

THE ASCENSION OF MESSIAH TO GLORY

a sermon

by

JOHN NEWTON
(1725-1807)

“Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah.” –Psalm 24:7-10

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PSALM 24:7-10. *“Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah.”*

The institutions of the Levitical law were a shadow or sketch of good things to come. They exhibited a faint and general outline of the mediation and glory of MESSIAH. They may be compared to the delicate engravings on a seal, the beauty and proportions of which cannot be plainly discerned without the assistance of a glass. The gospel answers to such a glass. Beheld through this medium, the miniature delineations of the law, which to the eye of unassisted, unhumiliated reason appear confused and insignificant, display a precision of arrangement in the parts, and an importance of design in the whole, worthy the wisdom of their great Author.

From the similarity of the subject of this Psalm and the sixty-eighth, it is at least probable that they were both composed upon the same occasion, the removal of the ark of the Lord, from its last stationary residence, to its fixed abode in Zion; when the king, the priests, the singers, and the harpers, all assisted in the procession, attended by a great concourse of the people. The language of the latter part of the Psalm is evidently alternate. And we may conceive, that when the ark approached the tabernacle, the priests and Levites who accompanied it demanded admittance for it in these words, *Lift up your heads, O ye gates, &c.* and were answered by those who were waiting within to receive it, *Who is the King of glory?* To which question the proper reply is made, *The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of glory.*

This, if taken according to the letter of the history, was a grand and solemn transaction. But it was at the same time a type of an event unspeakably more glorious. They know that the Scriptures of the Old Testament testify of Christ, that it is He of whom Moses in the Law, David in the Psalms, and all the succeeding prophets, did write, will, I think, agree in considering this passage as referring to

His ascension, in the nature in which He suffered, into the true holy place in the heavens, as the Representative and High Priest of His people; when, after having by His own self purged our sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Then having spoiled principalities and powers, He triumphed over them openly, though not in the view of His apostles, and while in this attitude He was parted from them.¹ He ascended gently and gradually, and they, admiring and adoring, beheld Him with fixed attention, till a cloud concealed Him from their sight.² The pomp and triumph of His ascension were displayed in the invisible world. But this description, accommodated to our apprehensions, is given to assist the faith of His people; that their hearts may be comforted, their meditations enlarged, and that in the exercise of grateful love, they may follow Him in their thoughts, ascend with Him into the heavenly places, and rejoice in His glory.

We conceive of Him, therefore, from this sublime passage, as ascending to His Father and our Father, to His God and our God; accompanied with a train of worshipping angels, who demand admittance for MESSIAH, the Savior and friend of sinners, as the King of glory. The question is asked, Who is He that claims this honor? An answer is given, asserting His character, His victories, and the justice of His claims— *The Lord of hosts, the Lord strong in battle, He is the King of glory.*

The principle points which offer to our consideration, are,

I. His title, *The Lord of hosts.*

II. His victories, implied in the expression, *The Lord strong and mighty in battle.*

III. His mediatorial title, *the King of glory.*

IV. His authoritative entrance into the holy place.

I. MESSIAH, who humbled Himself to the death of the cross, is *the Lord of hosts.* He is so, if the scripture be true: I attempt no other proof. This is a point not referred to the discussion of our fallen reason, but proposed by the authority of God in His Word, as the foundation of our faith and hope. He is the Husband of the church, and the husband of the church is the Lord of hosts.³ It was the Lord of hosts whom Isaiah saw, seated upon a throne, His train

¹ Luke 24:51

² Acts 1:9

³ Isaiah 54:5

filling the temple.⁴ The vision filled him with astonishment, and he cried out, *Woe is me, I am undone; for mine eyes have seen the Lord of hosts.* But the Apostle John assures us, that when Isaiah said these things, he saw *His* glory and spake of *Him*.⁵ This is the title of God in the Old Testament; or, as some choose to speak, of the Supreme Being. And it is ascribed to MESSIAH in many places. Therefore, if He were not the Lord of hosts, the Scripture would be chargeable with authorizing, yea with enjoining idolatry. But he is *the true God, and eternal life*,⁶ and they who give Him the honor due to His name, have every thing to hope, and nothing to fear.

II. *He is the Lord, strong and mighty in battle.* It was in His human nature He engaged in battle with His enemies and ours. But the battle was the Lord's. Therefore, though He *trod the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Him*,⁷ His own arm brought Him salvation. He is conqueror of sin, Satan, and death. We were under the power of these; therefore, for our sakes He engaged in conflict with their united force. He fought, He bled, He died; but dying, He conquered. The strength of sin is the law; this strength He subdued, by obeying the precepts of the law, and sustaining the penalty due to our transgressions. He destroyed death, and disarmed it of its sting. He destroyed him that hath the power of death, Satan. He shook, He overturned the foundations of his kingdom, broke open his prison-doors, released his prisoners, delivered the prey out of the hand of the mighty, *and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it*,⁸ that is, His cross. The Apostle alludes to the manner of a Roman triumph, in which the conqueror was drawn in a chariot of state, attended by his officers and soldiers; the principal prisoners followed in chains, and all the treasures and trophies gained from the vanquished enemy were displayed to adorn the procession. Thus MESSIAH subdued the strength and policy of the powers of darkness, in the hour of His lowest humiliation, when He hung and expired upon the Cross, and triumphed over them, gloriously leading captivity captive, when He ascended on high.⁹ Satan, though still an

