

Christ

Renewed Thoughts on The Ascension - Part 2

Introduction

The previous paper finished with considerations of why it was necessary for the Lord to ascend. This paper will continue that theme. The Hebrew epistle provides much of our knowledge concerning Christ as High Priest as is seen by:

- a) The multi references to Christ as Priest / High Priest
- b) The avenues of truth presented in His distinguishing titles
- c) The emphasis on His qualifications, legality, morality experientially, and sufficiency

It is only as we begin to grasp our need for Christ as High Priest that we will be able to appreciate in spirit the glories of the Lord's perfect qualifications to meet our need. When Peter was about to fall, interestingly the Lord said, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Lk. 22:32). The Lord did not pray that Peter would not sin or be tempted, but that his faith would not fail. If his faith failed Peter would no longer have been a believer. However, Peter like us had a High Priest praying for him and therefore, his faith would never fail. Our faith will never fail because we have a High Priest who ever liveth to make intercession, lays hold on us (lit. not us taking His hand but He takes our hand (Heb. 2:16) and will save (keep) to the uttermost (the end of the road all who come to God by Him (Heb. 7:25). A believer can never lose their salvation for it does not depend on the individual but on Divine Persons. What is there to stop me being a believer today, or next week, or next year? It is the same as Peter, the Lord is interceding for us. I need Christ to be my High Priest to keep me as a believer until the end of the road.

It would be too large to consider all the backgrounds and significances of the Lord as High Priest in Hebrews. Therefore, any further thoughts are meant as a springboard for the reader's development.

Christ the Merciful and Faithful High Priest (Heb. 2:17)

Who is Christ a High Priest for?

- a) Since each verse of scripture must be taken in context, it is important to consider the immediate section as being verses 9-18.
 - i) Our first observation is the distinction between "every man" (Heb. 2:9) and "the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). Christ tasted death for every man, that is, on behalf of, as a substitute for the whosoever. Any curtailment of the all sufficiency of the sacrifice of our Lord for all humanity is contrary to the scriptures (1 Jn. 2:2). However, Christ is only a High Priest for the seed of Abraham, which are only those who are "Christ's" (Gal. 3:29). Christ is not a High priest for the unsaved for they are not Christ's. Christ had to ascend to be such a High Priest.

What does it mean, "He tasted death?"

- a) The word "taste" is used in three ways in the New Testament:
 - i) To taste with the senses (Lk. 14:24)
 - ii) To taste spiritually (Heb. 6:4, 5; 1 Pet. 2:3)
 - iii) To experience physical death (Matt. 16:28; Jn. 8:52)

It indicates a bodily experience so that when the Lord tasted death, it means in the depths of His being. He knew what death was. It was not a slight touching but a real spiritual experience with physical agonies.

When did the Lord become a High Priest?

- a) We are told distinctly He could not be such when on earth (Heb. 8:4) and to be a priest after the order of Melchizedec death could not take place (Heb. 7:17). Like Moses, Christ performed priestly duties when on earth, such as interceding for His own (Jn. 17:9-26). For this observation I am comforted by His ascension, for now, we the people of God, have a high priest who ever liveth (Heb. 7:25); is unchangeable (Heb. 7:24); making intercession in the holiest of all, that is Heaven (Heb. 8:1); and will do so to the

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uttermost, that is, the end of our earthly journey (Heb. 7:25). That could never have occurred had He not ascended.

