. Christ has said all He wants to say, and the heavens remain silent until He returns in power and glory. "This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him!"

B. CHRIST'S ASCENSION REVERSED HIS "KENOSIS" OR ACT OF "SELF-EMPTYING," AND HE IS NOW PROMOTED TO A STATE OF "HYPER OR SUPER" EXALTATION OR GLORY (Philippians 2:5-11).

The expression describing Christ's incarnation in the NKJV is **"made Himself of no reputation."** This is a translation of one Greek word which means "to empty", and is more clearly translated as He "emptied Himself." From this Greek word comes the theological word, *"kenosis"*, which is the doctrine of Christ's self-emptying in His incarnation. This does not mean that He emptied Himself of deity, or the attributes of deity. It does not mean He exchanged His deity for humanity. But He did empty Himself of the prerogatives that belonged to Him as deity. In other words, He emptied Himself of the expression of His deity, not the possession of His deity.

He set aside His privileges in several areas:

1. His heavenly glory. John 17:5 - **"And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."**
2. His independent authority - In His incarnation Christ completely submitted

Himself to the will of His Father.

Matthew 26:39 - ***"He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."***

Hebrews 5:8 - ***"Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."***

3. His divine privileges - He set aside the voluntary display of His divine attributes and submitted Himself to the Spirit's guidance and enablement.

Matthew 24:36 - ***"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."***

I am of the understanding that all of Jesus' miracles were performed, not as the eternal Son of God, but as the Spirit-anointed Son of Man. As a man He healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, opened the ears of the deaf, walked on the water and raised the dead.

4. His eternal riches - II Corinthians 8:9 - ***"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."*** While on earth Christ owned very little.

5. His favorable fellowship with the Father - Matthew 27:46 - ***"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*** While on the cross He felt His Father's wrath on human sin, and suffered what the wicked are suffering in hell right now and will forever and ever.

As a reward for His life of obedience ending in His suffering on the cross, God has exalted Him to the highest position of honor and glory that exists anywhere in the cosmos or the world of creation. This exaltation does not concern Christ's nature or eternal place within the ontological Trinity, but His new identity as the God-man (*Theanthropos*). In Christ's ascension back to the Father, He took with Him something He did not previously possess. That was a perfected specimen of humanity. Just as He did not lay aside His deity when He came from heaven, neither did He lay aside His humanity when He left earth and returned to heaven. He was always the Son of God, but He was not the Son of Man until His incarnation.

Christ's new status as the God-man meant God gave Him privileges which He did not have prior to His incarnation. If He had not lived among men, He could not have identified with men as an interceding High Priest. Had He not died on the cross, He could not have been the Savior of sinners. He must first humble Himself before He is given this place of high exaltation. The words, "highly exalted," mean "exceedingly high, over, or above." It corresponds to our English words "super" or "hyper". God has hyper-exalted Him!

Jesus Christ now possesses a threefold glory:

First, His glory as the Son of God before His incarnation. John 17:5, ***"And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."***

Second, His glory as God manifest in the flesh. John 1:14, ***"And the Word became 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."***

Third, His glory as the exalted Son of Man after His resurrection and ascension.

Luke 24:26, ***"Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"***

I Peter 1:21, ***"Who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."***

Philippians 2:10 - ***"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth."*** This verses states that this person, Jesus Christ, has been given a name, namely that of "the Lord." Because there is a definite article before name, Bible scholars believe the reference must be to a specific "name for God." The term, "Lord" is the word used by the Septuagint translators when they translated the Old Testament into Greek. They consistently used this title for the Old Testament name, Yahweh or Jehovah. This was the name that was so holy that the Jews hesitated to write or speak it. So Jesus has been freely given all the attributes of deity ascribed to the Father in the Old Testament by the Hebrew name Jehovah. And the day is coming when all of the created order will acknowledge that the Man Jesus is sharing the throne of God and that this Man is none other than the Almighty God! Holy angels in heaven will confess this truth. Unholy angels in hell will confess this truth. Holy saints in heaven will confess this truth. Unholy sinners in hell will confess this truth. Jesus is God!

