

CHAPTER 4.

THE EXULTATION OF OUR MEDIATOR

Everyone loves a promotion. A construction worker, who has been lugging boards and nailing up walls for some years, would be thankful if his boss offers him a position as the supervisor of the crew. A part-time lecturer at a university is glad to receive a full-time teaching position. The child in Grade One has an unmistakable sparkle in his eye when he sees these words on his report card: “Promoted to Grade Two.” Promotions, whether small or big, anticipated or unexpected, have a way of making someone’s day.

This being the case, it would not be entirely surprising if someone thought of Jesus Christ’s resurrection and ascension as a promotion. After all, he had endured a low and humble state of affairs for more than thirty years. He shouldered the suffering with dignity and grace, even if it eventually led to his death on the cross. Yet, on the third day after his death, everything turned around. His descent into anguish turned into his ascent toward glory. He broke the bonds of death and returned to his beloved Father in heaven. Surely, this was a promotion, if there ever was one. Indeed, Christ deserved a promotion, if anyone ever did.

However, to describe Christ’s exultation to the Father’s right hand simply as a promotion would be to miss the point. A promotion primarily benefits the person being promoted. However, Christ arose and ascended “for us men and our salvation,” to borrow a phrase from the Nicene Creed. Sometimes people have the impression that the Mediator was

humbled for *our* benefit, but that he was exalted for *his own* benefit. Nothing could farther from the truth. His state of exaltation gives us just as many blessings as his humiliation did. In fact, the apostle Paul writes that Christ “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom 4:25). The first, his death, is part of his humiliation; the second, his resurrection, is the beginning of his exaltation. However, both are for our benefit, yes, for our full salvation.

OUR MEDIATOR’S EXULTATION AND HIS THREEFOLD OFFICE

During each step of his exaltation, our Mediator has been busy fulfilling his threefold office. For example, concerning the royal aspect of his office, Christ began his state of humiliation, being born as a king (Matt 2:2). He also died with the notice “King of the Jews” over his head (John 19:19). However, by the time of his death, he had never yet sat on a throne. Surely, that had to change! Since Christ is a king, not by Pilate’s notice but by God’s decree (Ps 2:7), it is only fitting that he should ascend and be seated on a heavenly throne. This happens in his state of exaltation.

Also, with respect to the priestly aspect of his office, Christ began his public ministry with John the Baptist identifying him as “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29, 36). He also died, on the altar of the cross, as the Lamb led to the slaughter and slain for our salvation (Isa 53:7; Rev 5:6). Yet even the sons of Aaron were not finished with their tasks once they had offered an animal on the large bronze altar. They still had to offer incense on the golden altar inside the Holy Place as well. Likewise, for Christ, even though the sacrifice for reconciliation was complete, the work of intercession had only just begun (Rom 8:34).

Finally, the prophetic aspect of Christ’s office requires his ongoing attention as well. Christ started his public office by spending many hours preaching and teaching (Matt 4:23). In his last hours on the cross, he was still actively teaching those around him, including the crowds passing by, the Roman soldiers standing guard, and the criminals dying beside him (Matt 27:46–47; Luke 23:34, 42). However, up to that point in time,

most of the people who heard Christ's prophetic voice lived in Palestine. According to OT prophecy, the islands and even distant nations had to hear his voice as well (Isa 49:1). That prophetic work was yet to be done.

In short, it is clear that while his sacrifice on the cross was a singularly great advance in the Lord's mighty work of redemption, it was not the last step. Beginning with his resurrection and continuing up to the present day, Christ's official work as our Prophet, Priest, and King carries on and we are spiritually richer because of it.

OUR MEDIATOR'S RESURRECTION: HE IS ALIVE FOR EVER AND EVER

Just as there are those who are skeptical about the virgin birth of Jesus, so there are those who deny his resurrection. In both situations the skepticism has the same underlying cause: human reason, which refuses to acknowledge the full scope of God's supernatural power. Normally and naturally speaking, virgins do not give birth to children. Similarly, dead people do not normally and naturally arise from the dead a few days later. However, the God who created all things also possesses the power and wisdom to do things that go beyond the normal and natural course of events. "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26).

