

He Ascended into Heaven, and is Seated at the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty: Christ's Reunion; Our Redemption

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[0:00] Three weeks ago, I'm sure you all remember, I preached on a portion of the Apostles' Creed that was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

That is, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. In that sermon, I had three headings. One was the who of the conception and birth, the how of the conception and birth, and the why of the conception and birth.

Now, I'm not going to go through all the whole sermon again, but I do want to reference one part of it as it ties into what we are considering this evening. That is the who of this conception and birth. When we were in that section, we referenced Daniel chapter 7, one of Daniel's visions. And in that vision, he says this, So it presents to us a figure like a son of man, that is, he appears as a human being, who comes with the clouds of heaven.

And the clouds of heaven are a biblical image associated with divine presence. And what we learn about this figure, when he comes into this throne room where the Ancient of Days sits on his throne, and to him, this one, this figure, was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

[1:34] His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom, one that shall not be destroyed. Now, during his earthly ministry, Jesus claimed that he was that figure from Daniel's vision, that he was the son of man.

It was his most used self-designation over 80 times. And how was Jesus, the son of man, to come into this inheritance, dominion over the nations, all people serving him?

Well, essentially, it involves all that has been considered under the doctrine of Christ in the Apostles' Creed, that he was conceived, born, suffered, crucified, dead.

It's that difficult and inglorious path that was the way that would lead to his coming in to his glorious inheritance. He became one of us.

He suffered, was crucified. He died, was buried on our behalf. But as we learn from the Creed, though he was crucified, died, and buried, the grave was not the final word.

[2:47] The Creed goes on to say, the third day he rose again from the dead. And as Peter said on Pentecost, it was not possible for him to be held by the pangs of death because he didn't deserve it.

He didn't own it. So as the Apostle Paul says, far from being a criminal or a false messiah as he was tried and crucified to be, he was indeed declared to be the Son of God, a messianic designation, in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

The resurrection vindicated Jesus. He had been declared guilty. He was vindicated by God in the resurrection. Now through our faith union with Christ, we are to realize that just as the grave, the pangs of death could not hold Jesus, neither will they hold us, who have placed our confidence in the person and the work of Christ.

Paul says death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Oh, death, where is your sting? But there's one more step, one more step to Jesus' earthly ministry, the culmination of his incarnation, the reward for his obedience, the possession of his inheritance.

It is his ascension, which results in his reunion and our redemption. Let's pray. Gracious God, I pray you help us to grasp this important doctrine so that we might gain comfort and assurance in our lives of what you have done for us will really be accomplished and is there present for us, something in which we can place our hope and know, God, that because Jesus has returned and been reunited to you, we are indeed seated with him in heavenly places.

[4 : 41] Amen. The creed states, he, that is Jesus, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. Now, though this teaching about Jesus follows the others in the creed that we've been considering, I think it's safe to say that it gets scant attention compared to his birth, death, and resurrection.

I'm not sure why that is, but we are impoverished by that lack of attention. It is as vital a component as the other doctrines when we contemplate the redemption accomplished by Jesus, the Son of Man.

And we're going to look at it under two headings, Christ's reunion and our redemption. Christ's reunion and our redemption. Christ's reunion.

So we read from John chapter 17. Often, that is referred to as Christ's high priestly prayer. In fact, if you were to open up John 17 in your Bibles right there, they have that as a heading.

The editors put that in. Christ's high priestly prayer. That description is a commingling of several passages of Scripture. Priestly, because in the passage we hear Jesus doing the work of a priest.

[5 : 58] A priest in Israel represents God to the people and the people to God. And in the passage that we read, he speaks of his having represented the Father to those whom the Father had given him and in his prayer he intercedes on behalf of those people to the Father.

Listen again. I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, you gave them to me and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you.

For I have given to them the words that you gave me and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you and they have believed that you sent me.

Representing God to the people. I am praying for them. I'm not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me for they are yours. Representing the people to God.

