

LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #75

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

Ephesians 1:18-23; 3:16-21:

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

. . .

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: In the previous lesson, we examined the significance of Christ's ascension as it related to Himself. In doing so, we covered four significant elements which occurred upon His ascension. They were:

First: His ascension marked out the end of His incarnate personal appearances and teaching ministry on earth.

Second: His ascension reversed His act of humiliation and promoted Him to a state of "hyper or super" exaltation or glory.

Third: His ascension inaugurated His heavenly ministry as King and Lord of the Cosmos.

Fourth: His ascension clarified for His disciples the meaning of His present kingdom rule on earth.

Out of the many tenets or teachings associated with the ascension, let us never overlook its main focus, that being that Christ took His perfect manhood with Him back into the state of glory from which He came. The spiritual significance of Christ's ascension for the believer's life lies, not in Christ's physical remoteness, but in His spiritual nearness. His present life in

heaven is the promise and guarantee of ours. ***"Because I live, you shall live also."*** (John 14:19). As it relates to the believer, let us first consider:

A. CHRIST'S ASCENSION MARKED OUT HIS ACCOMPLISHMENT OF REDEMPTION.

Hebrews 8:1 - *"Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens."*

Hebrews 10:10-14 - *"By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."*

In order for sinful men to obtain a righteousness upon which they can enter into heaven and life eternal, two essential features are necessary. One: They must have their sin debt removed. Two: There must be the presence of perfect righteousness. The resurrection demonstrated the sufficiency of the atonement for the first, and the ascension demonstrated the sufficiency of righteousness for the second.

Christ died once for sin while here on earth. This is the negative dimension of redemption. Christ forever lives and reigns on His throne at the right hand of God thus providing a righteous presence for those who are called into faith in Him. This is the positive dimension of redemption. Every reference in the book of Hebrews to our Lord's atonement is in the past, implying completeness and perfection "once for all."

B. CHRIST'S ASCENSION ESTABLISHES HIM AS THE BELIEVER'S HIGH PRIEST.

Hebrews 4:14 - 5:1-10 - *"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things

pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.' As He also says in another place: 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.' who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest 'according to the order of Melchizedek.'"

The essential features of the Biblical priesthood is to represent man to God, which involves giving man access into God's presence - Hebrews 5:1 - ***"For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins."*** In Hebrews, Aaron is used as a type of the priest's work, and Melchizedek is a type of the person of the priest. Christ is both a priest and a priestly victim. He offered Himself as a sacrifice and entered into heaven to represent His people before the throne of God's presence. He first offered "propitiation" and then entered into heaven, not "with," but "through" His blood. Hebrews 9:12 - ***"Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."*** And being the believer's High Priest, He is at one both man and God, thereby being fully qualified to represent the interest of both parties.

The ascension of Christ means that we have a High Priest who, as a human being, can sympathize with humanity and can intercede on humanity's behalf. In I John 2:1 we are told that, ***"if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."*** Jesus experienced everything which humans experience - birth, growth, temptation, suffering, rejection, and death. Therefore, He can serve as a mediator before God in heaven.

In Hebrews 2:17 we are told that ***"in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."***

In Hebrews 2:18, We see that Christ is able to assist or help those who are tempted. ***"For***

in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."

In Hebrews 4:15 we are told that Christ is able to sympathize with our infirmities, ***"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."*** Christ's ascension assures Christian believers that God understands the human situation and that Christians can therefore approach Him boldly in their prayers. Hebrews 4:16, ***"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."***

He is not only able to help and sympathize, but He is also able to save. In Hebrews 7:25 we read, ***"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."***

C. CHRIST'S ASCENSION IS REGARDED AS THE CROWNING POINT OF OUR LORD'S WORK IN HEAVEN.

Romans 8:34-39 - "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Notice that Christ's work as an intercessor in heaven is as essential as His work on the cross here on earth. This is a most neglected concept in the modern preaching of the gospel. Christ is only able to save to the uttermost because of His endless life and His unchangeable intercessory priesthood. Our Lord's intercession consists in not so much in what He says as in who and what He is. His very presence at God's right hand in itself pleads on behalf of His people.

