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# THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST IN HIS ASCENSION

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BY WITNESS LEE

**T**he Lord Jesus surely had a fruitful life during His thirty-three and half years He was on earth. Most of what He accomplished, however, was in a three-year period. Thirty years He spent in preparation. Then He came forth to minister. What is preached and taught among Christians today largely concerns this earthly ministry.

When I was a young, seeking believer, I was taught that Christ has finished His work. John 19:30 was cited as proof of this. The Lord's word, spoken when He was on the cross, was, "It is finished!" After His death He rested in the tomb for three days. Then He was resurrected and ascended to the heavens, not to work but to sit there. To sit, they explained to me, meant that the work was finished. He is there now, waiting till God puts His enemies under His feet (Acts 2:34-35).

Is this the true picture? Has Christ finished His ministry? We have to say both yes and no. Yes, His earthly ministry is finished, but His heavenly ministry continues. Christ's ministry, as does His person, has two aspects. While He was on earth, He was the man Jesus. Since His ascension into heaven, however, He is the glorified Christ. His earthly ministry lasted for only a limited time, thirty-three and a half years at most. His heavenly ministry, in contrast, is eternal; it will never end. It is regrettable that many Christians pay attention only to the first part of Christ's ministry. In this article we want to focus on the second part, which is far more crucial.

God's intention is to have the church and, ultimately, the New Jerusalem. During Christ's earthly ministry the church did not come into being, much less the New Jerusalem. The church and the New Jerusalem are carried out by Christ's heavenly ministry, not His earthly one. His earthly ministry accomplished redemption for the producing of the church. But a higher, richer, wider ministry is needed for the carrying out of God's eternal purpose concerning the church and the New Jerusalem. As far as His earthly ministry is concerned, all has been accomplished. Redemption has been secured by the death of Christ on the cross. This accomplishment, however, has ushered the Lord Jesus into His heavenly ministry, and now He is engaged in a more far-reaching ministry than He ever had on earth.

Do not think that the Lord Jesus is seated in the heavens with nothing to do! He is administering the affairs of the universe! During His earthly life, this is surely not what He was doing. He suffered, was persecuted, and eventually went to the cross to accomplish redemption. Now, everything has changed, and He is fully in charge. For too long a time we have known Christ only in His incarnation. Now we must endeavor to know Him in His ascension.

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***In ascension  
Christ has  
been crowned  
with glory  
and honor.  
Glory is the  
splendor  
related to  
Jesus' person;  
honor is the  
preciousness  
related to  
Jesus' worth.  
As the ascended  
One crowned  
with glory  
and honor,  
Christ is in a  
state of glory  
and has a  
rank of honor.***

### **The Son of Man**

In ascension Christ is the Son of Man. This means that the Christ who is in the heavens still has His humanity; He still possesses a human nature.

When the Lord Jesus was being judged by the Sanhedrin, the high priest said to Him, "I charge You to swear by the living God to tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63). The Lord replied, "You have said rightly. Nevertheless I say to you, From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (v. 64). The high priest asked the Lord if He was the Son of God, but He answered by referring to Himself as the Son of Man. The Lord was the Son of Man on earth before His crucifixion, and He is still the Son of Man in the heavens at the right hand of God after His resurrection and ascension. Furthermore, even at His coming back on the clouds He will be the Son of Man. The Lord seemed to be saying to the high priest, "You ask Me whether or not I am the Son of God. I tell you that I am the Son of Man. Even after you have crucified Me and I have been resurrected from the dead, I shall be in the third heaven as a man." In ascension Christ continues to be the Son of Man.

Stephen saw the ascended Christ as the Son of Man: "Being full of the Holy Spirit, he looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56). This is further proof that in ascension Christ is still the Son of Man. Revelation 1:13 indicates that the ascended Christ is the Son of Man: "In the midst of the lampstands One like the Son of Man." Here Christ is unveiled as the Son of Man. He is both divine and human. As the High Priest He cares for the churches in His humanity.