See, that is a priestly activity. Representing God to the people and the people to God. But as I said this is often called Christ's high priestly prayer. And that particularly reflects language from the letter to the Hebrews.

[7 : 07] Now, you're probably aware that the high priest in Israel was the only one allowed to go one time in the day of atonement into what's called the holy of holies or the most holy part of the temple.

So once a year on the day of atonement the high priest entered into the holy of holies he sprinkles the mercy seat which is the cover to the ark of the covenant where the presence of God the Shekinah glory cloud would be manifested.

And what he would do is he would sprinkle the mercy seat with the blood of a bull or a goat as sin offerings. And atonement for sins was required for the high priest himself and also for all the people. That was the act of the high priest on the day of atonement. Hear the language from Hebrews chapter 9. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come then through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands that is not of this creation he entered once for all into the holy place not by means of blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood thus securing an eternal redemption.

The high priestly prayer of Jesus anticipates this movement of Jesus into the holy of holies. Listen again. Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven said Father the hour has come glorify your son with the son so that the son may glorify you since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him and this is eternal life that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent listen I have glorified you on earth having accomplished the work that you gave me to do and now Father glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

[9 : 01] What is profoundly poignant about Jesus' prayer is that Jesus longed for reunion with the Father must pass through the crucifixion.

See before the son is reunited with the Father he must first suffer the agony of that incomprehensible unity of love being severed as Jesus who knew no sin becomes sin for us and on the cross he emits a lamentation loud enough to subsume all the other cries of rejection and abandonment my God my God why have you forsaken me?

This is the burden of our high priest his reunion was enabled by his obedience unto death even death on a cross he was crucified died and buried only to be raised from the dead to die no more and then to ascend to be reunited with his Father and be glorified with the glory that he had with the

Father before the world existed what a boon what a benefit for sinners like you and me yeah we ought not to neglect so great a doctrine for it is the source of our redemption Jesus' reunion now our redemption see this one who first descended from heaven to assume and experience our humanity in its fullness who offered himself as the once for all sacrifice in that humanity has ascended back in that resurrected humanity to his rightful dwelling place as our great high priest listen to what the author of Hebrews teaches and exhorts since we have a great high priest who passed through the heavens

Jesus the son of God let us hold fast our confession for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy to find grace to help in time of need you might recall in that sermon that I preached I kept repeating a phrase that which he has not assumed he has not healed that which Jesus did not take on in his humanity it hasn't been redeemed but he took everything on of our humanity and it's in that humanity that he descends and assumes that he dies and he ascends in our humanity in our real humanity he presents himself to the throne room of God that's why the writer of Hebrews says we have a high priest who is unable who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because he knows what it's like to live as a human being he knows what it's like to persevere in the weight of this corrupted fallen world he experienced it himself and he has taken all of that with him to the throne room of heaven now that passage from Hebrews leads us to consider a reality more deeply namely Christ's intercession for us as he sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty now when we use the word intercession

I think our first thought runs toward prayer in our service this evening right we had a time of intercession and that was a time in which we lift up the needs of others some we know some that we don't know circumstances in the world what we do in intercession is that we identify and sympathize with people in those circumstances they're just too great for them to bear or to manage illness financial stress and for brothers and sisters in the faith as we pray under persecution what we're doing in intercessions we're lifting them up before our merciful and gracious God interceding on their behalf asking for God's grace and mercy power and love to be experienced by them right where they are and we're also instructed to lift up those who rule in the various spheres of life as we did home, church and civil government intercessory prayer is an important part of the Christian life and so when we think of Jesus interceding for us I think it's probably true that our first thought runs towards prayer that is Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father Almighty prays for us now we've already seen in his high priestly prayer that he does indeed pray for his people so there's no reason to assume that he ceases praying for us once he returns to his exalted position but the primary way in which we want to think of Christ's intercession for us his advocacy for us is the fact that his presence seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty bearing the marks of his atoning sacrifice is the primary way we want to understand his intercession you see intercession and atonement are two aspects of the same redemptive work with Burkhoff theologian the essence of the intercession is atonement and the atonement is essentially an intercession it is essentially an atonement or substitutionary offering once perfected on Calvary and now perpetually presented and undergoing perpetual acceptance in heaven see despite our regeneration despite our having been brought from darkness into light despite we no longer are followers of the prince of the power of the air despite there were no longer children of wrath we still have need of an advocate of an intercessor for we're not yet all that we are and will be in Christ in short we sin we sin because we're sinners and because we sin we need Christ seated at the right hand of the father

