

THE ASCENDED LORD

By Rolfe Barnard

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There is a nominal Christianity which is accepted and approved of men, but the pure gospel is still despised and rejected. The real Christ of today, among men, is unknown and unrecognized as much as He was among His own nation nineteen hundred years ago. Christ in doctrine, Christ in Spirit, Christ in life—the world cannot endure as King. It is all right for men to chant about Him in cathedrals, or sing about Him in synagogues, or preach about Him in pulpits; but Christ honestly obeyed, followed and worshipped in simplicity, without pomp or form, Christ exalted as prophet, priest, and King (not later, but now), they will not allow to reign over them. It is as spiritual Lord that Christ claims sovereignty among men.

Somewhere in my reading I came across the expression, “The richness of the ascension.” I was struck by the expression because so little is said or written these days about the tremendous act of both the Father and the Son by which the gospel of God concerning His Son is brought to its climax. A gospel that does not speak of an ascended Lord is not the Gospel of God. If the gospel is Christ and Christ is the gospel, and surely this is true; we must proclaim a Christ risen, exalted and reigning. He must be preached **where He is now** and identified as the pre-existent, virgin born, sinlessly living, vicariously dying, Son of the Living God. Always the apostles preached the Living Christ **and worked backward**, a decided reverse from the gospel of today. This is God’s good news. How can Christ be preached if He is not preached **where He is now**. If Christ be risen and exalted, the rest is easy to accept! If not, the virgin birth and everything else cannot be accepted. The whole pattern of the gospel story sinks or swims on the truth or falsity of the resurrection and exaltation.

In the classic passage, Phil. 2:9-11, Paul says, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that ... every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” The word *hupsōo*, which is translated '*exalted*' is never used of the Resurrection. It is the word for, *ascension* or *exaltation*. Thus it was by His ascension that Jesus was marked out to be Lord, as by His resurrection He was marked out to be the Son of God in power (Rom. 1:4). By the resurrection Jesus Christ is seen to be Victor over death and corruption. By the ascension He is seen to be Lord, with all

power in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). As sin was shown to be subject to Him by His sinless life, as death was shown to be subject to Him by His resurrection, so all things in heaven and earth are shown to be subject to Him by **His ascension**. It was not that the ascension effects His lordship any more than the resurrection effects His victory over death. Rather, the ascension is the **designation and the demonstration of His Lordship**. It is the designation in that it is the reward of the Father for His perfect obedience. In His humanity He was subject to His Father. It is demonstration since He ascended of His own will, His own power and in His own right. It is true to say that God raised Him and that He raised Himself. God took Him up and He ascended of His own power.

Peter points out the tremendous significance of the ascension as he comes to the climax of his sermon on the day of Pentecost. He quotes first from Psa. 110, and then says, "Therefore (in view of the ascension), let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made the same Jesus, Whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Messiah." **The climax of gospel preaching must be here**. This is God's answer and act. Men killed Jesus, God exalted Him. Let us preach this Jesus. Peter writes, "Jesus Christ is gone into heaven and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him" (I Peter 3:22). This is true. It is true now, not in the some distant future. Where is the crucified Christ now? He is at the right hand of God. All things are under Him now. Brethren, the hour is late. It is long since time that this generation hear *the gospel*, not just a part of the chain but all of it. The whole Christ is the gospel, nothing less, nothing more.

The apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:8 quotes from Psa. 18 and portrays a wonderful picture in this connection, "He led captivity captive." The ascension is the triumphal return to heaven of the Son of God. He has conquered and He returns with the captives of war. Sin and death, those enemies of man and God, those tyrants which had enslaved men, are themselves now subjected and held captive to Him who openly triumphed over them. The power of sin is broken; it shall not lord it over the believer. Death is swallowed up in victory, its reign ended. Christ the Conqueror rules and He shall rule "till He hath put all enemies under His feet" (I Cor. 15:25). For the apostles, here is greatly needed help and hope. They see now that the resurrection proclaimed a King after all.

The suffering Servant is enthroned, this same Jesus. His kingdom indeed is not of this world. He will (and does) reign, but not simply from an earthly throne. His kingdom is and shall be glorious, but it shall not be the glory of this world. He is and shall be victorious, but His victories shall not be achieved through the blood

and steel of men. The cross was the decisive and atoning conflict. The resurrection was the conqueror's return with the captives of war which issued in the enthronement of the victorious King. **Away with the preaching of a pitiful, helpless Jesus.** He is not an exile hopefully watching to see what happens. He is the enthroned Lord into Whose nail-pierced hands the control of all things and all men has been given. It needs to be shouted from the housetops now as perhaps never before that everything depends on a man's union with a living, present Saviour. In the absence of that union, even the gospel of the cross loses its saving efficacy. "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (I Cor. 15:17). Atonement remains impersonal and largely irrelevant until we make contact with the One Who atones; and contact of a vital kind is possible only if Jesus is risen, alive and on the throne now. James Denney in his book *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, says that "nothing could be more curiously unlike the New Testament than to use the resurrection to belittle or disparage the death." But we do not disparage the death of our Lord, we simply insist that unless Christ is now enthroned, the death is powerless to save. We insist that without a living, present, reigning Christ, with Whom through faith the believer can come into union, all the benefits of His death would have had to stand unappropriated forever. It was on the resurrection and ascension fact that the church was built.

This was the gospel of the apostles. It was the experience of union with the risen, exalted, living Lord that made them conquerors. Let their gospel once more be preached.

By the late Evangelist Rolfe Barnard