

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 243

ASCENSION

*While they beheld, he was taken
up; and a cloud received
him out of their sight.*

Acts 1:9

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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ASCENSION

243

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THE SCENE OF CHRIST'S ASCENSION

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

*And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands,
and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them,
he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.*

—Luke 24:50-53

OUR Lord Jesus, having spoiled the grave, and so proved His power over things that are under the earth, tarried for forty days among men and so claimed His power over the earth itself. [He] then ascended through the air to show that the dominion of the prince of the power of the air was broken and, finally, entered the heaven of heavens to claim sovereignty there, so that, from the lowest depths up to the extremest heights, He might take possession of His vast domains. I like to think of Him as traversing¹ His dominions from end to end, like a conqueror looking over the provinces that have been subdued by His might. Our Lord did not make a rapid passage through the world. He might have gone on the resurrection morning straight from the grave, as soon as it was opened, into His glory; but He had reasons for tarrying a while, and of those reasons I will briefly speak...

His ascension occurred forty days after He had risen from the dead. You know what a significant period forty days has always been in Scripture; and you know that, in our Lord's own case, He was forty days in the wilderness, tempted of the devil, so that it was seemly² for Him to tarry here for forty days of triumph on the scene of His first great battle and victory. Whatever instruction there may be in those forty days, I will not attempt to give any fanciful exposition of [their meaning]; but it is quite clear that they were sufficient for certain excellent purposes.

They were sufficient to prove to all mankind that He had truly risen from the dead, not as a phantom,³ but in real flesh and blood. He made many appearances to His disciples in different ways and in divers places. It was not possible that five hundred brethren at once could all be deceived (1Co 15:6); and if that could be imagined, it is

¹ **traversing** – crossing; passing through.

² **seemly** – appropriate; suitable to the occasion.

³ **phantom** – something that appears to the sight but has no substance.

not likely that, when by twos and threes, and even as separate individuals (1Co 15:5, 7-8), they had the most intimate [communication] with Him, they could have been mistaken...The forty days was a sufficient period for our Savior to be here to make it clear to all ages that He had really risen from the dead.

Besides that, I have no doubt He timed His sojourn on earth so that He might remove every lingering doubt from the minds of His disciples. Thomas had to be talked to—to be bidden to put his finger into the print of the nails and to thrust his hand into his Lord's side; and there were others beside Thomas who had many doubts. In fact, there was not one of the disciples without some doubt or other, so their Master had to act and speak in such a way that every one of them should be thoroughly assured as to His identity and as to the nature of His risen body (Mat 28:17). Thus, He said to them, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luk 24:39).

Besides that, the instructions that Christ had previously given to His disciples needed a few finishing touches. Before His death, He had said to them, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (Joh 16:12). But after He had risen from the dead, they could bear much more; and there is no doubt that He made disclosures⁴ to them then, which let further light into their souls. We read more than once of how He opened their understandings to receive the Scriptures and opened the Scriptures so that their understandings might grasp them.

But, chief of all, our Lord tarried here for forty days that He might issue His commissions to His disciples. He said to one of them, "Feed my sheep," and, "Feed my lambs" (Joh 21:15-17); and He said to all of them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mar 16:15-16). He would not take His final departure until His last orders were issued, until He had, as it were, marshalled His battalions, set them in their ranks, given them His commands, and bidden them march forward to battle and to victory. There was infinite wisdom in the delay between the resurrection and the ascension; and the more we think of it, the more we shall see that it was so. Thus much⁵ concerning the time of our Lord's [visit] here after He rose from the dead.

⁴ **disclosures** – acts of making something known or of revealing information.

⁵ **Thus much** – so much; to this point.

Further, the spot from which the ascension took place is very instructive. Luke tells us, "He led them out as far as to Bethany" (Luk 24:50); but, in the Acts of the Apostles, he informs us that this memorable scene took place upon "the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey" (Act 1:12). The two statements are not at all inconsistent with one another. I suppose that our Lord was upon that part of the Mount of Olives from which He could look down upon Bethany. To my mind, it is a very beautiful remark that is made by Van Oosterzee⁶ upon this incident. He says that when we stand in the place of our Lord's ascension, we have three things: the heaven above us opened, for Christ passed through the golden gates; we have a happy home below, close at our feet, for there was Bethany, where Mary and Martha and Lazarus had their happy abode, and none are so happy as those who are joined to the risen Christ; and then we have here a pathway, often trodden by Christ's blessed feet, and along that pathway the disciples were to go back to Jerusalem—the very Jerusalem out of which He had led them for His ascension. So that His ascension from this position gives us three beautiful things—an opened heaven, a happy home, and a pathway consecrated and smoothed by His blessed feet.

The most significant circumstance, perhaps, about the place of His ascension was that He went back to heaven from the place where He had often communed with His disciples. He had opened many mysteries to them there. It was there that they had sat and looked over at Jerusalem, and He had spoken to them about the ultimate destruction of the guilty city (Mat 24:1-51; Mar 13:1-37). It was a place that was very dear to them and that must have brought many memories to our Savior's mind. There, just under the brow of the hill, were the olive trees of Gethsemane; and His eyes may have looked upon the spot where He wrestled for our sakes with all the powers of death and hell (Mat 26:36-46; Mar 14:32-42). It is sweet to think that He ascended to His glory from the place of His agony and bloody sweat (Luk 22:44); and, my brethren, we shall do the same in our measure. From the bed whereon we die, we shall ascend into glory! And there we shall be transfigured and made like unto our Lord; from the grave of death—our Gethsemane—our bodies shall leap, at the coming of the Lord and the sounding of the great trumpet, into all the resurrection beauty and life. Yes, where we fight, we shall conquer; where we suffer, there we shall reign. I like to think of the last spot of earth that

⁶ Jan Jacob van Oosterzee (1817-1882) – Dutch theologian.

Jesus touched being a mountain—for mountains have often been the places where the grandest transactions of men with God have been performed—and to find Him going as near heaven as He could upon His feet because He would not work a miracle as long as anything could be done by ordinary means. And then gently, as it were, pushing the earth downwards and Himself ascending into the glory where He now sits at the right hand of God, even the Father.

Think over the time and the place of our Lord's ascension, and you will have some subjects worthy of your deepest meditation.

Then think of the scene itself. There are Christ's disciples gathered around Him, the apostles certainly, and perhaps some more of His followers. They have come out to Bethany and Olivet from Jerusalem. I cannot tell whether they walked through the streets at midday. I think it is very likely; and if so, many must have stared wonderingly at the Nazarene, Whom they had seen nailed to the cross on Calvary, now alive again and passing through their streets. Whether it was so or no, I cannot tell. They crossed the Kedron, that gruesome brook in which the defilements of the Temple were taken away; and then they passed by Gethsemane by the winding path, until they came to the brow of Olivet where Jesus could look down on the one side on Jerusalem, and on the other side on Bethany; and He began to talk with His disciples...How astonished His disciples must have been! How they must have shrunk back as the majesty flamed forth from Him! He began to rise, and up He went—slowly, majestically rising, and the disciples looking on until He must have grown less and less to their astonished vision; and when He was about to vanish from their sight, they saw a cloud float between Himself and them, and He was gone—gone to His throne.

I like to think of our Lord's ascension in this simple but sublime manner...It is, to my mind, very beautiful to think of there being no medium employed in connection with His ascension—no angels' wings to bear Him upward, no visible arm of omnipotence to lift Him gently from the earth...No, but He rises by His own power and majesty. He needs no help. Glad would the angels have been to come once more to earth as they had come at His birth, as they had come to the wilderness, as they had come to His tomb. Gladly would they have ministered to Him, but He needed not their ministry, at least, in the beginning of His journey. He proved the innate power of His deity,⁷ by which He could depart out of the world just when He willed,

⁷ See FGB 230, *The Deity of Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

breaking the law of gravitation and suspending the laws usually governing matter. Well could He do this, for He made those laws and could alter or control them as He pleased. "A cloud received him out of their sight" (Act 1:9), for I suppose they had then seen all that they ought to see; and, perhaps, behind that cloud there were scenes of glory that it was not possible for human eyes to gaze upon, and words that it was not lawful for human beings to hear. I do not know about that...

There does seem to be some guide to us in that matchless 24th Psalm: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in" (Psa 24:7). It does read as if the warders⁸ at the top of the gate enquired, "Who is this King of glory?" and that the attending angels replied, "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" (Psa 24:7-9). Of these things, we speak with bated breath,⁹ for we know not all that happened then, but we do know that "a cloud received him out of their sight" (Act 1:9)...

What was the posture¹⁰ in which Christ was last seen by His disciples? I will read the words: "He lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven" (Luk 24:50-51), so that the last posture in which Christ was seen was this: His hands were uplifted in the act of blessing His disciples... We are not told much about the action with which our Lord Jesus Christ accompanied His speech. There is one thing recorded of Him in which it would be a great blessing if all ministers would imitate Him: "He opened his mouth, and taught them, saying..." (Mat 5:2). We do not always know how He stood; but, on the occasion of His ascension, we know exactly what His posture was: "He lifted up his hands, and blessed them" (Luk 24:50).

From a sermon on Thursday evening, May 20, 1875, delivered
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



⁸ **warders** – guards; keepers.

⁹ **bated breath** – holding one's breath in fear, suspense, or awe.

¹⁰ EDITOR'S NOTE: the original word used was *attitude*, an archaic use of *posture*, which has been substituted for modern readers.

DESCENDING AND ASCENDING

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.—Ephesians 4:9-10

WHAT we have here is a description of the whole movement of salvation. Indeed, we can use a stronger term and say that the apostle is describing the great drama of salvation. He is saying, in effect, that the verse that he has quoted from Psalm 68 is a description of how our Lord has achieved salvation and redemption, and, as the mighty Victor, is now giving gifts to His people in the church.

Let us examine the terms the apostle employs. Why is there any need of salvation at all? The answer is, because mankind in sin is in a condition of slavery. An enemy has entered the world. The devil, the enemy of God, pretending to be the friend of man, was man's greatest enemy. He conquered man, and he has held man in bondage and in captivity ever since. This is taught in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb 2:14-15). Man in sin is a slave of the devil; he is under the dominion of Satan. When the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus was given the command by the Lord Jesus Christ to preach the gospel, he was told to go to the people and to the Gentiles "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Act 26:18). Satan, the archenemy, is the commander of the hosts of hell, and he has attacked and defeated mankind and has taken it captive. He exercises a terrible dominion and power over mankind. Sin is likewise a terrible bondage—"The way of transgressors is hard" (Pro 13:15).