Some do not believe that Christ today is still the Son of Man. They claim that Christ became a man by incarnation but that in His resurrection He put off His humanity. They think that Christ today is merely the Son of God, that He is no longer the Son of Man. However, it is erroneous to teach that Christ in ascension is no longer the Son of Man. In ascension Christ is still both the Son of God with divinity and the Son of Man with humanity. This is clearly revealed in the Word of God.

### **The One Who Is at the Right Hand of God**

In ascension Christ is the One who is at the right hand of God. Romans 8:34 says, "Christ Jesus who died and rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." Christ died for us, He was resurrected, and He is now in the heavens at the right hand of God interceding for us. In ascension Christ is at the right hand of God. "The right hand of God" signifies preeminence, the first place of honor. The right hand of God is the first and highest place in the universe, and God has put the ascended Christ there. God has given the preeminence and the highest honor in the entire universe to Christ. Our Christ today is in the highest heaven, holding the highest position at God's right hand.

### **The One Crowned with Glory and Honor**

In ascension Christ is the One who has been crowned with glory and honor. Hebrews 2:9 says, "We see Jesus, who was made a little inferior to the angels because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor." Here glory and honor are considered a crown. Glory is the splendor related to Jesus' person; honor is the preciousness related to Jesus' worth (1 Pet. 2:7). As the ascended One crowned with glory and honor, Christ is in a state of glory and has a rank of honor. It is always an honor for a person to have a high rank. The ascended Christ is glorious in state and honorable in rank. He has received such glory and has entered into such an honor. This glory and honor are the crown with which He has been crowned.

On earth in His suffering of death, Christ was crowned with thorns. But in heaven on the

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throne in His enjoyment of exaltation, He is crowned with glory and honor. Let us look away from everything to the ascended Christ who is crowned with glory and honor.

### **The One Enthroned for God's Administration**

Another aspect of Christ in ascension is that He is the One enthroned for God's administration. Hebrews 12:2 says that Christ is now seated at the "right hand of the throne of God." For Christ to be seated at the right hand of the throne of God does not mean that He is seated next to the throne of God, at God's right hand. In Revelation we see that there is only one throne of both God and Christ (Rev. 3:21; 22:1, 3), one throne for both God and the Lamb. Christ has been enthroned in His ascension. His ascension was for His enthronement for God's administration.

According to the book of Revelation, the throne on which the ascended Christ is sitting is the throne of the divine administration: "I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders a Lamb standing as having just been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth" (5:6). The Lamb, the Redeemer, the One slain on the cross for our sins, is now on the throne carrying out God's administration over the entire universe. The Lord Jesus has been enthroned to execute God's governmental operation in the universe. As the Lamb with the seven eyes, the seven Spirits of God, He is carrying out God's administration for the accomplishment of God's economy.

### **The Ruler of the Kings of the Earth**

In ascension Christ is also the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5). As the Ruler of the kings He is far above all earthly rulers. Apparently, the earth is ruled by kings and presidents; actually, the Lord Jesus rules the whole earth through the earthly authorities. Even all the kings and presidents are under His rule. Today He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (19:16). He is the Ruler of all the ones who are in power. He is the chief Ruler in the divine government for the fulfillment of God's eternal plan.

### **The Leader and Savior**

Acts 5:31 says that God has exalted Christ "to His right hand as Leader and Savior." The Greek word rendered "leader" is *archegos*, meaning author, origin, originator, chief leader, captain. This word is used only four times in the New Testament and always in reference to Christ (Acts 3:15; Heb. 2:10; 12:2). It has been translated a number of different ways in various versions because there is no precise English equivalent to the Greek. The thought is that this One is the origin and Originator, the Author, the Leader, and the Inaugurator. He is above all and spontaneously is the Ruler with authority. God has exalted Jesus, the One rejected and killed by the Jewish leaders, as the highest Leader. His being the Leader is a matter related to His authority. He rules sovereignly over the earth with His authority so that the environment may be fit for God's chosen people to receive His salvation (Acts 17:26-27; John 17:2).