[15 : 05] Burkhoff continues Christ is continually presenting his completed sacrifice to the father as a sufficient basis for the bestowal and pardoning grace of God you have that image Jesus sitting next to the father bearing the marks of his atoning sacrifice and every time we sin every time we confess our sin that presence of Jesus is sufficient for the pardoning grace of God he is constantly applying his sacrificial work and making it effective in the justification and sanctification of sinners moreover he is ever making intercession for those that are his pleading for their acceptance on the basis of his completed sacrifice and for their safe keeping in the world and making their prayers and services acceptable to God the intercession consists primarily in the presence of Christ in man's nature with the father and that the prayers that Jesus offers are to be considered as the presentation of legitimate claims rather than his supplications that's a phrase at the end let me just try to explain that for a minute

I'll repeat it the prayers are to be considered as the presentation of legitimate claims rather than his supplications what does he mean Jesus is lifting us up in prayer before the father as legitimate claimants of God's grace because we are in union to Christ see the picture is not when Jesus prays to the father for us oh father please please just one more time one more time let them go one more time let me get away with it please please there's not pleading it's sufficient and so every time something comes up there it is there's the evidence of Jesus atoning sacrifice the father looks upon and says yes yes of course see your righteousness before God is guaranteed by the presence of Jesus at the right hand of the father remember what Paul says in Romans chapter 8 who shall bring a charge against God's elect it is God who justifies who is to condemn

Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised who is at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us as one writer envisions when Satan makes an accusation against any one of Jesus beloved children Jesus holds up his hands revealing the marks of his sufficient atonement no no no it's done it's complete well another aspect of Jesus reunion of his going back into the place of glory that he possessed with the father before the world began was his enthronement and here we go back to that Daniel chapter 7 passage this is the son of man coming into his inheritance right I saw the night visions one behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like the son of man he came to the ancient of days was presented before him everything was given to him dominion and so on we discussed that the path to this enthronement was through the cross again listen to Philippians being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that 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 see having been exalted all the things spoken about the son of man the Christ the son of God are applicable to Jesus every knee will bow every tongue will confess all peoples nations and languages will serve him he possesses a kingdom a dominion that is everlasting never to be destroyed he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath he will execute judgment among the nations his enemies will be made his footstool commentators are quick to point out that the importance of the language of Jesus seated at the right hand of the father is because being seated signifies that the task he was sent to do is complete and having returned he sits assuming his place of authority now this is important to us because prior to his ascension you might remember that he commissioned his disciples to do something they were to go into all the world and make disciples of the nations baptizing them in the name of the father son and holy spirit and teaching them to observe all things that Jesus taught and he prefaced that commission by saying all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him therefore he had the authority to commission and send the disciples but not only that not only that he had the authority to send the holy spirit in order that his disciples would be empowered to carry out the commission what does he say in John 15 when the helper comes whom I will send to you the spirit of truth who proceeds from the father he will bear witness about me and you also will bear witness because you have been with me from the beginning see this enthronement of Jesus is important because he has authority and in that authority he commissions us but also in that authority he empowers us and so