People think that a life of sin is a life of freedom, but it is the greatest slavery of all. Think of the masses of people in the world today who are slaves to drink and drugs, to sex and a thousand and one other things. They talk about their marvelous liberty and life, but they are poor benighted slaves, as they soon discover when they try to

set themselves free. Anyone who has ever tried to break free from a long-continued or long-practiced habit knows something about the slavery and the power and the bondage of sin. In addition, mankind is under the curse of the Law. “The handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us,” says Paul in Colossians 2:14. The Law of God is against us because of our sin and is pronouncing a judgment upon us. We are under law by nature. This is the condemnation, and we cannot escape it. And then there is the fact of death. “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1Co 15:26). This is the mighty enemy that holds mankind in bondage all their lives: the fear of death. Satan controls it and uses it to keep us in bondage...These are the enemies that have conquered man. The Son of God came into this world to conquer these enemies and to set all believers in Him free. Christ came to redeem the church, to redeem His own people out of this bondage, this captivity, this tyranny. He came with that specific object, and He has carried it out.

Our Lord is now in glory, seated at the right hand of God, having put all enemies under His feet. But as we think of Him, we must think of something else also: “What is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?” He is in high heaven now, but He was once on earth. He left the courts of heaven; He “humbled himself” (Phi 2:8). These are other ways of saying, “What is it but that he...descended first?” These are ways of describing the incarnation¹...He could not lead captivity captive until He had first come down and dealt with the enemy. But He has come, He has descended.

The classic description and elaboration of this is found in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phi 2:5-6). He did not hold on to this equality that He had with God as a prize He would never let go, “but made himself of no reputation” (Phi 2:7). He was still God in all His fulness; but He laid aside the signs, the insignia, the pomp, and the glory of it all...“He that ascended, what is it but that he also descended first?” means that He came from the highest courts of heaven to the virgin’s womb—to earth, in the form of a man, in the form of a servant, with all the poverty and all that characterized the home into which He came. Give rein to² your inspired spir-

¹ **incarnation** – (*Latin: incarnation*, “taking on flesh”); miraculous act whereby the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, became fully human, while remaining full deity in one person; see FGB 234, *Incarnation*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² **give rein to** – indulge.

itual imaginations and contemplate this drama of redemption. He has come down to meet the enemies who have conquered us, and especially the mighty foe who holds us in bondage.

But He not only “took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (2:7), for we read on: “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death” (2:8). We pause here for a moment to emphasize this element of obedience that characterized the whole of His life. He came to engage in a terrible conflict; even when He was a babe, King Herod tried to kill Him. “A second Adam to the fight, and to the rescue came.”³ Consider also His conflict with the devil. Then think of His obedience to His parents. He became obedient, although He was the Son of God. Recall how at the age of twelve in the Temple His mother and Joseph found Him “sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions” (Luk 2:46) and upbraided⁴ Him. He said, “Wist⁵ ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (2:49). Though He knew His Father’s “business,” He was obedient to Joseph and Mary. “He became obedient” (Phi 2:8). He did so because it was part of the fight. He submitted Himself to baptism, though He had done no wrong and had no need to be baptized. Recall what John the Baptist said to Him. But He was identifying Himself with His people for whom He was going to fight. He was tempted of the devil. For forty days and forty nights in the wilderness He was in single, mortal combat with the chief enemy. Think of the opposition of the Pharisees and scribes and Sadducees and the doctors of the Law. It is all part of the drama of redemption, and of the fight—the conflict to deliver His people. He “descended” in order to do this. “He became obedient” (Phi 2:8). He never failed; He rendered a perfect obedience to His Father’s will. Then came that terrible moment in the Garden of Gethsemane when He saw clearly what our redemption was going to involve, and He cried, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me...nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Mat 26:39; Luk 22:42). Obedience! Yes, “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phi 2:8). He went even to the cross in order that this victory might be complete.

Consider again Paul’s word to the Colossians: “And having spoiled principalities and powers” (Col 2:15). At Calvary, they brought out their last reserves. The devil assumed that if he killed Him, he would

³ John Henry Newman (1865), “Praise to the Holiest in the Height.”

⁴ **upbraided** – scolded.

⁵ **wist** – know.

get rid of Him and thus defeat Him. But as they were killing Him, He was destroying them. “Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col 2:15). It was by dying and rising again that He finally defeated the devil and all his hosts. At the same time, He dealt with the Law: “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Col 2:14). In doing all this, He died; and they took down His body and buried it in a grave.

Was He defeated at last? We know the answer, thank God! There was no defeat; it was still victory all along the line. He died and was buried; His friends rolled a great stone over the mouth of the grave, and His foes set soldiers to guard it. The enemy seemed to be triumphant, and all seemed to be lost. But He burst asunder the bands of death and rose triumphant o’er the grave. “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1Co 15:54). He conquered death and the grave, so that we can say with Paul, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Co 15:55-57).

Our Lord conquered the last enemy. Every enemy that has ever enslaved man and kept him in bondage has been routed and defeated. Thus, having completed the work, He rose and ascended from earth to heaven. The disciples were with Him on mount Olivet, and they saw Him ascending into heaven. “He passed through the heavens.” As the apostle says, “He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.”

The apostle’s assertion is that it is because He has done all He came on earth to do that He is now “far above all heavens.” He expresses the same truth in the Epistle to the Philippians: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phi 2:9-10). It is because of what He has done that God has exalted Him to this supreme position. Our Lord Himself stated this when He said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Mat 28:18-20). Then turn to the book of Revelation, chapter 5, with its account of a book with seals on it—the book of history—and take note of the weeping and wailing because no man is strong enough to tear off the seals; no one in heaven or on earth is

big enough to control history. Again, all seems to be lost and hopeless; but “the Lion of the tribe of Juda...hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof” (Rev 5:5). The Lion of the tribe of Judah! Jesus, Son of God! The One Who “descended” has also “ascended” and is big enough and great enough! The book is handed to Him, and He tears off the seals. He is the Lord of history! He is seated at the right hand of God and waiting until all His enemies shall be made His footstool. Lord of creation, Lord of history, Lord of everything!

The apostle...wants us to know the exceeding greatness of God’s power to us-ward that believe, “according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:19-23). “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Eph 4:8). “Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (Eph 4:7). And it is all because He Who ascended and is in the position to give gifts first descended and conquered all our enemies and captors and led them in His triumphal train. He has earned the right to be the Head of the church and has all power. Thus, He dispenses these gifts to His people in the church according to the measure that He Himself has determined.

Surely, we must all join in thanking God that the great apostle broke off his argument and gave us this exposition, and thereby gave us this astounding view of the drama of redemption—from heaven to earth, to the grave, and back into heaven. But let us remember that He has taken our human nature back with Him into the glory. The One Who is on the throne is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb 4:15). He carried His human nature, our nature, with Him to glory!

From *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), www.banneroftruth.org, used by permission, 161-167.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Welsh expository preacher and author; born in Cardiff, Wales, UK.



THE ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST

Isaac Ambrose (1604-1664)

THE ascension of Christ was a glorious design and contains in it a great part of the salvation of our souls. In prosecution of this, I shall show,

I. That He ascended: (1) *The types prefigure it.* “Then said the LORD unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened...It is for the prince; the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before the LORD; he shall enter by way of the porch of that gate, and shall go out by the way of the same” (Eze 44:2-3). As the gate of the holy of holies was shut against every man but the high priest, so was that gate of heaven shut against all, so that none could enter in by their own virtue and efficacy, but only our Prince and great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ; indeed, He hath opened it for us, and entered it in our place and stead. “Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb 6:20). (2) *The prophets foresaw it.* “I saw in the night visions, and behold one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him, and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom” (Dan 7:13-14). (3) *The evangelists relate it.* “He was received up into heaven” (Mar 16:19). “He was...carried up into heaven” (Luk 24:51). (4) *The eleven witnessed it.* For “while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight” (Act 1:9). (5) *The holy angels speak it.* “And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Act 1:10-11). (6) *The blessed apostles in their several epistles ratify and confirm it.* “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men...He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens” (Eph 4:8, 10). “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1Pe 3:22).

II. How He ascended: The manner of His ascension is discovered in these particulars: 1. He ascended, blessing His apostles. “While he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven”

(Luk 24:51). It is some comfort to Christ's ministers that, though the world hates them, Christ doth bless them. Yea, He parted with them in a way of blessing; as Jacob leaving the world blessed his sons, so Christ leaving the world blessed His apostles—and all the faithful ministers of Christ unto the end of the world. Some add that in these apostles, not only ministers but all the elect to the end of the world are blessed. The apostles were then considered as common persons, receiving this blessing for all of us; and so these words uttered at the same time are usually interpreted: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Mat 28:20). This was the last thing that Christ did on earth, to show that by His death, He had redeemed us from the curse of the Law, and that now going to heaven, He is able to bless "us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places" (Eph 1:3).

2. He ascended visibly in the view of the apostles: "While they beheld, he was taken up" (Act 1:9). He was not suddenly snatched from them, as Elijah was, nor secretly and privily taken away, as Enoch was; but in the presence of them all, both His apostles and disciples, He ascended into heaven. But why not in view of all the Jews so that they might know that He was risen again and gone to heaven? Surely this was the meaning: God would rather that the main points of faith should be learned by hearing than by seeing. However, Christ's own disciples were taught the same by sight that they might better teach others that should not see; yet the ordinary means to come by faith is hearing: "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." And as for the Jews, saith the apostle, "Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Rom 10:14, 17-18).

3. He ascended principally by the mighty power of His Godhead. Thus, never any ascended up into heaven but Jesus Christ. For though Enoch and Elijah were assumed into heaven, yet not by their own power nor by themselves; it was God's power by which they ascended, and it was by the help and ministry of angels. "There appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire...and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2Ki 2:11).

4. He ascended in a cloud: "While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Act 1:9). Hereby He shows that He is Lord of all the creatures; He had already trampled upon the earth, walked upon the sea, vanquished hell or the grave, and now the clouds received Him, and the heavens are opened to make way for this King of glory to enter in. When Christ shall come

again, it is said that He shall come “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Mat 24:30). “Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mat 26:64). Which verifies that saying of the angel: “This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Act 1:11). He went up in clouds, and He shall come again in clouds.

5. He ascended with the sound of a trumpet; not on earth, sounding Hosanna, but in heaven crying Hallelujah—so the psalmist: “God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet” (Psa 47:5). Certainly, great joy was in heaven at Christ’s ascending thither; the very angels struck up their harps and welcomed Him thither with hymns and praises.

6. He ascended in triumph, as a Roman victor ascended to the capital, or as David ascended after his conquest up to Zion. Now we read of two triumphal¹ acts in Christ’s ascension, whereof the first was His leading of His captives, and the second was the dispensing of His gifts. The apostle and the psalmist join both together: “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Eph 4:8; Psa 68:18). (1) *He led them captive, who had captivated us.* Death was led captive without a sting; hell was led captive as one that had lost her victory; the Law was led captive, being rent and fastened to His cross...The serpent—[his] head being bruised—was led before Him in triumph, as was Goliath’s head by David returning from the victory. This was the first act of His triumph. (2) *He gave gifts unto men.* This was as the running of conduits with wine, or as the casting abroad of new coin, or as the shutting up of Christ’s triumph in His ascension up to heaven...

