

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages		Pastor/Teacher
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The Exalted Lord Jesus

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."¹ 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."² 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 Christians 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.³ 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.”⁴

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).⁵

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.”⁶

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.”⁷

III. THE ENSIGNS OF HIS KINGLY POWER

We read in Revelation 5:9 and 12 that the Lamb is *worthy* to receive adoration and praise. The grounds for this is His death and the blessings this has brought His people. He possesses the power and wisdom to accomplish salvation. This echoes Isaiah 52:13 where we are told that the suffering Servant of the LORD “will act wisely.”

A. Worthy to Receive Authority. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus declares, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Note that this was said *prior* to His ascension.

B. Worthy of Riches. Wealth is associated with royalty. He has obtained an inheritance because He is heir of all things (Hebrews 1:1-4).⁸

C. Worthy to Receive Strength. He not only has the authority, He has the power to rule as King. This is demonstrated in a number of ways, but notice how this is connected in Acts 2:33 with the outpourings of the Holy Spirit.

D. Worthy of Honor and Glory. Honor is due Him. Glory was His before the foundation of the world (John 17:1-5).

CONCLUSION: Christ reigns not only in His church by His Word and Spirit, He reigns in the world. It is true that all fallen human beings (and their cultures) are in rebellion against God's anointed One (Psalm 2), but this does not prevent Him from ruling and carrying out His purposes. Christians are called into His service. Our vocation is to serve King Jesus in His church and in the world.

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

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

³ 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).

⁴ "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.

⁵ "Whether 'the right hand of God' describes a specific place in heaven cannot be said with certainty. Some have thought this because the throne of God is in any case thought of as being in heaven and because Christ as a human being is bound to a specific location. We must bear in mind, however, that in speaking of God's right hand, we are expressing ourselves, not incorrectly, but in a human manner and in imagery (1 Kings 2:19; Pss. 45:9; 110:1; Matt. 20:21). The Christian church has always been aware of this and has refrained from a further specification of the place of Christ's exaltation. Undoubtedly implied in Christ's seat at God's right hand, however, is that he has been exalted to the highest power, dignity, and honor conceivable and possible under that of God himself. Angels stand before God's face and cover their own faces (1 Kings 22:19; Isa. 6:2), and the priests stood daily serving in the tabernacle (Heb. 10:11), but the Son is seated at God's right hand. He has received a power that, though not identical with omnipotence, encompasses all power in heaven and earth. He obtained a glory that is not identical with the glory of God but still far surpasses that of all creatures. And he received a dignity that prompts every knee in heaven, on earth, and under the earth to bow itself and every tongue to confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father. As it is, we do not yet see that all things are subject to him, but he has nevertheless been crowned with glory and honor and must reign as king 'until he has put all his enemies under his feet' (1 Cor. 15:25; Heb. 2:8-9). So then our comfort is that 'we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven' (Heb. 8:1). A Priest-King is seated on the throne of the universe and is still looking forward to his greatest exaltation when he comes again for judgment." H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics III* (Baker Academic, 2006), p. 446.

⁶ *Collected Writings of John Murray I: The Claims of Truth* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 47.

⁷ H. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine* (rpt. Baker, 1971), p. 377.

⁸ The Bible does not allow wealth and riches to be monopolized by the type of crass materialism that permeates our society. Listen to this summary by Moulton: "*Ploutos* comes from the same root as the Greek verb *pimplemi*, I fill, and is connected etymologically with the Latin word from which 'plenty' comes, with the Sanskrit *purnam*, and with the English 'fill.' And it is true that we are made far more rich, full, complete (another word from the same root) on the spiritual level than we can ever be on the material. The New Testament therefore uses our series of words for riches thirty times in a spiritual sense." H.K. Moulton, *The Challenge of the Concordance* (Bagster, 1977), p. 202.