Added to this, the testimony of eyewitnesses is important. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples a number of times. Yet the constant refrain in the gospel accounts is that his own disciples did not believe it at first (Matt 28:17; Mark 16:14; Luke 24:11). When they saw the resurrected Saviour, they thought they were seeing a ghost (Luke 24:37). In due time, most of the disciples did believe that Jesus Christ actually arose (John 20:25), but there was still one who refused to believe it: Thomas. In fact, he adamantly insisted, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20:25). A week later, when the resurrected Jesus appeared also to Thomas, this disciple's unbelief was transformed into faith as he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

In addition, there were other eyewitnesses to his resurrection such as Mary Magdalene (John 20:10–18), Cleopas and his travelling companion (Luke 24:13–35), and even a crowd of five hundred (1 Cor 15:6). However, the critical point is that none of these people was eagerly expecting the resurrection of Christ. Surely, all of this confirms the authenticity of these eyewitness accounts. Sometimes when people really want something to happen, they make up a story to suit their desires. However, after Christ’s death, the disciples and others were neither expecting, nor yearning for, his resurrection. They had given up hope, and they thought that the natural course of events would prevail: the one who dies remains dead. Yet, they, too, were pleasantly surprised by the power of God, who can even raise the dead.

There are also other details of the biblical account of Christ’s resurrection that confirm that it truly and historically happened. In the first place, Jesus’ tomb was empty (Luke 24:2, 12), much to the sorrow of the women who came there to give his body a proper burial (John 20:10–13). Still, as the Jewish leaders suggested, an empty tomb as such could be evidence of a grave robbery, just as much as it may indicate a resurrection (Matt 28:11–15). However, as the apostle John informs us, “[Peter] saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself” (John 20:6–7). Typically, robbers snatch what they want and they run. Robbers certainly do not take extra time to fold burial head cloths neatly and set them off to the side! Pulling these facts together, the physical evidence in Jesus’ tomb points to a resurrection not a robbery.

Secondly, Christ gave visible evidence of his resurrection when he made a point of showing the disciples his hands and feet, which still bore the marks of his crucifixion. He even invited them to experience this tangible evidence for themselves and actually touch his wounds (Luke 24:39; John 20:27). The Risen Saviour also ate with his disciples (Luke 24:41–43) in order to convince them that he was not a ghost. Thus, both in his tomb and during his appearances, God’s Son took extra care to give clear evidence that he truly arose from the dead.

In fact, his resurrection was also, what we might call, a doctrinal necessity. First, Jesus Christ was a faithful Prophet. A true prophet is distinguished from a false prophet because what he prophesies actually comes true (Deut 18:21–22). On multiple occasions, Jesus did prophesy about his resurrection (Matt 16:21; 17:23; Luke 9:22; 18:33). On the third day after his crucifixion, the words of this true Prophet were fulfilled. Second, as the apostle Peter explained on Pentecost Day, “it was not possible for him to be held by it [death]” (Acts 2:24). Death is a consequence of sin. Yet because Christ, the Holy One, was sinless, death had no legitimate right to hold on to him (Ps 16:10; Acts 2:27). Third, Christ is equally man and God. Since God is immortal (1 Tim 6:16), it is impossible that the Christ, the Son of God, would have remained in the grave. Finally, as the apostle Paul so powerfully argues, the forgiveness of our sins depends upon the resurrection of our Mediator. Concerning forgiveness, the cross was certainly necessary, but the empty grave was equally essentially. In short, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17). Thus, from at least four different doctrinal angles, the same truth is confirmed: Jesus Christ *had to* rise from the dead.

It is also an enormous blessing for us that he arose. Naturally, it was delightful for Christ himself to be set free from the bonds of death. He could enjoy life, now in glory, once again. However, in Lord’s Day 17 the Catechism steers us in another direction and calls us to consider how his resurrection benefits us. The three benefits listed correspond to three central parts of our salvation: justification, sanctification, and glorification. In the first place, the Living Saviour could actively take the redemptive benefits he obtained through his suffering and death, and distribute them to God’s children. Included in this post-resurrection distribution is the reception of the righteousness that Christ obtained for us, otherwise known as justification. Secondly, just the old, sinful nature of a believer is crucified and buried along with Christ, so his new nature is brought to life through Christ’s resurrection (Rom 6:4–10). This is the Spirit-driven process of sanctification. Thirdly, the body in which Christ arose was his own (Luke 24:39), yet it was superior to the body he had during his

