

CHRIST IN ASCENSION AND IN GOD'S ADMINISTRATION

BY WITNESS LEE

The Lord Jesus surely had a fruitful life during the thirty-three and a half years He was on earth. Most of what He accomplished, however, was in a three-year period. He spent thirty years 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 Christian, 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 until 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 still continues.

The person of Christ has two aspects, as does His ministry. 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.

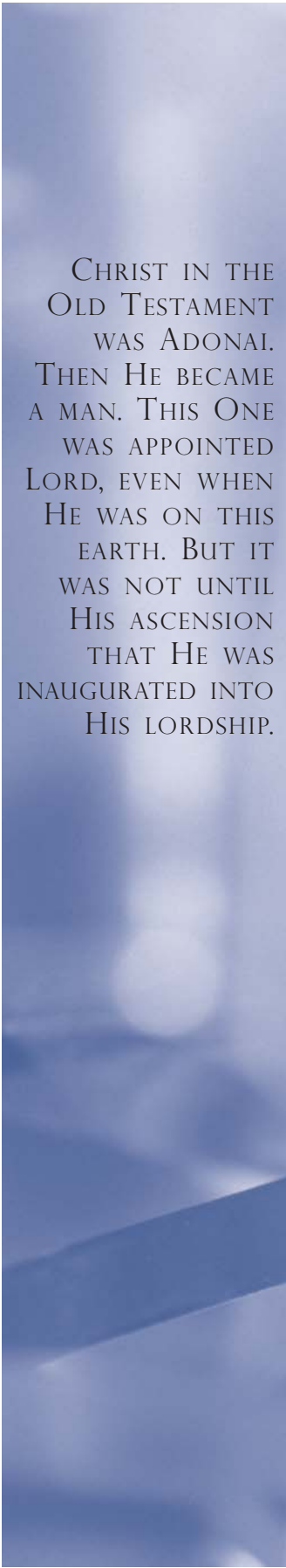
The Offices of the Ascended Christ

When Christ ascended, He was inaugurated into a number of great offices, including the Christ, Lord, Ruler, Savior, High Priest, Minister, Firstborn of the dead, Ruler of the kings of the earth, and Head over all things.

The Christ

Not until His ascension was Christ officially inaugurated as the Christ. On the day of Pentecost Peter said, "God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified" (v. 36). This verse used to bother me. Was He not Christ before His ascension? Yes, even in eternity He was Christ, but in eternity He was not anointed. It was at His baptism that He was anointed. 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 the manger, the river Jordan, and the cross, and He is now enthroned in the heavens as the Christ.

Everywhere in Christianity the cross can be seen. There are crosses of wood, gold, stone, and steel. Catholics often make the sign of the cross. They have a dead Christ. Their knowledge of Him is limited to the manger and the cross. Where is the symbol



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of the throne? Our Christ did not end with the crucifixion. He is enthroned! Even in our spirit there is this throne. The One in our spirit is not lying in a manger or hanging on the cross but seated on the throne. It is this enthroned Christ we must experience.

Lord

Acts 2:36 also tells us that He was made Lord. Yes, He was Lord before His ascension, but, again, He was not 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 appointed Lord, even when He was on this earth. But it was not until His ascension that He was inaugurated into His lordship. When Peter said, “This One is Lord of all” (10:36) in the house of Cornelius, Peter meant that He was Lord of all peoples—both Jews and Gentiles—and of all things. There is not only God but a man on the throne today, who in His ascension was inaugurated as Lord of all.

Ruler

“This One God has exalted to His right hand as Leader and Savior” (5:31). The Greek word translated here as “Leader,” or “Prince,” is used only four times in the New Testament and always in reference to Christ (Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb. 2:10, Author; 12:2, Author). 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 the Originator, the Author, the Leader, the Inaugurator. He is, therefore, above all and spontaneously is the Ruler with authority.

Acts 3:15 calls Him the Author of life. In Hebrews 2:10 this same word is translated “Author.” Christ in ascension is the Author of our salvation, leading us into glory, where He has already entered as the Pioneer. Hebrews 12:2 calls Him the Author of faith. Again, the thought is included that He is the Originator, the Leader, or the Forerunner, of faith. To be our source of faith and to lead us in the pathway of faith are functions of the office into which He has been inaugurated.

How rich is this Christ in ascension! On earth He was so poor that He had to ask water of a Samaritan woman. Now the poverty of His earthly life is over. He has taken office as the origin and the Originator, the Ruler, the Author, the Leader, the Captain, the Pioneer, and the Forerunner. He is far above all. He is the first. All things and all power are in His hands.

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 (Acts 5:31). Do you realize that your salvation is more glorious than Peter’s? Peter was saved unofficially by the Carpenter from Nazareth. You were saved officially by Christ on the throne. I realize you think that Peter was special to have been saved by Jesus on the seashore of Galilee, but you were saved by One in glory, the One seated on the throne in the third heaven. Do not be envious of Peter. When he was saved, he followed Jesus in Galilee. When you were saved, you were seated with Him in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6). Christ has saved you from the throne and to the throne. This is your Savior!

High Priest

We have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens (Heb. 4:14-15). He

is not just a priest but a High Priest, “able to save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him, since He lives always to intercede for them” (7:25). Christ appears before God on our behalf, praying for us that we may be saved and brought fully into God’s eternal purpose. As verse 26 says, He is not only in heaven but “higher than the heavens.”

Minister

In 8:2 Christ is called “a Minister of the holy places, even of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.” He is the enthroned Servant, ministering to us from the heavens.

Firstborn of the Dead

Firstborn of the dead is a great title. Lazarus was resurrected from the dead (John 11:43-44), but his resurrection was only temporary; later on he died. With the Lord’s resurrection, however, death is over. He will live forever. Thus, He is truly the First-born of the dead (Rev. 1:5).