III. Where He ascended: The gospel tells us into heaven. Only Paul saith, that “he ascended up far above all heavens” (Eph 4:10). But the meaning is: He went above all these visible heavens into those heavenly mansions where the angels and the spirits of the just have their abode. Or, if the highest heavens be included, I see no absurdity in it. The highest heaven we usually call the kingdom of heaven, which is either heaven material or heaven spiritual. (1) *For the material heaven:* In some sense, He may be said to ascend above that both in respect of His body because the body of Christ is more glorious than any material heaven; and in respect of His soul because the soul of Christ is more blessed than all things else whatsoever. And, (2) *for the spiritual*

¹ **triumphal** – celebrating a triumph.

heaven, i.e., all angelic or heavenly perfections. He is said to ascend above them all, both in respect of His humiliation,² because He hath [lowered] Himself below all things and is therefore worthily exalted above all things; and in respect of His perfection, because the human nature of Christ is more excellent than any creature, being joined to the Godhead by a hypostatical union.³ There are some that understand this place of Christ's ascending "far above all heavens" not so much by a local motion, as by a spiritual mutation and exaltation of His person; as earth heightened unto a flame changeth not its place only, but form and figure; so the person of our Savior was raised to a greatness and glory vastly differing from and surmounting any image of things, visible or invisible, in this creation. So, it is fitly expressed, He was "made higher than the heavens" (Heb 7:26). He was heightened to a splendor, enlarged to a capacity, and compassed above the brightest, beyond the widest heavens! He transcended all in the spirituality of His ascension, but I will not much insist on that.

IV. Why He ascended: The reasons are, 1. On Christ's part, that through His passion He might pass to glory. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luk 24:26) ...God exalted Him above the grave in His resurrection, above the earth in His ascension, and above the heavens in placing Him at His right hand. And He ascended that all those prophecies that were foretold of Christ might be accomplished: "Thou hast ascended on high" (Psa 68:18); "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east" (Zec 14:4). The types of this were Enoch's translation, Elijah's ascension, Samson's transportation of the gates of Gaza into a high mountain, [and] the high priest's going into the holy of holies. "Seeing that we have a high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" (Heb 4:14). Why, all these prophecies, types, and figures must needs be accomplished. Therefore, on His part, it was necessary that Christ must ascend and go into heaven.

2. The reasons on our part are (1) *that in our stead, He might triumph over sin, death, and hell*. In His resurrection, He conquered; but in His ascension, He triumphed. Now it was that He led sin, death, and the devil in triumph at His chariot wheels! And this is the meaning of the

² **humiliation** – Q. Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist? A. Christ's humiliation consisted in His being born, and that in a low condition made under the Law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time. (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 26)

³ **hypostatical union** – union of full deity and full humanity in one person, Jesus Christ.

psalmist and of the apostle: “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive” (Eph 4:8). He vanquished and triumphed over all our enemies, He overcame the world, He bound the devil, He spoiled hell, He weakened sin, He destroyed death, and now He makes a public triumphal show of them in His own person. He led the captives bound to His chariot wheels, as the manner of the Roman triumphs⁴ was, when the conqueror went up to the capital. It is to the same purpose that the apostle speaks elsewhere: “Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col 2:15). It is a manifest allusion to the manner of triumphs after victories amongst the Romans. First, they spoiled the enemy upon the place, ere they stirred off the field—and this was done by Christ on the cross; and then they made a public triumphal show. They rode through the streets in the greatest state and had all their spoils carried before them; and the kings and nobles, whom they had taken, they tied to their chariots, and led them as captives. Thus did Christ at His ascension: then He openly triumphed in Himself—in His own power and strength. Other conquerors do not thus; they conquer not in themselves and by themselves; but Jesus Christ conquered in Himself, and therefore He triumphed in Himself. And though He triumphed in Himself and by Himself, it was not for Himself only, but for us, which made the apostle to triumph in His triumph: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Co 15:55-57). If I may speak out what I think was this victory of Christ, I believe it was that honor given to Him after His resurrection by the conversion of enemies, by the amazement of the world, by the admiration of angels, and especially by His sitting down at the right hand of the Majesty on high! For therein is contained both His exaltation and His triumph over all His enemies to the utmost. (2) *That He might lead us in the way and open to us the doors of glory.* It is a question whether ever those doors of heaven were opened to any before Christ’s ascension. Christ tells us, “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Joh 14:2-3). Some infer hence, as if there should be many outer courts and many different places or states in glory; and yet that there

⁴ **Roman triumphs** – (*Latin = triumphus*) spectacular civic and religious celebration parades in the city of Rome that were the highest honors bestowed upon a victorious general.

is one place whither the saints should arrive at last, which was not then ready for them and was not to be entered until the entrance of our Lord had made the preparation. Again, the apostle tells us that the fathers “received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:39-40). Whence some infer that their condition after death was a state of imperfection, and that they were placed in an outer court on this side [of] heaven called Paradise or Abraham’s bosom. Christ also went there when He died and was attended with the blessed thief...I see no ground why the souls of saints should be excluded [from] heaven, either before or after Christ. As for that text of John 14:2, Christ saith, “In my Father’s house are many mansions,” not many outer courts, not many different states; and as for the fathers mentioned, surely “they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:40). And we without them shall not be made perfect, in some sense, until the Day of Judgment.⁵ But our perfection is not in respect of a more glorious place, but in respect of that perfection whereof all the faithful shall be made partakers, as well in body as in soul, at the resurrection of the just. Thus far I grant that no soul ever entered heaven but by the virtue and power of Christ’s ascension; and that no soul and body jointly ever ascended (except Christ’s types) before Christ Himself opened those doors and led the way; and in this respect, He is called “the forerunner” of His people (Heb 6:20).

3. That He might assure us that now He had run through all those offices that He was to perform here on earth for our redemption: “he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his” (Heb 4:10). He was first to execute His office, and then to enter His rest, though He were a son. So, the inheritance was His own, “yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb 5:8-9). This was the argument that Christ used when He prayed to be glorified again with His Father: “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thy own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (Joh 17:4-5). This was the order of the dispensation of Christ’s offices: His first work was a work of ministry and service in the office of obedience and sufferings for His church; and His next work was the work of power and majesty in the protection and exaltation of His

⁵ See FGB 210, *Day of Judgment*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

church. And there was a necessity in this order. (1) *In respect of God's decree*, Who had so fore-appointed it (Act 2:23-24). (2) *In respect of God's justice*, which must first be satisfied by obedience before any entrance into glory (Luk 24:26). (3) *In respect of Christ's infinite person*, which being equal with God, could not possibly be exalted without some preceding descent and humiliation: "That he ascended [saith the apostle], what is it, but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" (Eph 4:9). (4) *In respect of our evidence and assurance*, this is the sign that Christ hath finished the work of our redemption upon the earth: first, He was to act as our surety, and then He was to ascend as our head or advocate—as the firstfruits, the captain, the prince of life, the author of salvation, the forerunner of His people.

4. That He might thoroughly convince the world of believers of their perfect righteousness: The Spirit—"when he is come," saith Christ—"will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more" (Joh 16:8-10). If Christ had not fulfilled all righteousness, there had been no going to heaven for Him nor remaining there. Certainly, God would have sent Him down again to have done the rest, and the disciples should have seen Him with shame sent back again. But His ascension to heaven proclaims openly (1) *that He hath completely finished the work He had to do for us here*, that no more was to be done in this world for us, that the satisfactory work to justice was in itself finished. (2) *That God was well pleased with Jesus Christ and with what He had done and suffered for us*. Yea, God was so infinitely taken with Him and His oblation⁶ after His sufferings that He thought it not fit to let Him stay above forty days longer in this world. He could not be without Him in heaven, but He took Him up into glory and gave Him a name above every name. (3) *That we have our share in heaven with Him*. He went not up as a single person, but virtually, or mystically, He carried up all the elect with Him into glory; otherwise, how should the Spirit convince the world by His ascension of their righteousness?—or otherwise how should the Son of God convince His Father of the righteousness? I look upon Jesus Christ going into heaven, as a confident debtor after payment going into a court and saying, "Who hath anything to lay to his charge? All is paid, let the Law take its course." When Jesus entered heaven, He seemed thus to challenge justice, "Make room here for Me and Mine—Who should hinder? Hath the Law anything to say to these poor souls for whom I

⁶ **oblation** – something offered to God; in this case, Jesus sacrificed His life for His people.

died? If any in heaven can make objection, here I am to answer in their behalf." Methinks, I imagine a "silence in heaven" (Rev 8:1), (as John speaks) at this speech; only mercy smiles, justice gives in the acquittance, and God sets Christ down at His right hand. (4) *That He hath a new design to be acted in heaven for us.* He is taken up into glory that He may act gloriously the second part of our righteousness; I mean that He might apply it and send down His Spirit to convince us of it. He acted one part in the flesh, in the habit of a beggar, clothed with rags; but now He is gone to act the person of a prince in robes of glory, and all this to manage our salvation in the richest way that may be! Three great things Christ acts for us now in glory. First, He is in place of an advocate for us: "He ever liveth to make intercession for [us]" (Heb 7:25). He is always begging of favor and love for us. He lies there to stop whatever plea may be brought in against us by the devil or Law; yea, He is there to get out fresh pardon for new sins. Secondly, He is the great provider and caterer for us. He is laying in a great stock and store of glory for us against we come there: "In my Father's house are many mansions...I go to prepare a place for you" (Joh 14:2). Jesus Christ went before to take up God's heart for us, and now He is drawing out the riches of love from God His Father, and laying them in bank for us, which made the apostle say, "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phi 4:19). Thirdly, He sends down His Spirit to convince us that Christ's righteousness is ours. Indeed, the means of procuring this was the life and death of Christ, but the means of applying this righteousness are those following acts of Christ's resurrection, ascension, session, intercession, etc. By His death He obtained righteousness for us; but by His ascension, He applies righteousness to us Now it is that in special manner He convinceth us of righteousness because He is gone to His Father, and we shall see Him no more. (5) *That He might receive His Kingdom over us in the place appointed for it.* As kings are crowned in the chief cities of their kingdoms and keep their residence in their palaces near unto them, so it was [fitting] that our Savior should be crowned in heaven and there sit down at God's right hand, which immediately follows His ascension.

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Isaac Ambrose (1604-1664): Anglican, then Presbyterian minister; born in Ormskirk, Lancashire, England, UK.



CHRIST AT GOD'S RIGHT HAND

William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

HIS sitting at the right hand of God: This is the third measure of our Lord's reward—the third step in His exaltation. This was required by prophecy. David had said: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Psa 110:1; cf. Luk 20:42; Heb 1:13). Both Peter and Paul prove that this applies to Christ. Christ Himself foretold the same thing when He was in the hands of His murderers: "Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God" (Luk 22:69).

