

B. The Ascension of Christ—His Return to Glory

Having completed the work which the Father gave Him to do on earth, having been physically raised from the dead, Jesus exercised a forty-day ministry on the earth, after which He bodily “ascended into heaven.”

“As His resurrection was the means to His ascension, and so a significant aspect of His total exaltation, so His ascension in turn was the means to His climactic exaltation and enthronment (sessio) at the Father’s right hand as Holy One, Lord, Christ, Prince and Savior of the world (Acts 2:27, 33-36; 5:31; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:3)” (Reymond).

Epitomizing Text(s): Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-11.

1. The FACT of His Return.

- **Prophesied in the Old Testament.** (Ps. 68:18; 110:1; Isa. 52:13; Dan. 7:13, 14)
- **Anticipated by Christ.** (Matt. 25:14, 15; John 7:33-36; 8:21; 14:28-29; 16:5-7; 20:17)
- **Described as a Historical Event.** (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9; 3:21; 1 Peter 3:22)
- **Confirmed by the Experiences of Men.** (Acts 7:55-56; Acts 9:3-5; 22:6-8; 26:13-15; Rev. 4:1; 5:6)
- **Assumed by the Doctrine of the Second Coming.** (1 Thess. 1:9-10; 4:16)
- **Assumed by the Whole Christian Faith.** (1 Tim. 3:16) We worship One who is at the right hand of God.

2. The NATURE of His Return. A departure and a reception.

- a. **It was visible.** An event apparent to the physical senses (Acts 1:9), yet no attempt is made to explain it more fully. It is regarded as a part of the mystery of Christ (1 Tim. 3:16, cf. 3:9). We shall understand it better when we “ascend.”
- b. **It was a “separation” from His own** with respect to His *physical presence* with them (though not His spiritual communion with them) (Reymond). “[W]hile they were looking on . . . a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). *“The reality of the ascension is not seen in an up-there movement, so much as in the fact that it marked the cessation of the period of confirmatory appearances”* (Guthrie). In other words, the ascension marked the end of His physically seen ministry.
- c. **It was physical.** It was bodily into heaven, forty days after His resurrection (Heb. 9:24; Acts 1:3, 11). He was received up in glory (1 Tim. 3:16) to be with the Father (Heb. 8:1; 10:12).
- d. **It was more than a change of place; it was a change of state,** not simply spatial but spiritual. It is more than that Jesus is “up there somewhere,” but that He has been glorified and exalted to the highest spiritual eminence. The physical elevation served to picture this (Reymond).

3. **The SIGNIFICANCE of His Return.**

- It marks the close of Christ's redemptive work on earth. (Heb. 1:3)
- It brought Christ into a "new experience" as the divine-human Messiah, namely, universal dominion as the divine-human Messiah and the sole divine-human Mediator between God and man. He received glory and honor that had not been His before as the God-man (Reymond, 580).
- It results in His exaltation as Head over all things. It settled the supremacy of Christ. (Eph. 1:20-23; 4:9-10; 1 Peter 3:22)
- It inaugurates Him into His high priestly work. (Heb. 1:3; 4:14; 6:19-20; 7:23-26; 8:1-4; Rom. 8:34)
- It makes possible His present work through the Holy Spirit. (John 16:5-7, 14; Acts 2:33)
- It guarantees the truth of His claims (Matt. 26:63-64), that He was righteous (John 6:62; 16:10), that He will finally triumph over all His enemies (Acts 2:33-36; Col. 2:15ff.), and that He will come again (Acts 1:11).
- It guarantees that we have an Advocate at the right hand of God (Heb. 4:14-16; 9:24; 1 Jn. 2:1), a greater ministry in this world (John 14:12) and an entrance into heaven itself at last (Heb. 6:20).

Applications of this Glory.

It should bring joy to the Christian. (John 14:28-29)

It should arouse interest in heavenly things. (Col. 3:1-4)

It should produce steadfastness. (Heb. 4:14; 12:1-2)

It gives us great assurance. (Heb. 6:17-20)

It should take away fear. (Col. 2:15)

It shows that heaven is a place.

