

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>Special Messages</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>			Gary L.W. Johnson
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## Christ's Exaltation

In dealing with the subject of Christ's heavenly session, we are, in the words of the late G.C. Berkouwer, "dealing with Christ's power, the power of his holy sacrifice by which our salvation is established in heavenly inviolability."<sup>1</sup> The Scripture uses a variety of expressions when describing Christ's session. Sometimes we read that Christ *sat down* at the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven (Hebrews 1:3; 8:1). We read that the Father said to Him *sit Thou* on My right hand (Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13) or that the Father *set Him* there (Ephesians 1:20). The emphasis elsewhere falls on the act of taking the seat or on the condition of being seated (Matthew 26:64; Colossians 3:1). The place where Christ is seated is likewise richly described. He is on the right hand of the power of God (Matthew 26:64; Luke 22:69) or the right hand of the Majesty on High (Hebrews 1:3) or the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2). We read that Christ *is there* at God's right hand (Romans 8:34). The purpose of all this is to underscore the truth that after His death and resurrection, Christ ascended to the highest place beside God the Father Almighty (Philippians 2:9, 10). I am gravely concerned with the direction that Evangelicalism seems to be headed. There is afoot in Evangelical circles a rush to identify God's *present* activity in the world. This is especially the case among charismatics. "This is what God is doing!" and "This is how God is leading!" I am convinced that the attempts to name such things as God's doings are nothing more or less than attempts to sanction our own interests or activities (sometimes it is done as a way of getting people to respond financially to support what is without question declared to be a God-inspired ministry). Even well-meaning Christians can fall prey to this sort of sinful proclivity. Without realizing it they are detracting from the work of Christ. They shift the focus from what Christ has actually *done* to what we *assume* the Holy Spirit is now doing. David Wells has rightly warned, "Anything that does not arise from Christ's saving death as interpreted by Scripture, that does not promote Christ's glory as understood by the apostles' teaching, that does not bear the stamp of his grace as seen in obedience to his Word, love of his gospel, commitment to his church, and service of others cannot rightly be characterized as the work of God."<sup>2</sup> We cannot detach the work of the Spirit from that of Christ. When that happens then Christ's atoning work is overshadowed by a preoccupation with the power of the Spirit in the world today. As a result many Christian erroneously believe that spiritual strength and growth are to be had independently of the atonement, which is the only true basis and content of Christ's mediation.<sup>3</sup> The heavenly session should continually remind us that Christ's work is at once efficacious and entirely complete. The Lamb who was slain on Calvary's cross is the One who now sits enthroned at the Father's right hand (Revelation 22:1, 3).

### I. THE EXALTATION TO THE THRONE

Christ is now crowned with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:9). Hebrews 1:13 cites Psalm 110 where God Himself declares that there is One who will co-reign with Him. These words were never spoken of angels but find their fulfillment in the crucified and ascended Lord Jesus Christ. He who was rejected by men has been exalted by God (Acts 5:30).

- A. Mission Accomplished. He is seated. This speaks of His finished work. The language of Hebrews 10:13 explains, “every priest stands daily... offering repeatedly... But... Christ... sat down at the right hand of God.”<sup>4</sup>
- B. Supreme Glory and Honor. Sitting at the right hand implies exaltation and blessedness. In Psalm 16:11 we are told that there is joy in God’s presence and eternal pleasure at God’s right hand (cf. Hebrews 12:2).
- C. Sovereign Rule. We are told in Exodus 15:6, “Your right hand, O LORD, was majestic in Power. Your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy.” Christ is invested with majestic sovereignty. God seated him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given (Ephesians 1:20, 21).

## II. THE EXECUTION OF HIS ROYAL OFFICES

It was John Calvin who first observed the three-fold offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King.