The One God has exalted to His right hand is also the Savior. Jesus' incarnation made Him a man, His human living on earth qualified Him to be man's Savior, His crucifixion accomplished full redemption for man, His resurrection vindicated His redemptive work, and His exaltation inaugurated Him to be the ruling Leader so that He might be the Savior.

When Christ was on earth, He saved Peter, John, and many others. However, although the title *Savior* is applied to Christ in His earthly ministry (John 4:42), He was not officially the Savior until His ascension. We were saved officially by the Christ on the throne, by the One in glory. When we were saved, we were seated with Him in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6). Christ has saved us from the throne and to the throne. This is the ascended Christ as our Savior.

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***In ascension  
God gave  
Christ to be  
Head over  
all things to  
the church.  
Through God's  
surpassingly  
great power,  
Christ received  
the headship  
in the universe.  
It was given  
to Him as a  
man in His  
humanity  
with His  
divinity to be  
Head over  
all things.***

### **The Lord of All**

In ascension Christ is Lord of all (Acts 2:36; 10:36). As God, Christ was the Lord all the time (Luke 1:43; John 11:21; 20:28). But as man He was made the Lord in His ascension after He brought His humanity into God in His resurrection. In ascension Christ was made the Lord of all to possess all. In Acts 10:36 Peter speaks of Christ as the One who is "Lord of all." *All* refers here to all men, all peoples. Christ in His ascension is the Lord not only of the Jews but also of the Gentiles. He is the Lord of all the different races and peoples on earth.

Acts 2:36 tells us that Christ was made Lord. As we have seen, He was Lord before His ascension, but He was not officially inaugurated into this office. One of the Old Testament names for God is Lord (Heb. *Adonai*), meaning master. Christ in the Old Testament was Adonai. Then He became a man, a despised Nazarene. This very One was Lord even when He was on earth. But it was not until His ascension that He was inaugurated into His lordship. Christ in His ascension was inaugurated as Lord of all, not only of all men, but also of all things.

As the Lord, Christ now possesses the whole universe, God's chosen people, and all positive things, matters, and persons. Christ is the Lord not only of God's chosen people, but also of the angels and of all those who will be in the millennium and in the new heaven and the new earth. Therefore, He is the Lord of the heavens, the earth, and everything and everyone He has redeemed. In ascension He is the Lord of all to possess all.

### **The Christ for His Heavenly Ministry**

Christ in His ascension is also the Christ for His heavenly ministry. Acts 2:36 reveals that in His ascension Christ was made not only the Lord but also the Christ, God's anointed (Heb. 1:9), to carry out God's commission. In ascension He was anointed, appointed by God for His ministry in the heavens. When He was on earth, He was anointed and appointed for His earthly ministry. But in His ascension He was made the Christ to carry out God's commission through His heavenly ministry.

Not until His ascension was Christ officially inaugurated as the Christ. On the day of Pentecost Peter said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified" (Acts 2:36). In eternity Christ was already Christ. Furthermore, as God's sent and anointed One in His humanity, He was Christ from the time He was born (Luke 2:11; Matt. 1:16; John 1:41; Matt. 16:16). Then at His baptism He was anointed by God with His Spirit (Luke 4:18). However, He was not officially inaugurated as the Christ until His ascension. Christ has been not only chosen, appointed, and anointed by God but also inaugurated by God into His office. He has passed through death and resurrection and in ascension is now enthroned in the heavens as the Christ. In ascension He was officially made the Christ of God for His heavenly ministry.

### **The Head over All Things to the Church**

In ascension Christ is also Head over all things to the church. According to Ephesians 1:20-22, God's surpassingly great power has been wrought "in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church." In ascension God gave Christ to be Head over all things to the church. The headship of Christ over all things is a gift from God to Him. It was through God's surpassingly great power that Christ received the headship in the universe. It was given to Him as a man in His humanity with His divinity to be Head over all things.