C. The Heavenly Session of Christ—His Reigning in Glory

**“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion:
He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world,
taken up in glory”
(1 Timothy 3:16)**

The ascension led to the “right hand of God” where He assumed, as the Messiah, the prerogatives of His office on a universal scale. Christ was granted supreme lordship and universal dominion over men (Matt. 28:18; Acts 2:36; Phil. 2:9).

A Summary of this Glory. Robert Reymond wonderfully summarizes this *present* “glory”:

As His resurrection was the means to His ascension . . . so His ascension in turn was a means to His climactic exaltation and enthronement (session) at the Father’s right hand as Holy One, Lord, Christ, Prince, and Savior of the world (Acts 2:27, 33-36; 5:31; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:3). If His ascension was “in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16), exalting Him thereby “higher than all the heavens” (Eph. 4:10; Heb. 7:26), He is also now “crowned with glory and honor” (Heb. 2:9), “with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to Him” (1 Pt. 3:22), with “everything under His feet,” the Father alone excepted (1 Cor. 15:26; Eph. 1:22a), sitting “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come” (Eph. 1:21). God has also “given” Him to be “Head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way” (Eph. 1:22-23), indeed, who fills “the whole universe” with His power and lordship (Eph. 4:10). In sum, He now occupies the “highest place” (Phil. 2:9) of glory and honor (Heb. 2:9) which heaven can afford, and to Him belongs . . . the titles “Lord of all” (Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:12) and Lord above all other lords (Acts 2:36; Phil. 2:9b; Rev. 19:16), “that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10-11a). The nature of His lordship entitles Him sovereignly to bestow gifts of every and of whatever kind upon men as He pleases (Eph. 4:7-8, 11). (579)

Let us consider, for the encouragement of our faith and the advancement of our obedience in love, that glory which is Christ’s in His present state of exaltation before the consummation of all things. Our focus is on what some have called His present “session” on high. I am sure that I am like those who gave the Queen of Sheba reports of the splendor of Solomon’s wealth and wisdom. The half cannot be told.

1. **The FACT of His Exaltation in Glory.** This glory was predicted by the prophets, powerfully preached by the apostles, and personally perceived by some.
 - a. ***Predicted by the Prophets/Promised by God.*** I have already mentioned Isaiah 53:12, but in Isaiah 52:13 God says, **“Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted.”** (cf. Pss. 2; 110; Ezek. 17:22-23).
 - b. ***Preached/Declared by the Apostles.*** This was one of the great headings of Peter’s Pentecostal sermon in Acts 2--not only Jesus’s resurrection, but His exaltation. **“This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that**

God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:32-33, 36). The writer to the Hebrews declares at the very beginning of his letter, **“When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”** (Heb. 1:3).

- c. *Perceived/Seen by Some.* This glory was seen by Stephen (Acts 7--unto his comforting) and Paul (Acts 9--unto his commissioning) and John (Rev. 1:12-18--unto his). Even in the picture that John is given later of the exalted Christ in Revelation 5 there remains a reminder of the basis of it as He appears as a Lamb **“standing, as if slain.”**
2. **The NATURE of His Exaltation in Glory--the God-Man in Glory, at God’s Right Hand (Christ’s Session).** One has written of this exaltation that Jesus returned to where He was no stranger (McDonald, 133). But His return to glory was not in the same way as He left it. *“He returned as something more than He was before”* (McDonald, 133).
 - a. *In Terms of His Deity.* He is now entered into the “full, clear, and manifest revealing of His Deity” (Winslow, 280). The glory of His Godhead, suspended and eclipsed in His humiliation, is restored in His exaltation. Nothing was added to His deity when He was exalted. Christ’s exaltation, like His humiliation, could not make any real change in His divine nature--only in terms of its manifestation (Dagg, 206).
 - b. *In Terms of His Humanity.* *“The dust of earth is on the throne of the Majesty on High”* (Duncan). But His human nature, that manhood which He assumed in this world, is now glorified and exalted into glory. As He was exalted He did not leave His humanity behind. That very body in which He was raised from the dead, that very body is now glorified in heaven, that body which Paul calls in Philippians 3:21 the **“body of His glory.”** Who can describe this body of glory or comprehend it aright?!? [cf. Macleod, 164] As it has not yet appeared what we shall be like, so it has not fully appeared what He is, to whom we shall be conformed! That body of His humiliation, which received the blows and spit and nails of men, which hungered and thirsted and wearied and wept and suffered and died, is now crowned with glory and honor. John caught a glimpse of it and fell as a dead man! Having been raised to glory He remains “the man” of glory, Christ Jesus (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5). He is exalted with our nature. Having taken our humanity in His incarnation and humiliation, He forever retains it in His glorification. His marriage to our flesh in His humiliation is indissoluble. The bonds of this mysterious matrimony forged by grace out of love will never be broken! *“All that man as man is, that Christ is--to eternity”* (Warfield). Beloved, this is an astonishing thing. He does not disdain our nature! Yea, He has honored it! It is now part and parcel of His own eternal glory! That He is not ashamed to call us brethren is seen by His perpetual identification with us in glory in terms of His bodily and human existence in glory. As such He remains forever sensitive and sympathetic to us (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15). This exaltation forms the pattern of our own at His return (1 Cor. 15:20, 49; Phil. 3:20; 1 Jn. 3).