His perfecting

- a) Observe the distinction between how the Lord is spoken of in Heb. 2:10 and Heb. 2:17. In the first reference He is “Captain”, and the second He is “Merciful and faithful High Priest”. To be such He had to be “perfected”.
 - i) The Lord was being made perfect, not regarding His personal perfections but in experience. There were two matters needed for His being “made perfect”. Being God He knew His people suffered but had never known what it was like to live in a world where God was just someone to be used when needed, or given lip service to, or despised, to suffer, and be hated because as an individual he lived for the glory of God. Many a saint has known mockery, despising, physical suffering, poverty etc., and have been able to endure it due to the High Priestly ministry of the Lord sustaining them. That could never have happened had the Lord not ascended.
 - ii) He had to take part of that which we are, that is humanity, and while the Lord was made in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3), He was never made sinful flesh. Our Lord was not only a perfect man, but was perfectly man having a body (Heb. 10:5), soul (Jn. 12:27) and spirit (Jn. 11:33). Wonderful truth, He brought manhood into the spirit world, namely Heaven.
 - iii) He had to enter death and destroy Him who had the power of death, that is the Devil, and release from the fear of death. There would be no comfort in having a High Priest who never knew what it was to face death and actually die, trusting in God to raise him from the dead. We need a priest who has faced that experience. I have been with various saints who were dying and they did so at rest, knowing consciously or unconsciously the Lord was there succouring them because He has ascended and is their High Priest.
 - iv) Our “Captain” (the word translated indicates a leader), walked the pathway of the child of God and knew by experience in a deeper more intense way the experiences the saint would face. This is more than the Lord knowing what it was to be hungry, thirsty or weary. This is not only knowing those experiences but enduring them for the glory of God, knowing they were permitted by God. Now having been made perfect and in such perfection as becoming appropriate (suitable to the character of God) to God (Heb. 2:10), He is now in Heaven and with His learning experiences over, He has become our High Priest and able to succour us. He is perfected.

Satan’s Destroyer and Our Deliverer

- a) Christ “destroyed him that had the power of death” (Heb. 2:14). What does it mean the “power of death?” When man sinned death was a condemnation from God. Since man had sided with Satan, he and death were legally under his domination. He had the power to retain the individual in death for man had died in his sins. Possibly Satan thought he had checkmated God, for if God was to retain His righteous condemnation of death for the one who sinned, that could not be nullified. Furthermore, since Satan had the legal right to death and man’s eternal damnation, no human being could get release for oneself or others because they all have sinned. However, God is never checkmated. There was a glorious alternative, a sinless man who would, of His own volition, enter the domain of Satan and then rise from death thus breaking the power of death and Satan. It was not just a resurrection, the Lord broke the retaining legal power of Satan and the physical domination of death. By so doing, it results in none being able to escape a resurrection, none can be held by death in defiance of the resurrected Christ. Furthermore, He rose from the dead never to die again and lives in an indissoluble life.

The Lord is a merciful and faithful High Priest

- a) There are two aspects to the high priestly work of our Lord Jesus. His work of propitiation and that of His pastoral work. The work of the Lord’s propitiation is of major importance because there is the problem of sin. Even though we are believers we still sin. We need our Lord Jesus to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. We can confess and our sins are forgiven but what about those times when we do not know we are sinning? It is then the work of Christ as our advocate steps in. Sin must be removed

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before the individual can have full fellowship with God. Therefore, we need a High Priest who will stand faithful to God's principles and to God's character. Because we still sin, due to the frailty of my old nature we need the Lord as High Priest who will be merciful to us.

- b) We must never lose sight of the fact that this has got nothing to do with salvation and the sinner, this is dealing with God and the saint. Thankfully, because of the ascension of our Lord, this shows that God is satisfied with the expiatory work of Christ at Calvary, and shows the permanency of its effectiveness. Here, after some 2000 years, the efficacy of the sacrifice of our Lord and His high priestly ministry still continues.
- c) When the trials of life are severe and we find within ourselves the inability to cope with them, then we may lay hold on Christ as our High Priest and He will succour us. He will help in the time of need and He is always more than willing to come to our aid. He did it with Peter when he cried from the troubled water, "Lord save me" (Matt. 14:30). Immediately the Lord was there to keep him to the end of the journey.

Conclusion

How thankful we ought to be, not only that our Lord rose from the dead, but that He has ascended and now is our High Priest who intercedes and succours us in our times of need.

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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