state of humiliation. His resurrected, glorified body was now immortal (Rom 6:9) and could even miraculously appear in, or disappear from, a certain location (Luke 24:31; John 20:26). Believers, grafted into Christ, also look forward to the final day when their present, frail bodies will be transformed to be like Christ's glorified body (Phil 3:21). Given all the diseases, limitations, aches, and pains that plague our present bodies, the hope of receiving a glorified body is a comfort that should never be underestimated. Clearly, Christ's resurrection does not only benefit him, but also us.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND HIS THREEFOLD OFFICE

The beneficial nature of Christ's resurrection is confirmed if we take one more look at this redemptive event, this time through the lens of Christ's threefold office. In his state of humiliation the Son of God dedicated many hours to his prophetic duties of preaching and teaching (Matt 4:23). Large crowds gathered; they were enamoured with the manner in which he taught (Matt 7:28–29). Yet more often than not, they did not really understand what he was teaching them (Mark 8:21). For Christ, it was not only that a prophet is not accepted in his hometown (Luke 4:24), it was also that a prophet was not understood among his own people. After his resurrection, Jesus Christ continued to teach; only now his teaching began to sink in. His disciples began to understand how all the words and actions of their beloved Master were a fulfilment of the Old Testament. Both with the men walking to Emmaus and with the other disciples, the Risen Prophet worked through large sections of the OT Scriptures and explained, step-by-step, how he fulfilled them (Luke 24:27, 45). Through these disciples, who became apostles, we today are still the beneficiaries of this post-resurrection instruction of our Chief Prophet and Teacher.

In connection with his priesthood, the resurrection of our only High Priest clearly signaled that the all-important shift from the order of Aaron to the order of Melchizedek had occurred. Death itself was part of the Aaronic order of priests. From the start the LORD consecrated not only Aaron, but also his sons (Lev 8:12, 13), since he knew that in time Aaron

would die and one of his sons would have to take his place as high priest. In fact, the death of the high priest was even an integral part of the OT laws pertaining to those who sought asylum in the cities of refuge (Num 35:25; Josh 20:6). Thus, when Jesus died, some might have supposed that they were still under the Aaronic order. Another priest had died, only to be replaced by his successor. However, Christ's resurrection shattered that false assumption. When he arose on the third day, things had obviously changed, and changed for the better. The death-plagued priesthood of Aaron was obsolete, and the permanent priesthood of Melchizedek had begun, bringing a complete salvation to all those who come to God through this eternal High Priest (Heb 7:23–25).

In a similar way, the royal office of the old covenant was weakened by death. Both wicked and faithful kings alike died. Among the ten northern tribes, the royal dynasty regularly shifted to another family, usually after the assassination of a king. Within the tribe of Judah, there was more stability as the sceptre of authority remained within the household of David. However, it must also be said that not every son of David was a man after God's own heart as he was (1 Sam 13:14). In both kingdoms the constant turnover in the royal office led to instability, anxiety, and often decline in the spiritual health of the nation. With the resurrection of Christ, though, this seemingly endless cycle was broken. Here finally was a King who would never be assassinated, never usurped, never succeeded. In Christ the prophecy given by Nathan was fully accomplished: "Your throne will be established forever" (2 Sam 7:16). In turn, this benefits the entire earth because by the eternal King, all peoples will be blessed and all nations will call him blessed (Ps 72:17).

OUR MEDIATOR'S ASCENSION: HE RETURNED TO HEAVEN FOR OUR BENEFIT

The ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ is perhaps one of the most overlooked redemptive actions that he accomplished on our behalf. In many countries Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday are statutory holidays that are found on every calendar. In this way, Christ's birth, death, and resurrection still receive some recognition in society. Ascen-

sion Day, which occurs forty days after Easter Sunday, does not enjoy the same privilege. It always falls on a Thursday, and therefore, for the most part, life and business go on as they do on any other workday. The world pays no heed to Ascension Day, and often the church is not so successful either in commemorating this redemptive-historic event. Yet it ought to be different. Christ's ascension is not a footnote; it is a highlight. It is a mighty act of the Lord for us and our salvation.