⁴ Isaiah 6:3

⁵ John 12:41

⁶ 1 John 5:20

⁷ Isaiah 63:3

⁸ Colossians 2:15

⁹ Psalm 68:18

enemy to His church and cause, is despoiled of his dominion; his power is only permissive, and in his fiercest assaults he is limited by bounds which he cannot pass, by a chain which he cannot break. And all his attempts are controlled and over-ruled, to the furtherance of the cause which he would suppress, and to the good of the persons whom he would worry and destroy. They are made acquainted with his devices, furnished with armor sufficient to repel him; and they fight under encouragement of a sure promise, that the God of peace will shortly and finally bruise Satan under their feet. As MESSIAH their King has conquered for them, so they, in due time, shall be made more than conquerors, by faith in His blood, and in the Word of His testimony.

III. The title of *King of glory*, I understand as peculiarly applicable to Him in the character of Mediator. The glory of His divine nature is essential to Him. But in consequence of His obedience unto death, He obtained, in the human nature, *a name that is above every name*.¹⁰ He suffered as a man, yea, as a malefactor; there was no appearance of glory in that form of a servant which He assumed for our sakes. Though without sin, He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, subject to poverty, disgrace, and death; but the same man who was crucified, dead, and buried, received glory and authority at His resurrection, and was highly exalted to the administration of all dominion and government. Perhaps the word *glory* is not easily defined. We conceive it as expressing brightness and splendor. The glory of Solomon was the combined effect of his wisdom, power, and riches; which distinguished him in his character, conduct, and appearance, from other men. The glory of the sun, is his effulgence¹¹ and influence. The word *glory*, when applied to the blessed God, seems to denote the manifestation of Himself, by which His intelligent creatures are capable of knowing Him; for in Himself He is infinite, inaccessible, and incomprehensible, and dwelleth in that light which no man, which no creature, can approach unto.¹² Of this manifestation there are various degrees. His glory shines in the creation. Not only do the

¹⁰ Philippians 2:9

¹¹ EFFULGENCE. Seldom used today in American English. Webster's 1828 Dictionary definition: "A flood of light; great luster or brightness; splendor; as the effulgence of divine glory. It is a word of superlative signification, and applied, with peculiar propriety, to the sun and to the Supreme Being."

¹² 1 Timothy 6:16

heavens declare it by their immensity,¹³ and furnish us with an idea of His unspeakable greatness, who has sent forth ten thousand worlds, to tell us that He resides above them all; but the smallest of His works, the grass and flowers of the field, and the insects which creep upon the ground,¹⁴ bear an impression of His wisdom and goodness, an inimitable criterion of His wonderworking hand, which so far displays His glory. To an attentive and discerning mind, His glory shines in His providence; in His preserving the world which He has made; in supplying the various wants of His creatures, and particularly in His moral government of mankind. Here, besides His wisdom, power, and general goodness, we discover some traces of His character as the righteous Judge of the earth. But to our limited capacities and views this glory is obscured by many difficulties. Though *righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne, yet clouds and darkness are round about Him.*¹⁵ By His holy Word, His revealed will, we are favored with a still brighter display of His glory, in the perfections of holiness, justice, truth, and mercy, which fallen man is unable clearly to discover in His works of creation and providence. But chiefly His Son is the *brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person.*¹⁶ No one hath seen God at any time, but the only begotten *Son, who is in the bosom of the Father,*¹⁷ intimately acquainted with His counsels, *He hath declared Him.* This was the great design of His advent to make God known to man: for as it is life eternal to know the only true God; so He is only to be known in and by Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent,¹⁸ and who is the way and the door, and there is no entrance to the knowledge of God but by Him. In the person and work of the MESSIAH, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, the brightness and harmony of all His attributes, is transcendently revealed. In this sense, He is the Lord, the King of glory. When we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit, to conceive of Him according to the testimony given of Him in the Scripture, we see the glory of God. Other discoveries of it are but scattered rays and emanations of light; but in Jesus the glory of God resides in its source and fullness, as light in the sun. He is

¹³ Psalm 19:1

¹⁴ Psalm 104:24, 25

¹⁵ Psalm 97:2

¹⁶ Hebrews 1:3

¹⁷ John 1:18

¹⁸ John 17:3

therefore the King of glory.

IV. As the acknowledged King of glory, in the nature of man, He ascended; the everlasting gates unfolded wide, and He entered into the holy place, not made with hands, there to appear in the presence of God for His people.