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Ephesians 1:22 does not mean that God gave Christ to the church as a gift. This verse means that God gave Christ a gift—the headship over all things. According to this understanding, a great gift was given to Christ by God, and this gift is the headship over all things. Ephesians 1:22 says that God gave Christ to be Head over all things to the church. The phrase *to the church* implies a transmission from the ascended Christ to the church, His Body. Whatever Christ, the Head, attained and obtained is transmitted to the church. In this transmission the church shares with Christ all His attainments: the resurrection from the dead, being seated in His transcendency, the subjection of all things under His feet, and the headship over all things.

If Paul had concluded Ephesians 1 by saying that God gave Christ to be Head over all things, Christ's ascension would not have anything to do with the church. Paul, however, added the important phrase “to the church.” This implies that whatever Christ has attained and obtained is being transmitted to the church, His Body. Because the divine transmission is not once for all, the church should continually receive this transmission. God raised up Christ, seated Him in the heavens, put everything under His feet, and gave Him the great gift of being the Head over all things. Now whatever Christ is in His ascension is being transmitted into the church. This is the continual transmission into the church of the ascended Christ with the full significance of His ascension. We should experience this divine transmission day by day.

As the Head of the Body, Christ in His heavenly ministry is perfecting His members by giving them growth in life for the building up of His Body (Eph. 4:12, 15-16). This is the finest work Christ is doing in His heavenly ministry. By His sovereignty He brings us together for the accomplishment of the divine economy. Now He is doing a very fine work to perfect us by giving us growth in life. This growth is for the sake of the Body, the church. Through the growth in life we will arrive at a full-grown man and at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This fullness of Christ is the Body of Christ, His expression.

Ephesians 4:15 speaks of growing up “into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ.” Here we see that we should grow up into Christ, not grow up into ourselves or into anything apart from Christ. Furthermore, this verse clearly says that we are to grow up into the One who is the Head. This indicates that our growth must be in the Body. In order to grow into the Head, we must surely be in the Body. It is of great significance that Ephesians 4:15 speaks not of growing into the Savior or into the Lord but into the Head. This growth can take place only in the Body.

Ephesians 4:15 says that we must grow up into the Head in all things. As the members of the Body are perfected through the ministry of Christ, they will grow up into Him in particular matters. We have Christ within us, but in many matters we are still in the self. Hence, we need the growth that will bring us out of ourselves and into Christ. This can take place only through the heavenly ministry of Christ.

In Ephesians 4:16 Paul goes on to say, “Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.” Our growth in life is to grow up into the Head, Christ, but our function in the Body is to function out from Him. First we grow up into the Head. Then we have something which is out from the Head.

Ephesians 4:16 indicates that growth is not for individuals but for the Body. Any growth that is not for the Body is not genuine. The words *each one part* refer to every member of the Body. Every member of the Body of Christ has its measure, and this measure works for the growth of the Body. The Body causes the growth of itself through the supplying joints and working parts. Both the joints of the rich supply and every single part with its measure are needed for the church to build itself up. The growth of the Body is the increase of Christ in the church. This results in the Body building itself up.

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***The redeeming blood washes away our sins, whereas the water of life washes away the blemishes of the natural life of our old man. In sanctifying the church, the Lord first washes away our sins with His blood and then washes away our natural blemishes with His life.***

Ephesians 4:16 tells us that all the Body causes the growth of the Body. This means that the Body grows by the Body itself. The Body makes the growth of the Body. For this reason, Christ, the Head of the Body, gives the growth in life to the members so that they may be perfected for the building up of the Body.

#### **The One Who Is Sanctifying, Cleansing, Nourishing, and Cherishing the Church**

In His heavenly ministry Christ is also doing the work of sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing the church (Eph. 5:26, 29). To be sanctified is not only to be separated from what is common but also to be saturated with the element of Christ. Hence, one aspect of sanctification is to be separated positionally, to undergo a change of position. Another aspect of sanctification is to become holy dispositionally by having Christ dispensed into us. Christ's purpose in giving Himself to the church is to sanctify her, separating her to Himself and saturating her with Himself that she may be His counterpart.