Still, many Christians do not understand the full significance of the ascension. Often they think that the ascension benefits Christ himself much more than us. The idea runs something like this: after suffering so much here on this earth, and yes, even dying on that horrible cross, the ascension was an opportunity for Christ to escape from all the hardships of life on this earth and return to the bliss and tranquility of heaven. Now, it is undoubtedly true that the Only-Begotten Son was eager to return to his Father (John 17:5). Yet this same Son also specifically told his disciples, "It is *for your good* that I am going away" (John 16:7; emphasis added). We want to explore this aspect of Christ's ascension next.

Before we come to that, though, we should briefly touch on the teaching of the Lutheran church, which is commonly called the communication of Christ's attributes. This teaching holds that, especially after his resurrection, Christ's human nature began to share in the attributes of his divine nature. For example, they teach that just as Christ's divine nature is omnipresent, so also his human nature became omnipresent. This is also called the ubiquity of Christ. Obviously, the desire behind this teaching is to have Christ physically close to us. However, in the end, the communication of attributes compromises the real humanity of Christ. To have a real human body means that you are located in one particular place. There is no such thing as an infinite, omnipresent human body. So, if Christ's human nature is present everywhere (ubiquitous), then it is questionable whether he is truly a human being. As the Catechism explains in Lord's Days 5–6, we need a Mediator who is really a human being, not one who is simply similar, in most respects, to human beings.

However, if the ascension of Christ is not an escape from earthly sorrow nor a divinization of his humanity, what is it? In order to gain a well-rounded understanding, we need to begin in the Old Testament. Our first stop is 2 Kings 2:1–18 and the ascension of Elijah. Clearly, this was a painful time for his younger assistant, Elisha. Elisha did not want his master to leave him. In fact, he did not even want to speak about his master’s impending departure (2 Kgs 2:3). However, when Elijah actually did ascend, Elisha inherited a double measure of his spirit (2 Kgs 2:9). Subsequently, Elisha went on to perform mighty deeds that were as great, if not greater, than what his predecessor did. In other words, initially Elijah’s ascension might have felt like a loss to Elisha, but in fact, the LORD was stepping ahead in his plan of salvation. The same is true for the ascension of Christ. Physically speaking, the Son was lifted up; redemptively speaking, our Triune God stepped forward in his plan of salvation.

Our next stop in the Old Testament is Psalm 47:5 where the Sons of Korah exclaim, “God has gone up with a shout.” The next verse becomes even more exuberant: “Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!” There is no denying that the ascension is an occasion for shouts of jubilation, not sobs of lamentation. But *why* rejoice? The reason is that “God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne” (Ps 47:8). Ascension leads to coronation. At his ascension, Jesus Christ, the eternal King, went up to his throne. Having such a gracious Saviour as the only legitimate Ruler over all nations is a blessing to those nations, especially to those who willingly acknowledge his rule.

This leads directly to our third and last stop in the Old Testament: Daniel 7:13–14. This verse prophetically describes the ascension from a heavenly, rather than an earthly, point of view. As Christ arrives in heaven, riding the clouds as his chariot, he enters the divine throne room in order to assume nothing smaller than global authority. Indeed, “all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Dan 7:14).

Turning to the New Testament, it is noteworthy how the Old Testament themes regarding ascension return in an increasingly glorious manner.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not wave farewell to his disciples as he ascended. On the contrary, he raised his high-priestly hands and blessed them (Luke 24:50; cf. Lev 9:22), thereby indicating that, for them, his ascension meant gain not loss. Furthermore, in Acts 1 Christ's return to heaven is immediately preceded by the commission he gave his apostles to be his witnesses in their own home country and to the ends of the earth (v. 8). The ascended Christ did not conquer the nations with a vast army of soldiers, tanks, and missiles; rather he won over their hearts with the truth of his gospel, which is the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17). Even though it would take time for Christ to subdue the nations in this way, there was an aspect of his victory that happened immediately. As recorded in Revelation 12, as soon as Christ ascended into heaven (v. 5), war broke out in heaven between the angels and the demons with the net result that Satan and all his evil accomplices were permanently cast out of heaven (vv. 7–9). They could still roam the earth, but they could not re-enter heaven.