This session at the right hand of God is much spoken of in Scripture. Mark says, He "sat on the right hand of God" (Mar 16:19). Paul says, God "set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:20). Peter says, He "is on the right hand of God" (1Pe 3:22).

1. The question then arises, What is the import of the phrase, "sitting at the right hand"? The word *sitting* does not teach that our Lord's body is always in a sitting posture. Indeed, mere posture is not referred to at all. Peter and Paul, each once, simply say He "is at the right hand of God" (Rom 8:34; 1Pe 3:22). And Stephen, dying, saw "the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Act 7:56). Standing is a posture in which one is ready to receive another or give him assistance. This was just what Stephen needed.

(1) The first thing taught by Christ's sitting at the right hand of God is that He now has quiet repose. He "is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works" (Heb 4:10). Thus says Micah: "They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid" (Mic 4:4). So in Revelation: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev 3:21). It is right that after toil should come rest; after war, peace. After the conflict, both Christ and His people rest from their labors and sorrows.

(2) The term *sitting* also denotes permanency of abode and possession. Thus it is said, "Asher continued [literally, sat] on the sea shore" (Jud 5:17); that is, he had permanent possession of that country. Christ has rest and a permanent abode and a rightful possession in heaven.

(3) Sitting also expresses authority and dominion. “Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Psa 110:1), is parallel to “He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet” (1Co 15:25). It is not meet that the king should stand in the presence of his subjects, even of those admitted nearest to his throne.

(4) Sitting is also a fit posture for a judge. Solomon speaks of “a king that sitteth in the throne of judgment” (Pro 20:8). Speaking of Christ, Isaiah says, “In mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness” (Isa 16:5). And “he shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth” (Isa 42:4); yea, “he shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor” (Psa 72:4).

2. Sitting, being, or standing at the right hand is figurative. God has no bodily parts. He uses such language in condescension to human weakness. The figure is one of frequent use in the Scriptures. Jacob put his right hand on the head of Joseph’s younger son wittingly, to give him the greater blessing. In Psalm 80:17 are these words: “Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.” What is the import of the figure?

(1) The hands are the chief instruments of human bodily power, and by reason of use the right hand is commonly the stronger of the two. It is a fit emblem of strength and is often used to denote the almighty power of God. Thus, in Moses’ song: “Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy” (Exo 15:6). So, Jesus Christ at the right hand of God has all power. He is able to do all His will.

(2) With the right hand, gifts were commonly bestowed and received. So, when Christ ascended on high, He received gifts for men, and for Himself glory and dominion (Eph 4:8).

(3) The right hand of regal power is by men esteemed a place of enjoyment. As such, it is much sought after. So, in Psalm 16:11, which much relates to Christ, we read: “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” Our Savior is no longer “a man of sorrows” (Isa 53:3). Grief reaches Him no more.

(4) The right hand, according to Hebrew ideas, is the post of honor. When Solomon would confer peculiar honor on his mother, he caused her to sit on the right hand of his throne (1Ki 2:19). To say that Christ is on the right hand of God is to declare that He is exalted by

His Father to great dignity and glory. This corresponds with the declaration of Paul in Philippians 2:9. Our translation is, "God...hath highly exalted him." The Syriac is, "God hath multiplied His sublimity." The Arabic is, "God hath heightened Him with a height." Justin renders it, "God hath famously exalted Him." God has heard His prayer and glorified Him with Himself, with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. Yes, "we see Jesus crowned with glory and honor" (Joh 17:5; Heb 2:9). To a higher degree of rest, rule, bliss, favor, power, and majesty, Christ could not be raised.

In this glorious state, Jesus Christ executes all the mediatorial offices. He is the great Prophet of the church. With Him is the residue of the Spirit. By His Spirit He convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (Joh 16:8). We may not say, as some do, that the Spirit was purchased by Christ, much less that He is the minister of Christ. The Holy Ghost is "free" (Psa 51:12). He has no guide or counsellor. He is equal with the Father and the Son. He is sovereign in all His acts (1Co 12:11). He cannot be purchased with money, tears, or blood. But there is a glorious harmony in the counsels of the Trinity. The Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son. There is no diversity of counsel or of will in the Godhead. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said, Jesus, "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Act 2:33). So, the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Christ. He enlightens our minds, works faith in us, and saves us. Christ also raises up, qualifies, and sends forth every real, genuine gospel minister. He is head over all things to the church.

In His exalted state, Christ continues to be our Priest. He makes, indeed, no more offerings; but He gloriously intercedes for us. The glory of His intercession may be learned from these facts: 1. The person of the intercessor is ineffably gracious; 2. He is the delight of His Father; 3. His intercession is full of authority; 4. It always prevails; 5. It is alone; 6. It continues forever.

In His exaltation, Christ is also a King. In this, His great glory is 1. His kingdom is spiritual, and so has its seat in the hearts of His people. 2. It is wholly ordered in truth, equity, and righteousness. 3. It is as stable as the throne of God. 4. It is forever and ever.

1. We have a right to expect the conversion of all God's chosen. Native depravity and long-continued habits of sinning may seem to render a change of heart hopeless; but because Christ is sitting at God's right hand, His people shall be willing in the day of His power (Psa 110:1, 3).

2. There will be no failure in the completion of all God's plans and schemes: "The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen...He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head" (Psa 110:5-7).

3. The church is safe. Her Head is exalted, and He loves her and bought her with His blood. He has graven her on the palms of His hands. Her success depends on an arm full of power, on grace that is infinite, on intercession never unavailing. Humble and exclusive confidence in the Captain of our salvation can never be disappointed.

4. To what a glorious state believers in Christ are rapidly tending! Heaven, "the heaven of heavens," "the third heaven," "paradise," "the new Jerusalem," [and] "the city of my God" (Deu 10:14; 2Co 12:2; Luk 23:43; Rev 3:12) are some of the names by which the glory of "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb 12:23) is shadowed forth. The glory of that blessed world is that "the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev 21:23). "We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1Jo 3:2). Our vile bodies shall "be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phi 3:21). We shall be forever with the Lord.

5. Hearty and universal submission and obedience to Christ are both reasonable and obligatory. Submit we must, either joyfully unto salvation, or reluctantly unto destruction. Now men may affect, and even feel, contempt for religion and its Author; but those are shallow thinkers who do not know that inconsiderate courage soon gives way to appalling dismay, while sober apprehension prepares the mind for the worst. No cries for mercy will be louder, no shrieks of anguish will be more piercing, no moanings of despair will be more heart-rending than those uttered at the last by men who all their lives made light of eternal things. If you are yet in your sins, one of two things is true—either your conscience is at perpetual and fearful war with your practice, or you have embraced some error that strips life of dignity and death of hope.

From *Rock of Our Salvation: A Treatise Respecting the Natures, Person, Offices, Work, Sufferings, and Glory of Jesus Christ*, Sprinkle Publications,
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William S. Plumer (1802-1880): American Presbyterian minister and author; born in Greensburg, PA, USA.



CHRIST'S HEAVENLY SESSION

John Gill (1697-1771)

THIS follows upon the resurrection and ascension of Christ to heaven. It is in this order things stand according to the Scriptures: Christ was first raised from the dead; then He went to heaven, and was received up into it; and then sat down at the right hand of God (Eph 1:20; 1Pe 3:22)....

I. It was foretold in prophecy that Christ should sit at the right hand of God. Hence, it may be thought that in prophetic language, and by anticipation, He is called *the man of God's right hand* (Psa 80:17)... because when He had done His work on earth, He should be received to heaven and placed at the right hand of God. Of [this,] there is a plain promise and prophecy in Psalm 110:1: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand"...Angels, authorities, and powers are subject to Him Who sits at the right hand of God (1Pe 3:22), and Who is the Messiah, Christ, the Son of God, of Whom the text in the Psalms is spoken. [This] was understood by the ancient Jews and even by the Jews in Christ's time, as is clear from Matthew 22:42-45, where Christ puts a question to which they could give no answer. [They] were non-plussed and confounded; but could they have given or had they known any other sense of the words, they could easily have made answer by denying they belonged to the Messiah, but to some other person, and so have freed themselves from the embarrassment they were in. But they knew that this was the universal and acknowledged sense of their nation. The words were spoken by Jehovah the Father to His Son in the everlasting council¹ and covenant of grace—even to Him Who was David's Lord. Christ Himself also foretold that He should sit down at the right hand of God: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power" (Mat 26:64).

II. It is fact: Christ is set down at the right hand of God, and the above prophecies are fulfilled. The evidences of this fact are (1) The effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, after Christ had ascended and took His place at the right hand of God. The Spirit was not given until He was glorified in heaven, by His session there at God's right hand; upon which, "having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see

¹ See FGB 236, *God's Eternal Purpose*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

and hear” (Act 2:33), says the apostle. And again, “And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him” (Act 5:32), on His exaltation at the right hand of God. (2) Stephen, the proto-martyr, while he was suffering, was an eyewitness of this. He saw Christ at the right hand of God, and declared to the Jews that stoned him, that he did see Him—only with this difference: in all other places Christ is spoken of as sitting; but Stephen saw Him standing at the right hand of God (Act 7:55-56); having risen up, as it were, from His seat, to show His resentment at the usage of His servant; but this circumstance makes no difference, nor creates any objection to the thing itself, which is, Christ’s being exalted in human nature, at the right hand of God. I shall endeavor to explain this article and show,

III. What is meant by the right hand of God, by sitting at it, how long Christ will sit there, and what the use and benefits of His session there are to His people.

1. **What is meant by the right hand of God, at which Christ is said to sit.**² This is variously expressed: sometimes by “the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2); sometimes by “the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb 8:1); and elsewhere by “the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3). By *Majesty* is meant God Himself, as it is in some of these passages. This is also clear from other passages: to God belong “glory and majesty” (Jude 1:25); “with God is terrible majesty” (Job 37:22). Majesty is not only before Him, but He is clothed with it (Psa 96:6; 93:1). By *His Throne*, heaven is sometimes meant—there He especially displays His majesty and glory. The throne represents Him that sits upon it, and God and His throne are said to be “on high,” “in the heavens,” and “in heavenly places.” For though God is everywhere, His majesty and glory are most conspicuous in heaven. And there the human nature of Christ is—at God’s right hand, and He will continue there until His second coming. The *right hand of God* is not to be taken in a literal sense, but figuratively. It signifies the power of God and its exertion (Psa 89:13; 118:16) and is such a glorious perfection of God that it is sometimes put for God Himself, even when this article of Christ’s session at His right hand is expressed (Mat 26:64).