- A. High Priest. He is the One who purges sin (Hebrews 1:3). He does this by making sacrifice (Hebrews 10:12). John Murray writes: “The definition of the office of high priest that he is ‘ordained for men in things pertaining to God’ (Hebrews 5:1), is brought to bear upon the continued high priestly activity of the Redeemer. His continued activity has a Godward reference as truly as did his finished priestly offering. This adds new richness to our conception of the relation he sustains to his people and enhances our understanding of the significance for us, as individual believers and as members of the body which is the church, of the activity which Christ in heaven continues to exercise in reference to God on behalf of those whom he has purchased with his blood.”<sup>5</sup>
- B. Prophet. Christ sits on His throne as prophet. He has sent forth His Holy Spirit to instruct His people (Acts 2:33-34). “Christ remains active as prophet,” wrote Bavinck. “The preaching of the apostles, whether orally or in the writing of their letters, ties in with the instruction of Jesus, not with that which they received from Him before His death alone, but also with that which they received from Him during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. We must not overlook this last named fact. It is only that which explains why the apostles stood in the conviction from the very beginning that Christ had not only died, but had been raised and was seated on the right hand of God as Lord and Christ, Prince and Savior, and the sinner’s whole salvation was contained in the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>6</sup> (To be continued.)

**CONCLUSION:** I close with a quote from B.B. Warfield: “Had Christ only died for us, perhaps salvation might have consisted solely in relief from this penalty of sin which He bore for us. That He ascended out of death to the throne, conquers the throne itself for us. When we behold Jesus on the throne for us, we may see how great a salvation He has wrought for us. For on that throne we too shall sit, not merely in Him but with Him. It has always been the Father’s good pleasure to give us the Kingdom; not apart from the Son but along with that Son who is not ashamed to call us brethren. And because this has always been and still is the Father’s will, it behoved Him who orders all things for His own glory, in leading many sons into glory, to bring the leader of their salvation through sufferings to the full accomplishment of His great task.

“Let us fix our eyes and set our hearts today, then, on our exalted Saviour. Let us see Him on His throne made head over all things to His Church, with all the reins of government in His hands, – ruling over the world, and all the changes and chances of time, that all things may work together for good to those that love Him. Let us see Him through His spirit ruling over our hearts, governing all our thoughts, guiding all our feelings, directing all our wills, that, being his, saved by His blood, we may under His unceasing control steadily work out our salvation, as He works in us both the willing and the doing, in accordance with His good pleasure. As, in our unrighteousness, we know we have an

Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, – or, as our own Epistle puts it, a great High Priest who has entered within the veil and ever liveth to make intercession there for us: so let us know that in our weakness we have the protecting arm of the King of kings and Lord of lords about us, and He will not let us slip, but will lose none that the Father has given Him, but will raise them up at the last day. Having been tempted like as we are (though without sin), He is able to sympathize with us in our infirmities; having suffered as we do, He knows how to support us in our trials; and having opened a way in His own blood leading to life, He knows how to conduct our faltering steps that we may walk in it. Christ our Saviour is on the throne. The hands that were pierced with the nails of the cross wield the sceptre. How can our salvation fail?”<sup>7</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Work of Christ* (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> D.F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Eerdmans, 1994), p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> F.D. Bruner in his classic work *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Eerdmans, 1970) says that any separation between the church's experience of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit entails the gravest heresy (p. 245). “There is no other means for the full gift of the Holy Spirit than the message of faith in Christ's finished work, either initially (Galatians 3:2) or continually (Galatians 3:5)” (p. 239).

<sup>4</sup> “It is perfectly evident,” says Louis Berkhof, “that it would be a mistake to infer from the fact that the Bible speaks of Christ's ‘sitting’ at the right hand of God, that the life to which the risen Lord ascended is a life of rest. It is and continues to be a life of constant activity. The statements of Scripture vary. Christ is not only represented as *sitting* at the right hand of God, but also simply *as being* at His right hand, Romans 8:34; 1 Peter 3:22, or as *standing* there, Acts 7:56, and even as *walking* in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.” *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 352.

<sup>5</sup> *Collected Writings of John Murray I: The Claims of Truth* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> H. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine* (rpt. Baker, 1971), p. 377.

<sup>7</sup> B.B. Warfield, *The Saviour of The World* (rpt. Mack Publishing, 1972), p. 111 and p. 124.