Still, there is more. The Catechism highlights three main benefits that we receive from Christ's ascension (LD 18, Q&A 49). In the first place, we have an Advocate, that is, an Intercessor, right where we need him the most, at the Father's right hand. If we wish to speak with an earthly king, we first need to seek official permission in order to appear in his throne room. Receiving such permission would likely involve a lengthy process, and in the end, there would be no guarantee that we would receive entrance into the royal courtroom. However, with Christ, our Advocate, already there in the heavenly throne room, we have access to the Father's throne, every hour of every day. Certainly, that is a great ascension-related blessing!

Next, the Catechism mentions that since Christ's human nature, including his physical body, is in heaven, we receive assurance that he will take us to be with himself when we die. Christ the Head and the church, which is his body, belong together. If a sincere believer dies, then there is no need to doubt where his soul is going. He belongs to the Head; therefore, he goes to be with the Head.

Finally, the Catechism draws our attention to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christ ascended so that, ten days later, his Holy Spirit could descend on Pentecost Day. The Spirit, sent down into our hearts, in turn, lifts up our hearts and our minds to focus on a lifestyle worthy of heaven rather than being absorbed with all sorts of futile earthly things (Col 3:1–3). Already this is enough to indicate that the ascension not only benefited Christ but also certainly blesses us.

CHRIST'S ASCENSION AND HIS THREEFOLD OFFICE

Once again, we gain a glimpse at additional blessings if we look at Christ's ascension through the lens of his threefold office. As Prophet, the Ascended Lord Jesus Christ was obviously no longer walking up and down the dusty roads of Palestine teaching the crowds. However, since the ascension and Pentecost are intimately related, it is evident that when Christ moved up into heaven, his prophetic program of teaching the good news took a giant stride forward. From God's right hand Christ poured out his Spirit (Acts 2:33), and immediately the gospel started to spread through many different languages and into many different cultures (Acts 2:5–11). So long as he was on earth, our Chief Prophet and Teacher could only walk so far each day; he could only teach a limited number of people each day, even if those crowds sometimes numbered in the thousands. However, from his throne in heaven, our Ascended Prophet is no longer limited by how long he could walk or how far his voice could be heard. From heaven his voice is heard throughout all nations and his gospel travels farther and faster than he could have ever walked, while in his state of humiliation.

Concerning his priestly tasks, we have already mentioned his work as Advocate and Intercessor of our prayers before the Father (Heb 4:14–16). However, his ascension fulfilled another high-priestly task. In the old covenant, once every year on Atonement Day, the high priest would bring blood into the Holy of Holies, there to sprinkle it in front of the Ark of the Covenant (Lev 16:14), which is the footstool of God's heavenly throne (1 Chron 28:2). As the name of the day indicates, this sprinkling of blood in the Most Holy Place brought about atonement

for the people, at least it did so symbolically. When Christ ascended he entered the real Most Holy Place, heaven itself, taking with him his own blood (Heb 9:14, 24–25). As a result, our consciences are cleansed (Heb 9:14) and we receive boldness “to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh” (Heb 10:19–20). In sum, knowing that the atoning blood of Christ is no longer here on earth but up in heaven gives us a confidence in prayer which we would not otherwise have.

Finally, as already mentioned, Christ’s ascension is also his coronation. The one who once wore a crown of thorns (John 19:5) now wears a crown of glory and honour (Heb 2:9). However, if Christ had been crowned as king here on this earth, for instance, in the city of Jerusalem, then there would have been much more reluctance among the other nations of the world to bow their knees in submission to him. To put it another way, if Christ’s throne was in Jerusalem, his kingdom would forever appear to be a distinctly Jewish kingdom. How many Gentile nations would be willing to submit to a Jewish throne? Not many! However, since Christ ascended to his heavenly throne, his kingdom also transcends and transverses all national, linguistic, and cultural borderlines. No earthly nation can claim heaven’s throne as its own national treasure. Rather heaven’s throne claims all nations as its rightful domain. For this reason as well, it is to our benefit that Christ ascended into heaven rather than remaining here on earth.