Christ's work of sanctifying the church is accomplished by cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word. According to the divine concept, the water in Ephesians 5:26 refers to the flowing life of God, which is typified by flowing water (Exo. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4; John 7:38-39; Rev. 21:6; 22:1, 17). The washing of such a water is different from the washing of the redeeming blood of Christ. The redeeming blood washes away our sins (1 John 1:7; Rev. 7:14), whereas the water of life washes away the blemishes of the natural life of our old man, such as "spot or wrinkle or any such things" (Eph. 5:27). In sanctifying the church, the Lord first washes away our sins with His blood and then washes away our natural blemishes with His life. Spots are something out of the natural life, and wrinkles are signs of oldness. Only the water of life can metabolically wash away such defects. All the spots and wrinkles in the church will be washed away through the inner cleansing of the water in the word. We all need such an organic, metabolic washing to take away our defects and the marks of our oldness. As the church is washed organically and metabolically in this way, the church is renewed and without blemish. We are now in such a washing process in order that the church may be holy and without blemish.

As Christ in His heavenly ministry sanctifies and cleanses the church, He also nourishes and cherishes her. To nourish is to feed. For Christ to nourish means that He supplies with His riches. This nourishment causes transformation. Since we are what we eat, the more we eat Christ, the more we are constituted with Christ. Then we will be transformed by the element of Christ which has been dispensed into us. Therefore, through Christ's work of nourishing the church we are transformed; we become new persons with a new element and substance.

Along with Christ's nourishing we have His cherishing. To cherish is to nurture with tender love and foster with tender care. To cherish is also to soften by warming. As a mother cherishes a child by holding the child close to her, the Lord Jesus cherishes us by holding us close to Him. In this way we are warmed and softened. The Lord warms us and softens us as we enjoy His tenderness, sweetness, and lovingness. How tender, sweet, and warm the Lord Jesus is! In His work in His heavenly ministry He is the cherishing One.

#### **The God-exalted One Receiving the Name which Is above Every Name**

In ascension Christ is the God-exalted One, the One who has received the name which is above every name. Philippians 2:9 says, "Therefore also God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name." How marvelous Christ is! He humbled Himself to the uttermost, but God exalted Him to the highest peak. The name referred to in Philippians 2:9 is the name of Jesus, as indicated in the following verse. From the time of Christ's ascension, there has never been a name on earth above the name of Jesus. God has exalted Jesus to be the Lord of all. Therefore, it is altogether right for us

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to call "O Lord Jesus." We need to confess the Lord's name openly. In the New Testament there is the clear word that we are to call on the Lord's name (Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13). By His exaltation the Lord has been given a name which is above every name. There has never been a name in history higher than the name of the Lord Jesus. The highest name in the universe, the greatest name, is the name of Jesus.

In Philippians 2:10 and 11 Paul goes on to say, "That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should openly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." The name is the expression of the sum total of what the Lord Jesus is in His person and work. The words "in the name" mean in the sphere and element of all the Lord is.

In verse 10 are the three levels of the universe: heaven, earth, and under the earth. Those who are in heaven are angels, those who are on earth are men, and those who are under the earth are the dead. The day is coming when those on every level will bow their knees and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. To openly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord is to call on the Lord (Rom. 10:9-10, 12-13). The Lord Jesus as a man was made the Lord in His ascension by God. Thus, every tongue should confess that He is Lord. This confession is to the glory of God the Father. The Greek word rendered "to" in Philippians 2:11 means resulting in. Our confessing that Jesus is Lord results in the glory of God the Father.

### **The Righteous**

In ascension Christ is the Righteous. First John 2:1b says, "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." Our Lord Jesus is the only righteous man among all men. Only He is qualified to be our Advocate to care for us in our sinning condition and restore us to a righteous condition so that our Father, who is righteous, may be appeased. Instead of saying, "Jesus Christ the Righteous," we may say, "Jesus Christ, the right One." Jesus Christ certainly is the One who is right, the right One, and only this right One can be our Advocate with the Father, taking care of our case.