Jesus returned to that place of glory that that that that vision in the ancient of days when he returns what happens he is given the kingdoms he is given all authority in heaven on earth and indeed he exercises it to send us out into the world to speak more of Jesus you know you might be one of the accounts of when Jesus actually ascends at the end of Luke and beginning of Acts you know when the disciples are standing there with the resurrected Jesus and they're plying him with questions about the end times Jesus says to them it is not for you to know the times or seasons that the father has fixed by his own authority but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth and when he had said these things as they were looking on he was lifted up from the earth a cloud taking him out of their sight there's that cloud again that cloud the son of man ascending to the throne room of the ancient of days to receive his inheritance

[21 : 51] I think we can say with confidence that the disciples did not grasp what was going on when they witnessed that absolutely crazy phenomenon of Jesus being lifted up from the earth a cloud taking him out of their sight but when Jesus returns and he tells the Holy Spirit to go and the Holy Spirit falls on them on Pentecost they knew they knew that he had gone to where he said he was going to back to the Father received back into glory his prayer had been answered now we've been spoken we've been speaking of the ascension of Christ here tonight to the right hand of God

the Father Almighty we've talked about it in cosmic terms now the son of man returning to the throne room of the ancient of days to receive his inheritance that he might rule over all the peoples nations every knee bowing every tongue confessing that Jesus is Lord and these things are vitally important because as we seek prayerfully how to implement the carrying out of the commission given to us by our Lord to go into all the world to make him known we carry the message of this exalted king and we do so to the farthest ends of the earth in order that sinners such as you and I might know him for who he truly is humbly confessing him as king of kings and lord of lords but what if we lower our eyes a bit for a moment from the heights of heaven to consider how the ascension is something that pertains to our daily existence something sufficient to bring comfort and assurance to our often troubled souls the knowledge that our Lord possessed of physical humanity has ascended to the right hand of the father teaches us that by the grace of God we have every reason to believe that we ourselves though we die yet we shall live possessed of a body like unto Jesus resurrected body no longer subject to the corruption and decay but dwelling physically in the presence of our savior again from our passage that we read God being rich in mercy made us alive together with

Christ by grace you have been saved raised us up with him and seated us with him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus Jesus the first fruits the first born among many brethren is the guarantee of our humanity being fully received in heaven in fact he goes so far does he not promise that he goes to prepare a place for us and he says if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and I will take you to myself that where I am you may be also that is a comfort that we have in life and in death that I belong body and soul in life and in death not to myself but to my faithful savior Jesus Christ there is also assurance to be had from the ascension that Jesus was received back into heaven and reunited with his heavenly father sitting down at the right hand and doing so bearing the marks of his all sufficient atoning sacrifice means that our place in that glorious reality is secure not because we are righteous enough to be there but because he is and we are his and he is ours listen to this quote from John

Bunyan's grace abounding one day as I was passing in the field and that too was some dashes on my conscience fearing lest yet all was not right suddenly the sentence fell upon my soul thy righteousness is in heaven and we thought with all I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand there I say is my righteousness so that wherever I was or whatever I was a doing God could not say of me he is in want of my righteousness for that was just before him I also saw moreover that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better and not yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself the same yesterday today and forever our great high priest has gone once into the holy of holies on a once for all day of atonement not with the blood of animals but with his own blood our high priest sacrificer and sacrifice atoning for us and there he sits now having ascended bearing those marks of that atonement always present always ready in all of our weaknesses in all of our repentance in all of our confession in all of our needs there is

Jesus the lamb that was slain bearing marks and every accusation he holds them up holds them up holds them up and we have to be reminded that that is the reality so that we do not condemn ourselves because Jesus has borne our condemnation Jesus has borne the wrath of God on himself and in his humanity he suffers and in that moment my God my God why have you forsaken me he experiences that separation that will be any who is not with Jesus on that day it will be a moment when people look for God but he will be gone but those who are in Christ are secure the hope is ours because Jesus has ascended in his humanity bearing the marks of his atonement our redemption creation and his those to ■ may hurt but it his rates a good over