OUR MEDIATOR’S SESSION: NOW CROWNED WITH GLORY AND HONOUR

Christ’s ascension and his session, or sitting on his throne, are closely connected. For this reason the Heidelberg Catechism begins Lord’s Day 19 with the question, “Why is it added, *and sits at the right hand of God?*” Taking his place on his throne is an additional aspect of Christ’s ascension. However, it still deserves separate attention. The difference can be summed up in this way: his ascension culminates in his coronation while his session focuses on his ongoing rule from the throne. This ongoing aspect is also indicated in the Apostles’ Creed because it

chooses the present tense for this particular redemptive activity: “and *sits* at the right hand of God the Father almighty.” All the other great acts of salvation are confessed in the past tense: was born, suffered, crucified, died, buried, arose, and ascended. So, by turning to the present tense for “sits at the right hand,” the Creed teaches that we should now concentrate on what Christ is doing at this moment.

In Scripture the position of being at one’s right hand is significant. It is a place of great honour (Gen 48:13–18; 1 Kgs 2:19). At the same time, the LORD’S right hand is the means by which he exercises his power, especially his saving power. Numerous times God’s people look to the LORD’S right hand for deliverance (Exod 15:6, 12; Pss 20:6; 60:5; 118:15–16). It is also noteworthy that within the ranks of the musical Levites, Asaph is described as an assistant who served at Heman’s right hand (1 Chron 6:39). Finally, perhaps the most significant mention of the LORD’S right hand in the Old Testament occurs in Psalm 110. There David says, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (v. 1). This passage is unambiguously Christological (Mark 12:35–36). It also indicates the final goal of Christ’s session: the total subjection of all God’s enemies. Christ does rule, but at present many people disrespectfully ignore him or actively rebel against him. At his final coming, every knee in heaven and on earth will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2:10–11). Christ’s session is his daily sovereign activity governing over all things so that this world moves forward from his coronation to that final day of universal submission. Along the way, our eternal King is not only interested in establishing his own rule over all things, but he is also keen to defend and protect his Bride, the church, from the attacks she must yet endure.

Sitting on heaven’s throne, at the right hand of the Father, the Son of God has received all glory and honour (Ps 8:5; Dan 7:14; Heb 2:9). True to his gracious nature, our Mediator does not keep all this glory to himself. Rather the King shares it with his betrothed Bride, the church. Therefore, the apostle Paul writes, “and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we

may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:17). This gifted glory may only be enjoyed in a small and dim measure at the moment, but as Christ rules at the Father’s right hand he is busy ushering us into ever-increasing glory (2 Cor 3:18). Though often in challenging circumstances right now, all God’s children ought to trust firmly that from God’s right hand, the Lord Jesus Christ, through his Spirit, is holding our right hand, guiding us here below and afterward taking us to enjoy the fullness of his glory above (Ps 73:23). The fact that Christ sits on the throne now guarantees our glory in the future.

This highlights another aspect of Christ’s rule from the right hand: his generosity. Not only did Christ give the immeasurably great gift of his Spirit from the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33), but he also showers his saints with many other undeserved gifts. In Ephesians 4:11 the apostle highlights what a gift it is to have office bearers, such as apostles in the first generation of Christians and pastors right up until today. However, his gifts do not stop there. Using his sovereign power over all creation, including the hosts of angels, Christ puts in place the spiritual bulwarks and barricades that are needed to protect God’s people. When demons threaten to attack God’s people, Christ will command his angels to mount a counter-attack (Ps 91:11–12). He also equips his people with nothing less than the armor of God which provides them with protection from head to toe, as well as placing a formidable spiritual weapon in their hands, the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:13–17). With this armour the people of God are able to stand against the devil’s schemes. In short, we can say that as Christ sits at the right hand of the Father he has his eye firmly focused on his Bride below, faithfully providing for her and protecting her until the final day, which will be his Royal Wedding Day (Rev 19:6–9).

Although the session of Christ is most directly connected with his royal office, his priestly and prophetic duties are involved here as well. It is already a great blessing to have a priestly Intercessor who sits so close to the Father, but it is an even greater blessing that this Intercessor has all authority in heaven and on earth, “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in

this age but also in the one to come” (Eph 1:21). What an Intercessor! He is not only at the Father’s side (John 1:18), but he also rules over every single nook and cranny of the Father’s world. He has tender sympathy to hear us in our weaknesses (Heb 4:15), but he also has the invincible authority to do something about our plight and preserve us in the redemption he obtained for us. As the Belgic Confession so aptly says:

If, therefore, we had to look for another intercessor, could we find one who loves us more than he who laid down his life for us, even while we were his enemies (Rom 5:8–10)? If we had to look for one who has authority and power, who has more than he who is seated at the right hand of the Father and who has all authority in heaven and earth (Matt 28:18)? Moreover, who will be heard more readily than God’s own well-beloved Son? (Art. 26).