This heavenly work is not an ongoing re-enactment of the sacrificial shedding of His blood as taught by the Roman Catholic system. There is not any hint in the New Testament of a relation between the Eucharist (Lord's Supper) and His life and work in heaven. He is not

continually "offering up His blood" on behalf of man. He did this once and for all while He was on earth. His ongoing work is the pleading of His righteous presence before God on behalf of His people. As long as our Savior-Priest is at God's right hand, we have an assurance of our acceptance with God.

D. CHRIST'S ASCENSION TO HIS THRONE IN HEAVEN, PROVIDED FOR THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO DO HIS WORK ON EARTH.

John 16:7-11 - *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."*

John 14:12-18 - *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you."*

The Holy Spirit was given to Christ as the acknowledgment and reward of His completed work on earth. And having received the "Promise of the Father" (Acts 2:33), Christ now sends forth the Holy Spirit to do His work on earth. This consists of convincing sinners (John 16:7) and edifying believers (John 14:12). Since the Spirit is omnipresent, His work can be done throughout the earth, while Christ's physical body is in one location in heaven. This enables us to understand how our Lord can say to His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20, ***"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; (now watch His words) and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen."*** By sending the Spirit, the localized Christ can achieve the globalization of His redemptive program.

E. CHRIST'S ASCENDED LIFE IN HEAVEN LOOKS FORWARD TO A CONSUMMATION.

Hebrews 10:12-14 - *"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."*

As a result of His completed work on earth and His ongoing work in heaven, Jesus is expecting a victorious outcome in His redemptive program. His assurance of victory gives believers assurance that they will share in His life now and in the hereafter. While on earth, Jesus prayed for all of His disciples when He said, ***"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."*** (John 17:24). I believe that Jesus will get His prayers answered. In Hebrews 6:19, 20 we read, ***"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."*** The word, "forerunner" refers to a scout who is sent ahead in advance of the army to make observation, after which the army will follow. Jesus is our scout. He entered first into the holy presence of God and is now able to show others the way. He said in John 14:6, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*** Jesus said in John 10:15,16, ***"I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd."***

Upon the conclusion of His ingathering of all His sheep, His intercessory work will be complete and He will return from heaven in the same body in which His disciples saw Him leave this earth (Acts 1:11). In Philippians 3:20, 21 we read, ***"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."***

At this coming there will be a resurrection of the bodies of the saints who have died and a transformation of living ones (I Thessalonians 4:16, 17). At this coming there will be a Divine judgment of all men with Christ as the Judge. II Timothy 4:1 says, ***"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom. Preach the word."*** His coming again will bring victory and glorious joy to His people (Romans 8:19). It will also bring about defeat

and torment for His enemies (II Thessalonians 1:7-10).

When Christ returns, every eye shall see Him, even those who pierced Him (Revelation 1:7). His presence will again be visibly manifested in His incarnated body, but He will not be the "meek and lowly Jesus" of men's imagination. He will come as the resurrected, ascended, and glorified Lord with eyes like blazing fire (Revelation 1:14) and yielding a sharp two-edged sword (Revelation 1:16). Men will cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall upon them to hide them from the face of the wrath of the Lamb! (Revelation 6:15-17).

At His coming, His spiritual kingdom will break out into the open, and in visible form the glorified Messiah will rule the entire earth and cosmos, culminating in an eternal new heaven and earth wherein dwells righteousness. (II Peter 3:13).

In view of the significance of our Lord's present life in heaven, His appearing on our behalf, His interceding by His presence, His bestowing the Holy Spirit, His governing the life of His church, His sympathizing, helping, and saving His people, we are called upon to "lift up our hearts upward" to heaven. It is only as we become occupied and focused upon the living Christ that we find the secret of peace and assurance of a present and future hope. Whatever enemies our souls and bodies must face before we enter glory, our risen and ascended Lord will enable us to conquer them all. Because He lives, we can face tomorrow. **"We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."** (Romans 8:37). It is this understanding, or lack of it, that makes the difference between an immature or mature Christian. One can only experience a strong, vigorous, growing, joyous Christian life as his or her heart is lifted up into the heavenlies with Christ. **"To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."** (Revelation 1:6)