2. What is meant by Christ’s sitting at God’s right hand:

(1) It is expressive of great honor and dignity. The allusion is to kings and great personages, who, to their favorites and to whom they

² This paragraph and the next have been significantly edited for modern readers.

would do an honor when they come into their presence, place them at their right hand. So, Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, when she came with a petition to him, he caused her to sit on a seat on his right hand (1Ki 2:19). In allusion to this, the queen—the church—is said to stand on the right hand of Christ (Psa 45:9). This supposes such a person, [who is] next in honor and dignity to the king, [just as] Christ under this consideration is to the Majesty on high, on Whose right hand He sits. Therefore, it is not to be understood with respect to His divine nature, abstractly considered, or as a divine person. For as such, He is Jehovah's Fellow, Who "thought it not robbery to be equal with God" (Phi 2:6). Nor is it with respect to His human nature merely and of any communication of the divine perfections to it. For though the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him, yet this is not communicated to or transfused into His human nature, as to make it omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, or equal to God, or give it a right to sit on His right hand. This is to be understood of Him as Mediator with respect to *both* natures. In that office capacity, Christ is inferior to His Father, and His Father is greater than He (Joh 14:28) because Christ's power in heaven and in earth was given to Him by His Father. Christ was made subject to His Father, Who put all things under Him by placing Him at His right hand. There, Christ is next to His Father in His office as Mediator.

(2) It is expressive of His government and dominion over all; for this phrase of sitting at the right hand of God is explained by reigning or ruling. It follows, in the original text, as explanative of it: "Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies" (Psa 110:2), and so the apostle interprets it in 1 Corinthians 15:25. Now this government and dominion is not to be understood of what is natural to Christ and common to Him with the other two divine Persons. The kingdom of nature and providence equally belongs to Him as to His divine Father, of Whom He says, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (Joh 5:17); [He works] jointly with Him, having the same power, operation, and influence in all things He has. But [this means] His mediatorial kingdom and government, which dominion, glory, and kingdom were given to Him and received from the Ancient of days. [This is] a delegated kingdom for the administration of which He is accountable to His Father. [He] will deliver it up to Him, when completed. In respect of [this,] He may be said to sit at the right hand of God and to be next unto Him in power and authority, yet superior to all created beings of the highest form and of the greatest name, which are all subject to Him (Eph 1:20-21).

(3) Sitting at the right hand of God supposes Christ has done His work, and that to satisfaction and with acceptance, as the work of redemption, which was given Him; and He undertook, came to work out, and has finished. Upon which He “entered in once into the holy place” (Heb 9:12), that is, into heaven; and the work of making atonement for sin, reconciliation for iniquity, and full satisfaction for it, which was cut out in council and covenant for Him and He agreed to do. Having done it, [He] “sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb 10:12). And, the work of bringing in an everlasting righteousness, for the justification of His people: this He engaged to do, and for this end came into the world. [He has] become the end of the Law for righteousness, to everyone that believes; and being raised from the dead for our justification and gone to heaven (Rom 4:25), [He] “is at the right hand of God” (Rom 8:33-34), which the apostle observes for the strengthening of his own faith and the faith of others with respect to their full acquittance and complete justification before God. All which and more He has done with acceptance. God is well-pleased with His righteousness because the Law is by it magnified and made honorable; His sacrifice is of a sweet-smelling savor to God. All being done [that] He agreed to do to entire satisfaction, He was received up into heaven with a welcome; and as a token of it, placed at God’s right hand.

(4) Sitting at God’s right hand supposes ease and rest from labor. For Christ, upon His resurrection and ascension to heaven, came into the presence of God, in Whose presence is fullness of joy and at Whose right hand are pleasures for evermore (Psa 16:11). When He was made glad with the light of His countenance and when having entered His rest, He ceased from His works, as God did from His at creation (Heb 4:10). Not that Christ ceased to act for His people in heaven when [He sat] down at the right hand of God, for He passed into the heavens for them, for their service and good. He entered as the forerunner for them and appears in the presence of God for them and, as their high priest, transacts all affairs for them and ever lives to make intercession for them. But He ceases now from His toilsome and laborious work; for though it was His Father’s business—which He voluntarily engaged in and it was His meat and drink to do—it was very fatiguing, not merely in going about continually to do good to the bodies and souls of men, but in the labor and travail of His soul when He bore the wrath of God and endured the curse of the Law in His sufferings and death. Now, being freed and eased from all this, He sits down and looks with pleasure on all that He has done. As God, when He had finished the works of creation, took a survey of them and saw they were all very good and

then rested from His works, so Christ, with pleasure, sits and sees the travail of His soul, the blessings of grace through His blood applied to His people, and a continued succession of a seed to serve Him, who, ere long, will be all with Him where He is and behold His glory. [This] is the joy that was set before Him when He suffered for them.

(5) Sitting denotes continuance. Christ sits as a priest upon His throne and abides continually: the priests under the Law did not abide continually by reason of death; but Christ lives forever and has an unchangeable priesthood. They stood daily offering the same sacrifices because sin was not effectually put away by them. But Christ, by one offering, has made full and perfect expiation for sin and therefore is set down and continues to do the other part of His priestly office as an intercessor, to see the efficacy of His sacrifice take place. He also sits King forever: His throne is for ever and ever, and His kingdom [is] an everlasting kingdom, of which, and the peace thereof, there shall be no end. Which leads,

3. To observe how long Christ will sit at the right hand of God: namely, until all enemies are put under His feet and made His footstool. It began at His ascension to heaven and not before. The Word, *the Son of God*, was with God in the beginning from all eternity, was coeternal with Him, and had a glory with Him before the world was. But He is never said to sit at the right hand of God until after His incarnation, death, resurrection from the dead, and ascension to heaven. Then, and not before, He took His place at the right hand of God, where He will continue until His second coming, when all enemies shall be subdued under Him. Some are subdued already, [such as] sin, which is made an end of; the devil, who is destroyed; and the world, which is overcome by Him. Others remain to be destroyed. All are not yet put under Him, [such as] the man of sin and son of perdition, who will be destroyed with the breath of His mouth; the anti-christian kings, who will be gathered to the battle at Armageddon and slain; the beast and the false prophet, who will be cast into the burning lake. Now Christ sits and reigns until all these are vanquished and the last enemy destroyed, which is death.

4. The use of Christ's session at the right hand of God to His people and the benefits and blessings arising from thence to them are,

(1) Protection from all their enemies. Being raised and set down at the right hand of God, He has a name, power, and authority over all principalities and powers, might and dominion, in this world and that to come. All things are put under His feet, and He is given to be a Head over all things to the church. All are put into His hands, to

subserve His own interest and the interest of His people; He has all power in heaven and in earth given Him, and which He uses for their good, and for the protection of them from all evil.

(2) In consequence of this is freedom from fear of all enemies. Some are destroyed already; those that remain will be. So, there is nothing to be feared from them by those that believe in Jesus (1Co 15:25-27).

(3) The perpetual and prevalent intercession of Christ on the behalf of His chosen ones is another benefit arising from His session at the right hand of God. There He sits as their High Priest and, being made higher than the heavens, ever lives to make intercession for them by representing their persons, presenting their petitions, and pleading their cause. Though Satan sometimes stands at their right hand to resist and accuse them, Christ sits at the right hand of God as their advocate with the Father to rebuke him, answer to, and remove his charges. In view of this, every saint may say with the apostle, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" (Rom 8:33).

(4) Hence, [saints have] great encouragement to come with boldness and freedom to the throne of grace. Since we have such a High Priest Who is passed into the heavens for us, is our forerunner for us entered, appears in the presence of God for us, is on the throne of glory, and at the right hand of God to speak a good word for us, this serves to draw up our hearts heavenwards, to seek things above where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God and to set our affections on things in heaven, not on things on earth (Heb 4:14-16).

(5) This raises the expectation of the saints with respect to Christ's second coming and gives them assurance of it. Christ sits at the right hand of God, expecting until His enemies be made His footstool; and they look for and expect Him from heaven, Who is gone thither to prepare a place for them. [He] has assured them that He will come again and take them to Himself that where He is, they may be also, and sit upon the same throne and be forever with Him (Heb 10:12-13; Joh 14:2-3; 1Th 4:16-18).

From *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*,
Vol. 1, 596-601, in the public domain.

John Gill (1697-1771): Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar; born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, England, UK.



CHRIST'S INTERCESSION

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

CHRISt's intercession: Here is the grand climax. First, Christ made a complete atonement for the sins of His people. Next, He rose from the dead in proof that His sacrifice was accepted by God. Then He was advanced to the place of supreme honor and power in reward of His undertaking. And now He...asks for His people the benefits He purchased for them. The inexpressible blessedness of this appears in the above order. How many who have been suddenly elevated from poverty to wealth, from ignominy to honor, from weakness to power, promptly forget their former associates and friends? Not so the Lord Jesus. Though exalted to inconceivable dignity and dominion, though crowned with unrivalled honor and glory, yet this made no difference in the affections of Christ toward His people left here in this world. His love for them is unabated, His care of and concern for His church undiminished. The good will of the Savior unto His own remains unchanged.

The ascended Christ is not wrapped up in His own enthronement but is still occupied with the wellbeing of His people, maintaining their interests, seeking their good: "He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25). He knows they are weak and helpless in themselves and are surrounded by those desiring and seeking their destruction; and therefore does He pray, "I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me" (Joh 17:11). He bases that request on the finished work by which He glorified God (17:4). The plea that our great High Priest urges cannot rest upon our merit, for we have none. It is not in recognition of our worthiness, for we are destitute of such. Nor does our wretchedness furnish the reason that the Intercessor urges on our behalf, for that very wretchedness has been brought upon us by our sins. There are no considerations personal to ourselves that Christ can plead on our behalf. No, His all-sufficient sacrifice is the alone plea, and that must prevail. Christ intercedes in heaven because He died for us on earth (Heb 9:24-25).

If left entirely to themselves believers would perish. Temptations and tribulations from without and corruptions from within would prove too strong for them, and therefore does Christ make interces-

sion on their behalf, that God would grant them such supplies of grace and pardoning mercy that they will be preserved from total apostasy. It is not that He prays they may be kept from sin absolutely, but from a fatal and final departure from God. This is evident from the case of the eleven on the night of His betrayal: not one only, but *all of them* “forsook him and fled” (Mat 26:56). It was the [prevailing power] of His intercession that brought them back again. That was made more especially evident in the case of Peter. The Lord Jesus foresaw and announced that he would deny Him thrice (and lower than that it would seem a Christian cannot fall), yet He prayed that his faith should fail not: nor did it—it worked by love (Gal 5:6) and produced repentance.

That for which our great High Priest particularly asks is the continuance of our believing...The very thing Christ does pray for is “that thy faith fail not” (Luk 22:32)—for the continuance of a living faith. For where that is, there will be good works. And that for which Christ asks must be performed: not only because He is the Son of God (and therefore could ask for nothing contrary to the Father’s will), but because His intercession is based upon His sacrifice. He pleads His own merits and [pleads] only for those things that He has purchased for His people—the things to which they are entitled.