In addition, Christ’s ongoing prophetic work is facilitated by his session. Christ now speaks to us through his Spirit who inspired the apostles to proclaim the gospel (1 Pet 1:12). However, since he is sitting at God’s right hand, this Christ is no longer a lonely voice crying out in the wilderness. On the contrary, this is the voice of him who speaks from heaven with enough power and authority to shake not only the earth but also the heavens (Heb 12:25–27). Obviously, this prophetic voice from heaven is not a voice to be shrugged off or ignored. As the Psalmist rightly says of the Son who sits on God’s throne, “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.” Thankfully, he also and immediately adds, “Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (Ps 2:12).

OUR MEDIATOR’S RETURN: HE WILL CERTAINLY COME BACK FOR US

The return of the Lord Jesus Christ usually falls under the heading of eschatology, or the study of the last things leading up to final glory. Eschatology will be dealt with in detail later on in the third volume of *Growing in the Gospel*. At this point, though, we should note that Christ’s entire work of salvation will not be complete until he returns on the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead. Our Mediator came to save us from our sins, but he also had a far broader, deeper, and higher work to accomplish. “For in him [Christ] all the fullness of God

was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19–20). On the cross, as his humiliation was swiftly sinking to its lowest point, Christ could rightly say of his atoning sacrifice, “It is finished” (John 19:30). That sacrifice was truly done, once for all, never to be repeated again. However, the full scope of God’s salvation was not yet complete. Christ’s exultation describes his ongoing work for us and our salvation. This work will continue until he comes again and until the voice from the throne says, “I am making all things new!” (Rev 21:5) Then he who is the Alpha and the Omega will say, “It is done” (Rev 21:6). And then—but not before then—the *entire* work of God’s salvation will be finished right down to the very last grand and glorious detail.

Suggested Readings: Psalm 2; 1 Corinthians 15:12–28

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Why do many Christians make the mistake of thinking that Christ’s exultation provides us with fewer benefits than his humiliation? How can we correct that?
2. If someone is interested in following Christ, but cannot believe that Jesus actually rose from the dead, how would you defend the truth of his resurrection? Can someone be a true Christian and doubt the resurrection at the same time?
3. Compare what the high priests of the OT did on Atonement Day (Lev 16) and what Christ did on the day of his ascension (Heb 9–10). In what ways were the actions of OT high priests and Christ similar? In what ways were they radically different?
4. Are members of the church generally afraid of, or eager for, the return of Jesus Christ? If there are mixed feelings, why is that? What is the right perspective on Christ’s return and how can we cultivate that in our fellow believers and ourselves? Lord’s Day 19, Q&A 52 may help.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. How should Ascension Day be commemorated in the churches?

Should it receive as much attention as Christmas Day and Good Friday? Or is the church calendar beginning to fill up with too many special days and events? Do we need to steer in the direction of a simpler liturgical year?

2. In Ephesians 1:22 the apostle Paul writes, “And he [God] put all things under his [Christ’s] feet and gave him as head over all things *to the church*” (emphasis added). Is Christ also the head over the devil and his demons? Defend your position from the Bible. How does this fit with Ephesians 5:23 where Christ is called “the head of the church, his body”?
3. As citizens of the kingdom of Christ we have been equipped with the armour of God in order to take our stand “against the spiritual forces of evil” (Eph 6:12). How does spiritual warfare against demonic forces become a concrete reality in our North American context? Can you list four realistic scenarios in which spiritual warfare confronts the average Christian? Are there still people today who are demon-possessed? How would we know? What should we do about it?
4. Read Hebrews 9:11–14 concerning how Christ entered the Most Holy Place by means of his own blood which, in turn, is able to purify our consciences. If the blood of the Ascended Christ is powerful enough to cleanse our consciences, why are our consciences still plagued by so many guilt feelings? Are those guilt feelings a sign of true humility or a lack of faith?

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