This glory, you see, is a *different* glory from that which He had in eternity past. It is new glory, a sort of “added glory”--of glorified humanity joined to magnified deity. This is now His permanent glory, His unchanging glory, His eternal glory, His from now on forever glory.

3. **The CONDITION of His Exaltation in Glory--the Focus of Worship and Adoration in Glory.** He was inducted into a condition of “preeminent dignity, power, and glory” (Winslow, 278).

Epitomizing Text: Revelation 5. This is the picture we are given in the Revelation, especially chapter 5. Here we see what place He holds in glory.

a. ***The Condition Described.***

- *Triumphant.* He has “**overcome**” says the text (v. 5). He has conquered. He is exalted as a Champion.
- *Prominence/Preeminence.* He is in the center, in the midst of the throne and the elders (v. 6). He is the focus of glory! Earthly obscurity is exchanged for heavenly preeminency!
- *Fullness of Power and Wisdom.* “*His [exaltation] was the signal for the full development of His mediatorial power and glory*” (Winslow, 283).
- *Adored/Praised.* He is worshipped and adored along with the Father and particularly for His sacrificial work for sinners.
- *Happiness.* Holy delight (Winslow, 286).

b. ***The Condition Contrasted.*** What a glorious contrast this is to what was His condition in His humiliation (Flavel, I, 519)!

c. ***The Condition Rejoiced In.*** Oh, there is a wonderful appropriateness to all this. How fitting it is! How glorious that He is now cherished and magnified and adored and admired, who knew so much grief and shame on our behalf! (cf. Winslow, 265).

4. **The VOCATION of His Exaltation in Glory.** What is His labor in glory? Oh, beloved of God, here again we must bow in humble awe and adoration! Having left us and been raised to the highest place, He does not forget us. Though He announced with respect to His atoning work, “**It is finished,**” He is not finished for us! Love that will not let us go! Having sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, He is not idle! “*He leads not in heaven a life of mere glory, majesty and blessedness, but a life of office, love, and care also*” (Owen, 252). Yea, like the high priest of old He bears us on His shoulders and upon His holy breast. He is a king and a priest in glory!

a. ***Communication of His Spirit--the Glorious Supply and Strength of Grace.*** The exalted Savior means a descending Spirit (cf. John 7:39; 16:7; Acts 2:32-33). Exalted, He sends the Spirit to unite us to Himself (Letham, 81). Exalted, He pours out His resurrected life and virtue through the Spirit. Exalted, He builds His church by the Spirit. Exalted, He gifts and equips and empowers His people by the Spirit. Here is the exalted glory of His fullness available for us, that we may lack for no good thing and have a sufficiency for every good work.