While I do not endorse the ideal of a new name being written down in heaven when a sinner is saved, I do proclaim that Jesus Christ was crowned with a new name when He ascended to the right hand of God. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!

C. CHRIST'S ASCENSION INAUGURATED HIS HEAVENLY MINISTRY AS KING AND LORD OF THE COSMOS.

While on earth, Jesus' authority over evil spirits had previously indicated that the Lord was here, and that His kingdom was at hand, and that in the King the kingdom was to come. The fact that God exalted Jesus to His right hand, along with His resurrection, further confirmed that He is both Lord and Christ.

Acts 2:33-36 - ***"Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.'"***

The One who was incarnated in the virgin's womb, born in Bethlehem's manger, lived and ministered in Palestine, died on a cross, rose from the grave and ascended to the throne, is indeed all He claimed to be.

The Lord, who resides at the Father's right hand, presently reigns with power and authority over every created being in heaven and earth. The One who has conquered sin, Satan and death on earth, now rules in heaven. It is from this invisible, supernatural state and place that He rules over all things in heaven and on earth. Angels and men are now under His control. His throne is now the control center of the universe. He is the maker and the shaker of all things in the creative order. Not a single atom is beyond His control. Not a cancer cell is beyond His authority. Not an angel, including Satan himself can act without His permission and approval. Not a king on earth can rise to power or be overthrown without His oversight.

When He became incarnated, He came to establish a kingdom in which a man would rule over all, and He got the job done! Just look where He is at now! No, His kingdom was not postponed because a little handful of Jewish leaders rejected Him, as the older form of dispensationalism affirms. No, He is in His kingdom now. He is not coming back to earth to inaugurate His kingdom, He is coming back to consummate His kingdom. He must reign until all of His enemies are put under His feet, and the last of these enemies is death.

Death is destroyed in the resurrection, and the resurrection of the dead occurs at His second coming! No more enemies to deal with after death is destroyed. No more tears, no more pain, no more death when Jesus comes back to this earth in His glorified body. Why? Because He will bring with Him a new heaven and earth wherein dwells righteousness! Worthy is the Lamb!

D. CHRIST'S ASCENSION CLARIFIED FOR HIS DISCIPLES THE MEANING OF HIS PRESENT RULE ON EARTH.

It was at His ascension, the disciples asked the question, "**Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?**" (Acts 1:6). The disciples were still hoping for a political, economic messianic kingdom to be established which would liberate them from foreign domination and bring about a universal peace. Israel would be restored to the place of prominence which it had possessed under David and Solomon.

Their interpretation of the Old Testament promises of liberation from their enemies overlooked the teachings on the necessary preparation of repentance and forgiveness. The Jewish problem was that they did not know who their enemies were. It was their sins, and they needed a Messiah who could deliver them from their sins.

In Luke chapter 1, verses 67-79, Luke records how Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, correctly understood these promises of liberation. Look at verses 71 through 73 and verse 77 - "**That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham . . . To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins.**"

Jesus would say in John 18:36, "**My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight.**"

It was not until the disciples saw Jesus ascend into heaven, that the disciples understood once and for all their mistaken idea concerning the nature of Israel's Messiah and His kingdom. They never raised the question again. A few days later Peter was enabled to clearly explain that Christ's ascension to the right hand of God was the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. The Gospel was to be preached throughout the world beginning in Jerusalem. This was to be Christ's message until He returns at the end of the age.

Thus the authority of Christ does not center in the earthly Jerusalem, but in Jerusalem above, the City of God - the heavenly Zion. So Christ's kingdom is not located in

Jerusalem, Rome, Mecca, Salt Lake City, or Washington D.C. The United States of America is not "Christ's city set on a hill!" He who came from above rules morally and spiritually in the thinking, feeling, and the willing of all those who receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Though they exist all over the present earth and in the heaven above, they make up the great assembly who are bowed and worship at the feet of the One who saves by sovereign grace.