That for which Christ intercedes is clearly revealed in John 17: it is for the preservation, unification, sanctification, and glorification of His people. The substance of His petitions is found in verse 11, where (in effect) He says, “Holy Father, Thou art concerned for each of these persons and hast been viewing them with unspeakable satisfaction from everlasting. Thou gavest them Me as a special expression of Thy love; My heart is set upon them, and My soul delighteth in them because they are Mine by Thy free donation. As I am going to leave them behind Me and they are weak and defenseless in themselves, exposed to many enemies and temptations, I pray Thee keep them. Let them have the person of the Holy Spirit to indwell them; let Him renew their spiritual life and graces day by day; let Him preserve them in Thy sacred Truth.” That prayer will be fully answered when Christ will “present [them] to himself a glorious church” (Eph 5:27).

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, Nov. 1942, 24-26,
available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.



HE HATH SHED FORTH THIS

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

THE Holy Spirit, or the Third Person of the Trinity in His operations and fruits, is the sum of the blessings that Christ purchases for us in the work of our redemption.

Evidences of the Doctrine: This is plainly taught in the text we are upon. But further, *First*, the Holy Spirit is the great subject of the promises in the covenant God has entered, relating to man's redemption. The Spirit of God is spoken of as the great thing promised by God the Father to the Son in the covenant of redemption: "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luk 24:49). "And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me" (Act 1:4). "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Act 2:33). "And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever" (Isa 59:20-21).

A further evidence is the great promise of the covenant of grace made by Christ to believers. So in the text, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Act 2:38-39).

A further evidence is [the term] *the Spirit of promise*. "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Eph 1:13).

Second, [the Holy Spirit is] the great legacy that Christ left to His church at His death.

Third, [the outpouring of the Spirit] is insisted on by the prophets as the grand blessing, wherein should consist that blessedness and

glory that the church should be brought to in the latter days by the Messiah. “Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest” (Isa 32:15). “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa 44:3). “And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Eze 36:27). “Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD” (Eze 39:29). “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joe 2:28).

Fourth, this is represented as that wherein the communicative fullness of Christ consists: “full of grace” (Joh 1:14); “of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (1:16). That was by His being full of the Spirit. The Father “giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him” (Joh 3:34). God the Father gave the Son His fullness by appointing Him. Saints are made holy and happy by His unctions flowing down: “It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of His garments” (Psa 133:2). This is that which Christ communicates as a vital head.

Fifth, this is represented as the great blessing Christ received for believers at His ascension into heaven. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away” (Joh 16:7). “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost...” (Act 2:33).

Sixth, Christ’s own exaltation and glory He received as His reward and is represented as chiefly consisting in it. “God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness” (Psa 45:7); “Thou shalt make them drink of the rivers of thy pleasures” (Psa 36:8).

Seventh, this was the great blessing actually bestowed, whereby Christ’s promised success was fulfilled after He had finished the work of our redemption. “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Eph 4:8).

Eighth, this is spoken of as the sum of all good things that we have to pray for. “How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luk 11:13). “How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Mat 7:11).

Ninth, 'tis by the Spirit of God that God dwells in believers and is bestowed on them as their portion.

Tenth, what the saints have of the Spirit of God in this world is spoken of as the earnest of that inheritance Christ purchases for them. "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:13-14). "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2Co 1:20-22). "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit" (2Co 5:4-5).

Eleventh, we are spoken of as being made partakers of Christ's body and blood, by our receiving this, etc. "The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (Joh 6:53). "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (v 63).

Twelfth, [the work of the Spirit summarizes] all the great blessings insisted on in the offers and invitations of the gospel. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (Joh 7:37-38). "And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely" (Rev 21:6). "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa 55:1).

From "The Holy Spirit the Sum of the Blessings Purchased for Us by Christ,"
in *Jonathan Edwards' Sermons*, ed. Tom Koontz (New Haven, CT: The
Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 1746), Gal 3:13-14.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758): American Congregational preacher and theologian; born in East Windsor, Connecticut Colony, USA.



WHY DID JESUS ASCEND?

John Flavel (c. 1630-1691)

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.—John 20:17

WHY did Christ ascend? I answer: His ascension was necessary upon many and great accounts. For, *first*, if Christ had not ascended, He could not have interceded, as now He doth in heaven for us. And do but take away Christ's intercession, and you starve the hope of the saints. For what have we to succor ourselves when under the daily surprises of sin, but this: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father" (1Jo 2:1). Mark that: "*with the Father*"—a friend upon the place: One that abides there on purpose to transact all our affairs and as a surety for the peace betwixt God and us.

Secondly, if Christ had not ascended, you could not have entered heaven when you die. For He went "to prepare a place for you" (Joh 14:2). He was, as I said before, the first that entered heaven directly, and in His own name; and had He not done so, we would not have entered when we die, in His name. The Forerunner made way for all that are coming on, in their several generations, after Him. Nor could your bodies have ascended after their resurrection but in the virtue of Christ's ascension. For He ascended, as was said before, in the capacity of our head and representative, to His Father and our Father: for us and Himself too.

Thirdly, if Christ had not ascended, He could not have been inaugurated and installed in the glory He now enjoys in heaven. This world is not the place where perfect felicity and glory dwell. And then, how had the promise of the Father been made good to Him? Or our glory, (which consists in being with, and conformed to Him), where had it been? "Ought not Christ to have suffered...and to enter into his glory?" (Luk 24:26).

Fourthly, if Christ had not ascended, how could we have been satisfied that His payment on the cross made full satisfaction to God, and that now God hath no more bills to bring in against us? How is it that the Spirit convinceth the world of righteousness (Joh 16:8-10), but from Christ's going to the Father and returning hither no more?

[This] gives evidence of God's full content and satisfaction, both with His person and work.

Fifthly, how should we have enjoyed the great blessings of the Spirit and ordinances if Christ had not ascended? And surely, we could not have been without either. If Christ had not gone away, the Comforter had not come (Joh 16:7). He begins where Christ had finished. For He takes of His and shows it to us (Joh 16:14). And therefore, it is said, "The Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (Joh 7:39). He was then given as a sanctifying spirit, but not given in that measure, as afterwards He was, to furnish and qualify men with gifts for service. And indeed, by Christ's ascension, both [the Spirit's] sanctifying and ministering gifts were shed forth more commonly and more abundantly upon men. These fell from [Christ] when He ascended, as Elijah's mantle did from him, so that whatsoever good of conversion, edification, support, or comfort you receive from spiritual ordinances, He hath shed forth that which you now see and feel. It is the fruit of Christ's ascension.

Sixthly, and *lastly*, if Christ had not ascended, how had all the types and prophecies that prefigured and foretold it been fulfilled? "And the scripture cannot be broken" (Joh 10:35). So that, upon all these accounts, it was expedient that He should go away. It was for His glory and for our advantage. Though we lost the comfort of His bodily presence by it, yet if we loved Him, we would rejoice He went to the Father (Joh 14:28). We ought to have rejoiced in His advancement, though it had been to our loss; but when it is so much for our benefit, as well as His glory, it is a matter of joy on both sides that He is ascended to His Father and our Father, to His God and our God. From the several blessings flowing to us out of Christ's ascension, it was that He charged His people not to be troubled at His leaving of them (Joh 14). And hence learn,

Inference 1: Did Christ ascend into heaven? Is our Jesus, our treasure, indeed there? Where, then, should the hearts of believers be, but in heaven, where their Lord, their life, is? Surely, saints, it is not good that your love and your Lord should be in two several¹ countries, said one that is now with Him. Up, and hasten after your lover, that He and you may be together. Christians, you ascended with Him, virtually, when He ascended; you shall ascend to Him, personally, hereafter. Oh, that you would ascend to Him, spiritually, in acts of faith, love, and desires daily. "Up with your hearts" was the form used by the

¹ **several** – separate.

ancient church at the sacrament. How good it would be if we could say with the apostle, “Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour” (Phi 3:20)! A heart ascendant is the best evidence of your interest in Christ’s ascension.

Inference 2: Did Christ go to heaven as a forerunner? What haste should we make to follow Him? He ran to heaven; He ran thither before us. Did He run to glory, and shall we linger? Did He flee as an eagle towards heaven, and we creep like snails? Come Christians: “Lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus” (Heb 12:1-2). The Captain of our salvation is entered within the gates of the new Jerusalem, and calls to us out of heaven to hasten to Him, proposing the greatest encouragements to them that are following after Him, saying, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Rev 3:21). How tedious should it seem to us to live so long at a distance from our Lord Jesus!

Inference 3: Did Christ ascend so triumphantly, leading captivity captive? How little reason, then, have believers to fear their conquered enemies? Sin, Satan, and every enemy were in that day led away in triumph, dragged at Christ’s chariot wheels, brought after Him as it were in chains. It is a lovely sight to see the necks of those tyrants under the foot of our Joshua. He made, at that day, an open “shew of them” (Col 2:15). Their strength is broken forever. In this He shewed Himself more than a conqueror; for He *conquered and triumphed too*. Satan was then trod under His feet, and He hath promised to tread him under our feet also, and that shortly (Rom 16:20). Some power our enemies yet retain: the serpent may bruise our heel, but Christ hath crushed his head.

Inference 4: Did Christ ascend so munificently,² shedding forth so many mercies upon His people, mercies of inestimable value reserved on purpose to adorn that day? O then see that you abuse not those precious ascension gifts of Christ, but value and improve them as the choicest mercies. Now, the ascension gifts, as I told you, are either the ordinances and officers of the church (for He then gave them pastors and teachers) or the Spirit that furnished the church with all its gifts. Beware you abuse not either of these.

First, Abuse not the ordinances and officers of Christ. This is a sin that no nation is plunged deeper into the guilt of than this nation,

² **munificently** – liberally; generously.

and no age more than this. Surely God hath written to us the great things of His law, and we have accounted them small things. We have been loose, wanton, skeptical professors for the most part that have had nice and coy stomachs³ that could not relish plain, wholesome truths, except so and so modified to our humors. For this the Lord hath a controversy with the nation, and by a sore judgment, He hath begun to rebuke this sin already. And I doubt not, before He make an end, plain truths will down with us, and we shall bless God for them.

Secondly, but in the next place, see that you abuse not the Spirit, Whom God sent from heaven at His ascension, to supply His bodily absence among us, and is the great pledge of His care for, and tender love to His people. Now, take heed that you do not vex Him by your disobedience; nor grieve Him by your unkindnesses; nor quench Him by your sinful neglects of duty or abuse of light. Oh, deal kindly with the Spirit, and obey His voice: comply with His designs, and yield up yourselves to His guidance and conduct. Methinks, to be entreated by the love of the Spirit (Rom 15:30) should be as great an argument as to be entreated for Christ's sake. Now, to persuade all the saints to be tender of grieving the Spirit by sin, let me urge a few considerations proper to the point under hand.