1. As their Representative. The glory is properly His own, the benefit redounds¹⁹ to His people. Sin had excluded them from the kingdom; but He claimed and took possession in their name.²⁰ Hence He is styled their forerunner, because by virtue of their relation to Him, and their interest in Him, they shall surely follow Him. This is the encouragement of believers. He is the head of His body the church: and though the church, while in this world, is in a suffering perilous state; yet as the body of a man is not in danger of drowning while His head is out of the water, so our forerunner and head being in heaven on their behalf, He will assuredly draw all His living members to Himself. He has said, *Because I live, ye shall live also.*²¹ And He has stipulated for them that they shall, each in His appointed time, be with Him where He is, to behold His glory.²²

2. As their High-priest and Intercessor. He presents their persons and their prayers acceptable to God. He bears the iniquity of their holy things. With this encouragement, weak and unworthy as they are in themselves, and though their best services are polluted, they find a liberty of access; and because He ever liveth, thus to make intercession for all who come unto God by Him,²³ they know that He is able to save them to the uttermost.

3. Though the heavens must receive and contain the holy human nature till the restitution of all things, He is not unmindful of them in their present circumstances. He is seated upon the throne of universal dominion, and He exercises His authority and rule with an especial view to their welfare. While He pleads for them on high, by the power of His Spirit He is present with them below. He comforts their hearts, enlivens their assemblies, and manages their concerns.

¹⁹ REDOUND. Again, a word seldom used today in American English. Webster's 1828 Dictionary definition: "1. To be sent, rolled or driven back. 2. To conduce in the consequence; to contribute; to result. 3. To proceed in the consequence or effect; to result."

²⁰ Hebrews 6:20

²¹ John 14:19

²² John 17:24

²³ Hebrews 7:25

He is their Shepherd, who gives them food, controls their enemies, revives their fainting spirits, and restores their wanderings.²⁴ His ear is open to their prayers, His eye is upon them in every situation, and His arm stretched forth for their relief. Therefore, though persecuted, they are not forsaken; though cast down, they are not destroyed. And He has promised that He will not leave them until He has done all that for them which His Word has taught them to hope for; until He has made them victorious over all their enemies, and put the conquerors song in their mouths, and a crown of life upon their heads.

This High and Holy One, this King of glory, who is seated on the throne of heaven, dwelleth also in the humble and lowly spirit. He thus solemnly claims the throne of the heart of each of His people, which in a state of nature is usurped by self and Satan; and He is thus willingly acknowledged and admitted in the day of His power. *Behold! He stands at the door, and knocks;*²⁵ and because He is as yet unknown, He is for a while rejected. The bolts and bars of prejudice and unbelief withstand His entrance. But when He comes on a purpose of grace, He will take no denial. For a season He waits to be gracious. But He has an appointed hour, when He reveals His great name, and makes the soul sensible who He is! Then the gates of brass and the bars of iron are broken before Him. His greatness and His goodness, what He is in Himself, and what He has done and suffered for sinners, are motives which cannot be resisted when they are truly understood. Satan, who, as the strong one armed, long labored to hinder Him from His rightful possession, is himself dispossessed. The soul laments its former obstinacy, throws down its arms, throws wide open its doors, and bids the King of glory welcome. Then old things pass away, and all things become new. Such was the change the poor man experienced, out of whom Jesus cast a legion of evil spirits. At first, if he could, he would have prevented His kind purpose: he was afraid of his Deliverer, and said, *I beseech Thee, torment me not.*²⁶ How wretched was his state then, miserable in himself, and a terror to others! But what a wonderful and happy alteration, when he sat quietly at his Savior's feet, clothed and in his right mind!

²⁴ Psalm 23

²⁵ Revelation 3:20

²⁶ Mark 5:7

I close the subject with the Apostle's inference, *Seeing then that we have so great a High Priest, who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.*²⁷ Let not those who know Him be ashamed of their attachment to Him. You will not repent in a dying hour, that you once thought too highly of Him, or expected too much from Him, or devoted yourself with too much earnestness to His service. Nor yield to unbelief and fear. Though your enemies are many and mighty, and your trials great, greater is He that is in you. If the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the Lord strong and mighty in battle, be for you, who can be against you, so as effectually to harm you? Continue instant in prayer, persevere in well-doings. Our ascended Lord will one day return; and then they who have loved and served, and trusted Him here, *shall appear with Him in glory.*²⁸

Others, if they can, must prepare to meet Him. But alas! How shall they stand before Him? Or whither shall they flee from Him whose presence filleth the heavens and the earth?²⁹ Have they an arm like God? Or can they thunder with a voice like His? As yet He is proclaimed by the gospel, a Savior, seated upon a throne of grace, stretching forth the golden scepter of His love, and inviting sinners to be reconciled. Now is the accepted time. Hereafter He will be seen upon a throne of judgment, to take vengeance of His enemies.

²⁷ Hebrews 4:14

²⁸ Colossians 3:4

²⁹ Jeremiah 23:24