Christ was the righteous One in His earthly life, for He was right with God and man. Now, in the heavens, He is still the righteous One. As the ascended One in the heavens, Christ does everything in a righteous way. He is working and ministering righteously. If He were not acting righteously in the heavens, He could not be in God's presence. Whatever Christ is doing now in the heavens to intercede for us and to minister life to us as the High Priest according to the order of Melchisedec, He does righteously. His heavenly ministry of life today is a ministry in righteousness. In ascension He truly is the Righteous.

As our Representative, or Attorney, in the heavenly court, Christ is the righteous One. Just as an attorney cannot practice law if he is unrighteous, a lawbreaker, so Christ could not be our Attorney if He were not righteous. Christ, the Righteous, is surely the Lawkeeper, thus qualified to be our Advocate, our Attorney.

### **The Paraclete**

In ascension Christ is the Paraclete (1 John 2:1). He is the righteous One to be our Paraclete. The Greek word rendered "Advocate" in 1 John 2:1 is *parakletos*, and it denotes one who is called to another's side to help him, hence, a helper; one who offers legal aid or one who intercedes on behalf of someone else, hence, an advocate, counsel, or intercessor. The word also denotes consoling and consolation, hence, a consoler, a comforter. Paraclete is its anglicized form. This word is used in the Gospel of John (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) for the Spirit of reality as our Comforter within us, caring for our case or affairs. It is used in 1 John 2:1 for the Lord Jesus as our Advocate with the Father, the One who cares for our case, intercedes on our behalf (Rom. 8:34), and pleads for us if we sin. This interceding and pleading is based on His propitiation.

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***To the universe  
Christ is the  
Administrator;  
but to the  
church He is  
the High Priest.  
As the ascended  
One in the  
heavens, He is  
now living,  
working, and  
ministering as  
the High Priest  
caring for all  
the saints  
and all the  
churches for  
the fulfillment  
of God's eternal  
purpose.***

Christ as our Paraclete, our Advocate in 1 John 2:1 is actually our spiritual attorney. J. N. Darby, in his note on 1 John 2:1, explains that Christ as our Advocate is like a "Roman patron, who maintained the interests of his client in every way." Whenever we sin, the Father has a case against us. Therefore, we need a heavenly attorney to take care of our case. We need the Lord Jesus to be our Advocate, our Paraclete.

### **The High Priest**

In His ascension Christ was also made the High Priest in the heavens. Hebrews 4:14 says that we have a "great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God." The Lord came from God to us through incarnation, and then He went back from us to God through resurrection and ascension to be our High Priest to bear us in the presence of God and to care for all our needs (2:17-18; 4:15). Therefore, Hebrews 7:26 says, "Such a High Priest was also fitting to us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners and having become higher than the heavens." In His ascension Christ was inaugurated into His priestly office. When He was on earth He did not carry on His priestly ministry as He is now doing in the heavens. As our High Priest in the heavens He is qualified to care for us in every detail.

In the Old Testament the high priest typifies Christ as our High Priest. Whenever the high priest went into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, he bore upon his shoulders and upon his breast the names of the children of Israel before God (Exo. 28:9-12, 15-30). Today Christ is our High Priest, and we are on His shoulders and on His breast. He is in the heavens as the High Priest bearing us before God. As Christ bears us before God in the Holy of Holies, He ministers God into our being.

As our High Priest, Christ is taking care of us. He is a "merciful and faithful High Priest in the things pertaining to God" (Heb. 2:17), a High Priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (4:15).

Christ, our heavenly High Priest, who "sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (8:1), is "able to save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him, since He lives always to intercede for them" (7:25), caring for all the churches and transmitting into them the heavenly supply.

In Revelation 8 Christ is revealed as the Priest offering the incense at the golden altar: "Another Angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and much incense was given to Him to offer with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne" (v. 3). Therefore, Christ is the Priest.