Consideration 1: *First, He was the first and principal mercy that Christ received for you at His first entrance into heaven.* It was the first thing He asked of God when He came to heaven. So He speaks, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you" (Joh 14:16). No sooner had He set foot upon the place, but the first thing, the great thing that was upon His heart to ask the Father for us, was that the Spirit might forthwith be dispatched and sent down to His people. So that the Spirit is *the first-born of mercies* and deserves the first place in our hearts and esteem.

Consideration 2: *Secondly, the Spirit comes not in His own name to us* (though, if so, He deserves a dear welcome for His own sake and for the benefits we receive by Him, which are inestimable), *but He comes to us in the name and in the love both of the Father and the Son*, as one authorized and delegated by them, bringing His credentials under both their hands and seals. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father" (Joh 15:26). Mark, [Christ] will send Him from the Father; and in John 14:26, the Father is said to send Him in Christ's name. So that He is the messenger that comes from both these great and holy persons. And if you have any love for

³ nice and coy stomachs – unmanly and reluctant dispositions.

the God that made you, any kindness for the Christ that died for you, show it by your obedience to the Spirit that comes from Them both, and in both Their names to us, and Who will be offended and grieved, if you grieve Him. Oh, therefore give Him an [reception] worthy of One that comes to you in the name of the Lord: in the Father's name, and in the Son's name.

Consideration 3: *Thirdly*, but that is not the only consideration that should cause you to beware of grieving the Spirit—because He is sent in the name of such great and dear persons to you—but He deserves better [reception] than any of the saints give Him for His own sake and upon His own account, and that upon a double score, viz.⁴ of His nature and office.

First, on the account of His nature, for He is God co-equal with the Father and Son in nature and dignity. “The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me” (2Sa 23:2-3). So that you see He is God, the Rock of Israel; God *omnipotent*, for He created all things (Gen 1:2); God *omnipresent*, filling all things (Psa 139:7); God *omniscient*, Who knows your hearts (Rom 9:1). Beware of Him therefore, and grieve Him not, for in so doing you grieve God.

Secondly, upon the account of His office, and the benefits we receive by Him. We are obliged, even on the score of gratitude and ingenuity, to obey Him; for He is sent in the quality of an advocate to help us to pray, to indite our requests for us, to teach us what and how to ask of God (Rom 8:26). He comes to us as a Comforter (Joh 14:16), and none like Him. His work is to take of Christ's and show it to us (Joh 16:14), i.e., to take of His death, resurrection, ascension, yea, of His very present intercession in heaven and show it to us. He can be with us in a moment; He can, as one well observes, tell you what were the very last thoughts Christ was thinking in heaven about you. It was He that formed the body of Christ in the womb, and so prepared Him to be a sacrifice for us. He filled that humanity with His unexampled fullness, so fitting and anointing Him for the discharge of His office.

It is He that puts efficacy into the ordinances, and without Him they would be a dead letter. It was He that blessed them to your conviction and conversion. For if angels had been the preachers, no conversion had followed without the Spirit. It is He that is the bond of union betwixt Christ and your souls, without which you could never

⁴ viz. – from Latin *videlicet*: that is to say; namely.

have had interest in Christ or communion with Christ. It was He that so often hath helped your infirmities when you knew not what to say; comforted your hearts when they were overwhelmed within you and you knew not what to do; preserved you many thousand times from sin and ruin when you have been upon the slippery brink of it in temptations. It is He (in His sanctifying-work) that is the best evidence your souls have for heaven. It would be endless to enumerate the mercies you have by Him. And now, reader, dost thou not blush to think how unworthy thou hast treated such a friend? For which of all these His offices or benefits dost thou grieve and quench Him? Oh, grieve not the Holy Spirit Whom Christ sent as soon as ever He went to heaven, in His Father's name, and in His own name, to perform all these offices for you.

Inference 5: Is Christ ascended to the Father as our forerunner? *Then the door of salvation stands open to all believers, and by virtue of Christ's ascension, they also shall ascend after Him, far above all visible heavens.* O my friends, what place hath Christ prepared and taken up for you! What a splendid habitation hath He provided for you! God is not ashamed to be called your God; for He hath prepared for you a city (Heb 11:16). In that city Christ hath provided mansions and resting places for your everlasting abode (Joh 14:2), and keeps them for you till your coming. Oh, how august and glorious a dwelling is that, where sun, moon, and stars shall shine as much below your feet as they are now above your heads? Yea, such is the love Christ hath to the believer that, as one saith, if thou only hadst been the chosen of God, Christ would have built that house for Himself and thee. Now it is for Himself, for thee, and for many more who shall inherit with thee. God send us a joyful meeting within the vail with our Forerunner, and sweeten our passage into it with many a foresight and foretaste thereof. And, in the meantime, let the love of a Savior inflame our hearts, so that whenever we cast a look towards that place where our Forerunner is for us entered, our souls may say with melting affections, "Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ"; and again, "Blessed be God for His unspeakable gift."

From *The Whole Works of the Reverend John Flavel*, Vol. 1, 501-513,
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John Flavel (c. 1630-1691): English Presbyterian minister; born in Bromagrove, Worcester, UK.



CHRIST'S TRIUMPHANT ASCENSION

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them.—Psalm 68:18

THE hill of Zion had been taken out of the hand of the Jebusites.¹ They had held it long after the rest of the country had been subdued; but David at last had taken it from them. This was the mountain ordained of Jehovah of old to be the place of the Temple. David, therefore, with songs and shouts of rejoicing brought up the ark from the abode of Obededom to the place where it should remain.

That is the literal fact upon which the figure of the text is based. We are at no loss for the spiritual interpretation; for we turn to Ephesians 4:8, where, quoting the sense of the passage rather than the exact words, Paul says, “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” The same sense is found in Colossians 2:15: “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” Not misled by the will o’ the wisp² of fancy,³ but guided by the clear light of the infallible Word, we see our way to expound our text. In the words of David, we have an address to our Lord Jesus Christ concerning His ascent to His glory. “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them.”

Our Savior *descended* when He came to the manger of Bethlehem, a babe, and further descended when He became “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3). He descended lower still when He was obedient to death, even the death of the cross; and further yet when His dead body was laid in the grave. Well saith our apostle, “Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?” (Eph 4:9). Long and dark was the descent: there were no depths of humiliation, temptation, and affliction

¹ **Jebusites** – Canaanite tribe that inhabited Jerusalem before Israel’s conquest of the land.

² **will o’ the wisp** – pale mysterious light, possibly produced by combustion of marsh gas, but sometimes attributed to “spirits”; metaphorically, a hope that may lead one astray.

³ **fancy** – imagination; “will o’ the wisp of fancy” = an imaginary hope that will lead astray.

that He did not fathom. Seeing He stood in their place and stead, He went as low as justice required that sinners should go who had dared to violate the Law of God. The utmost abyss of desertion heard Him cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mat 27:46). Low in the grave He lay; but He had His face upward, for He could not see corruption (Psa 16:10).

On the third day, He [left] the couch of the dead and rose to the light of the living. He had commenced His glorious ascent. To prove how real His resurrection was, He stayed on earth some forty days and showed Himself to many witnesses. Magdalene and James saw Him alone; the eleven beheld Him in their midst; the two on the road conversed with Him; five hundred brethren at once beheld Him. He gave infallible proofs that He was really risen from the dead, and these remain with us unto this day as historic facts. He ate a piece of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb to prove that He was no phantom. He said to the apostles, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luk 24:39). One laid his finger in the print of the nails and even thrust his hand into His side. Their very doubts were used to make the evidence clearer. The fact that Jesus died was put beyond question by the spear-thrust; and the fact that He was alive in a material form was equally well established by the touch of Thomas. Beyond a doubt, Christ Jesus has "risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1Co 15:20).

This being settled beyond question, the time came for our Lord to continue His homeward, upward journey and return unto the glory from which He had come down. From the mount called Olivet, while His disciples surrounded Him, "He was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Act 1:9). The rest of His upward progress we cannot describe... "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in" (Psa 24:7). How high He ascended after He passed the pearly portal Paul cannot tell us, save that he says He "ascended up far above all heavens" (Eph 4:10). He describes Him as set at God's "right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion" (Eph 1:20-21); and as "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto" (1Ti 6:16). The man Christ Jesus has gone back to the place from whence His Godhead came. Thou art the King of glory, O Christ! Thou art the eternal Son of the Father! Thou sittest ever in the highest heaven, enthroned with all glory, clothed with all power, King of kings and Lord of lords! Unto Thy name, we humbly

present our hallelujahs, both now and forever.

Now, concerning the text itself, which speaks of the ascent of our ever-blessed Lord, we shall say...that our Lord's triumph was set forth by His ascension. He came here to fight the foes of God and man. It was a tremendous battle, not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickednesses and evil powers. Our Lord fought against sin, death, hell, hate of God, and love of falsehood. He came to earth to be our champion. For you and for me, beloved, He entered the lists⁴ and wrestled until He sweat great drops of blood: yea, He "poured out his soul unto death" (Isa 53:12). When He had ended the struggle, He declared His victory by ascending to the Father's throne.

Now His descent is ended. There was no need for Him to remain amid the men who despised Him. The shame, suffering, blasphemy, and rebuke are far beneath Him now. The sun has risen, and the darkness of night has fled. He has gone up beyond the reach of sneering Sadducees and accusing Pharisees. The traitor cannot again kiss Him, Pilate cannot scourge Him, Herod cannot mock Him. He is far above the reach of priestly taunt and vulgar jest...

Now, also, our Lord's work was done. We are sure that the purpose of His love is secure, or He would not have returned to His rest. The love that brought Him here would have kept Him here if all things necessary for our salvation had not been finished. Our Lord Jesus is no sudden enthusiast, who rashly commences an enterprise of which he wearies before it is accomplished. He does not give up a work that He has once undertaken. Because He said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (Joh 17:4), and then ascended to the Father, I feel safe in asserting that all that was required of the Lord Christ for the overthrow of the powers of darkness is performed and endured; all that is needed for the salvation of His redeemed is fully done. Whatever was the design of Christ's death, it will be accomplished to the full; for had He not secured its accomplishment, He would not have gone back. I do not believe in a defeated and disappointed Savior, nor in a divine sacrifice that fails to effect its purpose.⁵ I do not believe in an atonement that is admirably wide but fatally ineffectual. I rejoice to hear my Lord say, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me" (Joh 6:37). Whatever was the purpose of the Christ of God in the great transaction of the cross, it must be fully effected; to conceive a failure, even of a partial kind, is scarcely rever-

⁴ **lists** – fenced areas in medieval jousting tournaments, therefore, places of combat.

⁵ See FGB 227, *Atonement*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

ent. Jesus has seen to it that in no point shall His work be frustrated. Nothing is left undone of all His covenanted engagements. "It is finished" (Joh 19:30) is a description of every item of the divine labor; and, therefore, has He ascended on high...The love that brought our Lord here would have kept Him here if He had not been absolutely sure that all His work and warfare for our salvation had been accomplished to the full.