b. ***Representation and Intercession--the Glorious Support and Sympathy of Grace.*** We have, says John, an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 Jn. 2:1). None can condemn us. “**Christ Jesus . . . who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us**” (Rom. 8:34). He continues to pray for and plead for His people. He appears before the face of God for us (Heb. 9:24). He lovingly and sympathetically labors in prayer for our whole welfare, supply, deliverance and salvation. His prayers are most likely along those lines of prayer found

in John 17: preservation; protection; progress, and perfection. **“He always lives to make intercession for [us]”** (Heb. 7:25). Oh, beloved of God, the Lord of glory lives in glory to promote and secure by His prayers our arrival in glory! In His glory He sympathizes with us! He remains in glory “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” There is what one has called a “sympathetic resonance” in heaven. Christ has carried a man’s heart up with Him to heaven! Oh, the glory of this One! He became a man to die for us on earth, He remains a man to identify and sympathize with us in heaven! He is glorious in this office of mercy and sympathy (cf. Winslow, 295)! Here is the exalted glory of His love and mercy still burning for us!

*Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea
A great High Priest whose name is love
Who ever lives and pleads for me.*

- c. ***Rule and Preservation--the Glorious Sovereignty and Security of Grace.*** He is exalted to reign and rule, a King now coronated, enthroned above. Ephesians 1:20-23 where it is written that God **“raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church . . .”** He is exalted to subdue His enemies. **“He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet”** (1 Cor. 15:25). And He is exalted as King to rule over and preserve His church (Owen, 249). Here is the exalted glory of His privilege and power unleashed: directing, judging, pardoning, rewarding, protecting, and building.
- d. ***Preparation for His People--the Glorious of Grace.*** He prepares a place for us with Himself (Jn. 14:3).

There is glorious God on the throne, therefore we have confidence. There is a glorious King on the throne, therefore we have a certain security and stability. There is a glorious Priest on the throne, therefore we have a certain representation. There is a glorious Man on the throne, therefore we have a certain sympathy. There is a glorious Lamb on the throne, therefore we have a certain salvation (hope).

*Sinners, rejoice! He died for you;
For you prepares a place;
Sends down His Spirit to guide you through
With every gift of grace.*

*His blood, which did your sins atone,
For your salvation pleads;
And, seated on the Father’s throne,
He reigns and intercedes.*

Applications of this Glory. Do you think of Him in His present exalted status as glorious?

Encouragement. Beloved, take heart. His interests shall not fail! If He conquered in weakness and death, shall He not now prevail risen and reigning? He came to purchase all our blessings by His life and death, and now He is glorious above to provide them. Take heart. His glorification is

the pledge and pattern of our own.

Exhortation.

- *To be High-Minded.* This is where we are to be minded, beloved. **“If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”** (Col. 3:1-2). If Christ is precious to you, if He is your priceless treasure, then you will be marked by a sort of heavenly distractedness.
- *To be Sober-minded.* Think highly of Christ. None who know Him well think lightly, speak lightly or worship lightly the Lord of lords and King of kings.
- *To be Right-minded.* Do not think to follow Him to glory if you do not follow Him in His sufferings. Do not think to find glory here, but like Him, hereafter. Do not seek glory here, but His glory.

Examination. Is this glory your present joy and contemplation? *“The present satisfaction we receive in them by faith is the best evidence we have of an indefeasible interest in them”* (Owen, 245; cf. 347).

Evangelism. He is raised up a Sovereign to be honored. He is raised up to be believed in. He is raised up a Savior to grant **“repentance . . . and forgiveness of sins”** (Acts 5:31). Apply to Him in His glory. Look to Him (see Reymond, 581, for its impact on apostolic preaching). It was this gloriously exalted Christ, the only Lord over all, which the apostles preached. For them, because of who Christ is, the work He did, the place He occupies, and the titles He bears, “salvation is in no one else, for there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). For them, He is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). For them (and us) He is the only One who once for all offering up of Himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice is alone acceptable to God the Father (Heb. 9:24-26) and whose high priestly intercession alone meets with the Father’s approval (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:24-25; 1 John 2:1).]

“Blessed Jesus! we can add nothing to You, nothing to Your glory; but it is our joy of heart that You are what You are--that You are so gloriously exalted at the right hand of God; and we long more fully and clearly to behold that glory, according to Your prayer and promise” (Owen, 347).