Christ as the High Priest takes care of the lampstands and trims the lamps for the expression of God (Rev. 1:13; 2:1). This work includes His edifying of the saints and His building up of the church for a living testimony of Jesus. And in taking care of the lampstands He is also the Priest offering incense to God. To the universe Christ is the Administrator, but to the church He is the High Priest. As the ascended One in the heavens, He is now living, working, and ministering as the High Priest caring for all the saints and all the churches for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

### **The Propitiation Place (Mercy Seat)**

In ascension Christ is also a propitiation place (mercy seat). Romans 3:25 says that God has set forth Christ "a propitiation place through faith in His blood." The Greek word for propitiation here is *hilasterion*. This word is different from *hilasmos* in 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 and *hilaskomai* in Hebrews 2:17. *Hilasmos* is that which propitiates, that is, a propitiatory sacrifice. In 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 the Lord Jesus is the propitiatory sacrifice for our sins. *Hilaskomai* means to appease, to reconcile one by satisfying the other's demand, that is, to

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propitiate. In Hebrews 2:17 the Lord Jesus makes propitiation for our sins to reconcile us to God by satisfying God's righteous demands on us. But *hilasterion* is the place of propitiation. Therefore, in Hebrews 9:5 this word is used for the cover, the lid, of the ark (translated "mercy seat" in the King James Version) within the Holy of Holies. In Exodus 25:16-22 and Leviticus 16:12-16 the Septuagint also uses this word for the cover of the ark. The law of the Ten Commandments was in the ark exposing and condemning by its righteous requirements the sins of the people who came to contact God. By the lid of the ark, with the propitiating blood sprinkled upon it on the Day of Propitiation, the entire situation on the sinner's side was fully covered. Therefore, upon this sin-covering lid God could meet with the people who broke His righteous law, and He could do this without, governmentally, any contradiction of His righteousness, even under the overshadowing of the cherubim that bore His glory and overshadowed the lid of the ark.

The propitiatory or expiatory sacrifice, which foreshadowed Christ, satisfied all the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory. As a result, God could pass over the people's sins that occurred at that time. Furthermore, in order to show forth His righteousness, God had to do this. This is what is referred to in Romans 3:25. For this reason, Romans 3:25 uses the word *hilasterion* to reveal that Christ is the propitiation place, the propitiation-cover, whom God set forth for showing forth His righteousness by passing over the sins of the Old Testament saints, for, as the propitiatory sacrifice, Christ made the full propitiation on the cross for their sins and fully satisfied the requirements of God's righteousness and glory.

The point we would emphasize here is that in His ascension Christ is the place, the propitiation-cover, for God to meet with us. In Hebrews 4:16 this place is called the throne of grace. The throne of grace is the cover of the ark on which Christ sprinkled the blood He shed on the cross for our redemption. Because of the sprinkling of His redeeming blood, the cover of the ark has become a propitiation-cover, a place where God may contact us and where we may enjoy His grace in full.

### **The Minister of the True (Heavenly) Tabernacle**

Hebrews 8:2 says that the ascended Christ is a "Minister of the holy places, even of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man." Christ, as a Minister of the true (heavenly) tabernacle, ministers heaven (which is not only a place but also a condition of life) into us, so that we may have the heavenly life and power to live a heavenly life on earth, as He did while He was here.

The heavenly Christ is ministering in a tabernacle pitched by the Lord and not by man. This tabernacle, this sanctuary, is in the third heaven, in which is the heavenly Holy of Holies. The heavenly Holy of Holies, where Christ is ministering on our behalf, is connected to our spirit. Christ's ministry in the heavens takes care of our need. From the heavens Christ ministers Himself to us as food, as our life supply, in the way of dispensing. As our Minister takes care of our needs, He carries out God's economy.

Whatever Christ carries out as the heavenly Minister He applies to us as the Spirit. Whatever He ministers is transmitted into our spirit. Because the Lord in the heavens and the Spirit in our spirit are one, there is a continual transmission between the heavens and our spirit, so that whatever takes place there is immediately applied here.

The supply we need comes from the Christ who is both the Lord in the heavens and the Spirit within us. He is interceding for us, caring for us. Now we may experience Him in all His functions as the ascended One. In particular, as the heavenly Minister He transmits what we need from God the Father, who is the source, into our spirit to supply and sustain us. This is the dispensing of the Triune God into our being for the building up of the Body of Christ to consummate the New Jerusalem. 