Further, as we see here the ending of our Lord's descent and the accomplishment of His work, remember that *His ascent to the Father is representative*. Every believer rose with Him and grasped the inheritance. When He uprose, ascending high, He taught our feet the way. At the last, His people shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air, and so shall they be forever with the Lord (1Th 4:17). He has made a stairway for His saints to climb to their felicity, and He has trodden it Himself to assure us that the new and living way is available for us. In His ascension, He bore all His people with Him...Not one of the number shall fail to come where the head has entered, else were Jesus the head of an imperfect and mutilated body. Though you have no other means of getting to glory but faith in Jesus, that way will bring you there without fail. Not only will He not be in glory and leave us behind, but He cannot be so, since we are one with Him. And where He is, His people must be. We are in the highest glory in Jesus as our representative; and by faith, we are raised up together and made to sit together in the heavenlies, even in Him.

Our Lord's ascent is to the highest heaven. I have noticed this already; but let me remind you of it again, lest you miss an essential point. Our Lord Jesus is in no inferior place in the glory land. He was a servant *here*, but He is not so *there*. I know that He intercedes, and thus carries on a form of service on our behalf; but no strivings, cryings, and tears are mingled with His present pleadings. With authority He pleads. He is a priest upon His throne, blending with His plea the authority of His personal merit. He saith, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Mat 28:18); and therefore, He is glorious in His prayers for us. He is Lord of every place and of everything. He guides the wheel of providence and directs the flight of angels; "his kingdom ruleth over all" (Psa 103:19). He is exalted above every name that is named, and all things are put under Him. Oh, what a Christ we have to trust in and to love!

And on this account, *we are called upon in the text to think much of His blessed Person*. When we speak of what Christ has done, we must think much of the doing, but still more of the Doer. We must not for-

get the Benefactor in the benefits that come to us through Him. Note well how David puts it: to him the Lord is first and most prominent. He sees Him, he speaks to Him: “*Thou* hast ascended on high, *thou* hast led captivity captive: *thou* hast received gifts for men.” Three times he addresses Him by that personal pronoun *thou*. Dwell on the fact that He, the Son of David, Who for our sakes came down on earth and lay in the manger, and hung upon a woman’s breast, has gone up on high into the glory infinite. He that trod the weary ways of Palestine now reigns as a King in His palace. He that sighed, hungered, wept, bled, and died is now above all heavens. Behold your Lord upon the cross! Mark the five ghastly wounds and all the shameful scourging and spitting that men have wrought upon Him! See how that blessed body, prepared of the Holy Ghost for the indwelling of the Second Person of the adorable Trinity, was evil entreated! But there is an end to all this. “*Thou* hast ascended on high.” He that was earth’s scorn is now heaven’s wonder. I saw Thee laid in the tomb, wrapped about with cerements⁶ and embalmed in spices; but “*thou* hast ascended on high,” where death cannot touch Thee. The Christ that was buried here is now upon the throne. The heart that was broken here is palpitating in His bosom now, as full of love and condescension as when He dwelt among men. He has not forgotten us, for He has not forgotten Himself, and we are part and parcel of Himself. He is still mindful of Calvary and Gethsemane. Even when you are dazzled by the superlative splendor of His exalted state, still believe that He is a brother born for adversity.

Let us rejoice in the ascent of Christ as being the [emblem] of His victory and the symbol thereof. He has accomplished His work. “If Thou hadst not led captivity captive, O Christ, Thou hadst never ascended on high; and if Thou hadst not won gifts of salvation for the sins of men, Thou hadst been here still suffering! Thou wouldst never have relinquished Thy chosen task if Thou hadst not perfected it. Thou art so set on the salvation of men that for the joy that was set before Thee, Thou didst endure the cross, despising the shame; and we know that all must have been achieved, or Thou wouldst still be working out Thy gracious enterprise.” The voice of the ascension is, “It is finished.”

From a sermon delivered on Lord’s Day morning, April 27, 1890,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.



⁶ **cerements** – grave clothes; burial garments.

DO YOU BELIEVE THE SCRIPTURES?

Edward Payson (1783-1827)

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.—Acts 1:9-11

HAVING...briefly considered our Savior's ascension with its attending circumstances and effects, let us next inquire what we may learn from it.

First: We may perhaps learn from it whether we do or do not really believe the Scriptures. To ascertain this, let me ask each of you whether you really believe that the events that we have been considering actually occurred? Do you really believe that a Person Who appeared to be only a man, but Who called Himself the Son of God, was seen alive for forty days successively after He had been put to death as a malefactor?—that at the expiration of this time, He was seen in open day by a competent number of witnesses to rise from the earth, and without any visible effort or means of support, to ascend until He reached the region of clouds, and that there a cloud received Him and concealed Him from the eyes of beholders? Do you really believe that while these beholders were still gazing after Him, two angels appeared to them in a human form and said, “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven”? Do you believe that these events actually took place in the world that we inhabit, and that they were seen by human beings like ourselves? If you do not believe this—if it appears to you more like a tale, a fiction, or a dream, than a reality—you do not believe the Bible. Or if it appears to you like an event that took place in some other world than this, or among a different race of beings from ourselves, you do not believe the Bible. But perhaps you will say, “We do believe that all these things actually took place in our world.” Then, surely you regard them as most interesting and important events; you read the book that contains them and other wonderful facts with deep interest, and you are affected by its contents, as you are affected by other important truths that you really

believe. If not, you do not believe the Scriptures, whatever you may profess. Your understandings, perhaps, assent to these truths; but in your hearts, you do not believe them. These remarks, however, are too general. We must be more particular, and our text enables us to be so, for we may learn from it,

Secondly: In what manner those who really believe in Christ's ascension to heaven, and its attending circumstances, will be affected by it. It is, I presume, universally acknowledged that facts and events we really believe affect us in nearly the same manner, though not in the same degree, as if we saw them. For instance, if we really believe that a parent or child, a husband or any other dear friend, has died in a distant place, it will affect us almost, though not, perhaps, quite so much, as if we actually saw him die. If, then, we really believe the events that have been described, we shall be affected in some measure as if we had seen them. How they were affected, you have just heard. They worshipped Christ. If, then, we believe that He ascended to heaven, there to reign until His second coming, we shall worship Him, that is, we shall address to Him prayers and thanksgivings. They spent much time in the temple blessing and praising God. If we believe what the gospel relates of Jesus Christ, we shall do the same—surely we cannot refrain from often praising God for providing such an advocate and intercessor for us in heaven.

Again: Those who witnessed our Savior's ascension were excited to fervent, united, and persevering prayer. And surely, if we really believe that Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for all who call on His name, to obtain blessings for them, and to prepare a place for their reception when they leave this world, we shall be led to call on His name with frequency and fervency, and to unite with His praying people. Such are some of the effects that will result from a real belief of the events that have been described. If, then, these effects are not produced upon you, my hearers, it will prove that you do not believe the volume in which they are recorded. And if you, my professing hearers, who are assembled to commemorate the Lord Jesus Christ, have faith in present lively exercise, you will be affected in some measure, as you would have been had you witnessed the events that have been described. They will be presented to your minds and hearts in the vivid colors of truth and reality; this house will appear to you like the Mount of Olives, and you will almost see the Savior, the symbols of Whose body and blood are before you, rise from that table as from the grave, and re-ascend His native heaven. God grant you all faith to see this. You will then

go from this house, saying to yourselves and to each other, we have seen strange things today.

But this is not all. If you believe that two angels really appeared to the disciples and foretold the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, then, of course, you must believe that He certainly will come, come as He declared, to judge the world; for those heavenly messengers would not assert a falsehood. And if it was a most wonderful and surprising thing to see Him ascend alone to heaven in the form of a man, what a sight it will be to see Him descending from heaven in the form of God, shining resplendent in all His Father's glories, and surrounded by thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand angels and archangels, while at His summons all the dead arise and stand before Him in judgment.

This will be a spectacle indeed, such a spectacle as the world never saw. But if the Bible is true, we shall all actually see this spectacle, for its language is, "Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him" (Rev 1:7). And if you believe the Bible, then you believe that you will see it, believe that you will be actors in it, believe that you, as individuals, will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and receive your doom from His lips. And do you believe this? Are you living as if you believed it? If you do believe it, you are surely making it your great, your chief concern to be prepared for Christ's second coming, prepared to meet your Judge in peace. And is this your great concern? Are you living like accountable creatures who expect to be tried by the Word of God, and to be rewarded according to your works? If not, where is your faith, and what is your belief in the Bible? [It is] nothing but a dream, nothing but a cold, barren faith, which being "without works is dead" (Jam 2:20). And if God has clearly revealed truths that are thus calculated to affect you, and the only reason why they do not affect you is that you do not believe them, then surely you are without excuse.

To conclude: subjects like those we have been considering may be of admirable service to every Christian, if he knows how to use them aright. You are all aware, my brethren, that this world is your great enemy, that worldly-mindedness is in some form or other your besetting sin. You are also aware that this world has many scenes and objects that to our misjudging minds appear splendid, many that appear imposing, many that appear attractive and interesting. By these scenes and objects your passions are often excited, your affections entangled, your minds thrown into a feverish state, which is exceedingly unfriendly to progress in religion. The great question is, how

shall the pernicious¹ influence of these worldly scenes and objects be counteracted? I answer: The world to come—the unseen spiritual and eternal world—has scenes incomparably more grand, more imposing, more interesting than any that this world can exhibit. All that is wanting, then, is to bring them clearly before the mind. Let it be a part of your daily employment to do this. Enter your closet, open the Scriptures, and fix on some one of the many interesting objects that they reveal: the translation of Elijah for instance, or our Savior’s transfiguration, or His death, or His resurrection, or His ascension to heaven, or His second coming. Fix the eye of your mind attentively on the object selected; spread it before you with all its attending circumstances; call in the aid of imagination, or that power that forms images of absent or invisible things; pray for faith, and continue to meditate, if possible, until you obtain some clear, realizing apprehension of the scene before you, or until your hearts are suitably affected by it. Then, when the mind is filled and the heart occupied by such an object, you may, relying on the divine protection, venture out into the world; and all its wealth, its pomp, and its pleasures will appear contemptible indeed, compared with the scenes that you have been contemplating.

In this way, and in this alone, can you maintain a successful combat with the world, and finally obtain a decided victory over it. For until your minds are preoccupied by spiritual objects, the world will find them empty and rush in upon them like a flood. Let me beseech those of you who have not already done it, to make trial of this method during the month that you have now entered. Be not discouraged, should your first attempts prove unsuccessful; but persevere, and instead of faintly remembering Christ at His table only, you will remember Him almost constantly; you will feel in some measure as the apostles did, when they returned from witnessing His ascension; and fortified by the powers of the world to come, you will be enabled to tread the present world under your feet.

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Edward Payson (1783-1827): American Congregational preacher; born in Rindge, New Hampshire, USA.



¹ **pernicious** – subtly dangerous; highly destructive.