Ruler of the Kings of the Earth

He is also called in Revelation 1:5 “the Ruler of the kings of the earth.” *Ruler* here is a slightly different word than the title we referred to in Acts 3:15. It is common to call Jesus the King of kings, but to call Him the Ruler of kings is to say that He is far above the earthly rulers.

Head over All Things

When Christ was raised from the dead, God “subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22).

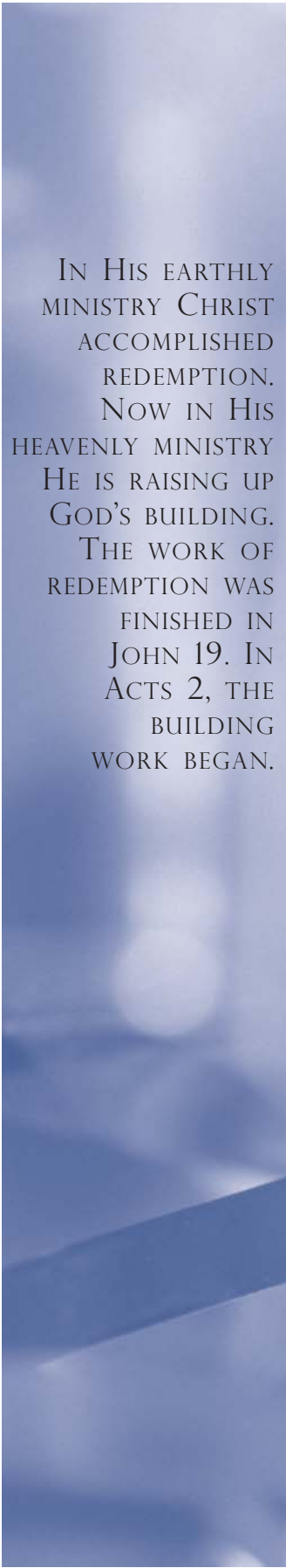
The Ascension Scene

Revelation 4 and 5 used to be a great puzzle to me. As far as I can recall, I never heard any message on them, and it was quite a long time before I came to have some understanding of what they meant. These two chapters present a scene in the opened heavens. There is a throne where God is sitting, surrounded by twenty-four other thrones. There are twenty-four angels as elders in the universe and four living creatures. No doubt there are also myriads of angels present, as well as all the other created beings. This picture declares that God on the throne is the center of the universe.

Then John saw a scroll in the hand of the One sitting on the throne. When the question was raised as to who could open the scroll, John wept that no one was qualified to do so. “Do not weep,” one of the elders told him, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so that He may open the scroll and its seven seals” (5:5). When John looked, what he saw was a Lamb with seven eyes. This Lion-Lamb was standing, not sitting, and His seven eyes were flashing. From this picture it is clear that His work is not finished. What was finished in John 19 was the work of redemption. But His standing position and His seven flashing eyes both indicate that He is taking action.

“He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sits upon the throne” (Rev. 5:7). This is the beginning of Christ’s ministry in the heavens. Without these two chapters we would not know what happened when Christ ascended to the heavens. From Revelation 4 and 5 we learn that when Christ ascended, He went directly to the throne at the center of the universe. Before the throne, before the twenty-four elders,

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and surrounded by all the created beings, He received a commission to carry out God's economy, symbolized by that scroll.

We enjoy singing the hymn that is based on Revelation 5:12-13: "Blessing and honor and glory be Thine, / And glory be Thine, And glory be Thine. / Blessing and honor and glory be Thine, / Both now and evermore" (*Hymns*, #241).

The blessing, honor, and glory are for the Lamb, not on the cross but standing before the throne at the center of the universe and receiving a universal commission. We must not be so shallow as to confine our praises to Christ for redemption only. Our vision must be uplifted to see this Lamb accomplishing a work of eternally vast dimensions.

Consider this photograph that John has taken for us. The redeeming Lamb is now standing at the center of the universe, before God's throne. This tells us that the Redeemer is now in God's administration. He is the Administrator of the universe, executing God's economy. He is not sitting or sleeping there. He is standing, His seven eyes flashing, watching, searching, and even burning. The whole universe is watching this scene. The four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, myriads of angels, and all other creatures are wide awake, alert, observing. These are the circumstances in which they proclaim, "To Him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be the blessing and the honor and the glory and the might forever and ever" (v. 13).

How do we know that this scene took place at the time when Christ ascended? We conclude this from verse 6, where the Lamb is described as "having just been slain." The Greek here implies that He had just recently been slain. Right after His sacrificial death, He received the universal and eternal commission from God's hand.

The Twofold Work of Christ

In His earthly ministry Christ accomplished redemption. Now in His heavenly ministry He is raising up God's building. Redemption is for God's building. The center of this building is the church. Its ultimate consummation is the New Jerusalem. Today the church is a house (1 Tim. 3:15), but that house will consummate in a city. When this happens, God's building is completed. The work of redemption was finished in John 19. A few chapters later, in Acts 2, the building work began. This is the work that continues today.

These two aspects of the work of Christ are not generally known among Christians today. They are familiar with the work of redemption, but if you tell them that Christ is still working in the heavens to accomplish God's building, they may wonder at the strange doctrines you hold. How marvelous it is to be in the light and to see this heavenly view, which is hidden from the eyes of most Christians. There is a Lion-Lamb standing in the center of the universe with seven flashing, burning eyes. He saves us from our silence, our coldness, and our laziness.

The Correspondence between Heaven and Earth

Who can thwart this Lion-Lamb? On the day of Pentecost the response to Christ's move in the heavens began on earth. Only one hundred twenty people were there at the start, most of them simple people from Galilee, not scholars. That work, which began then, is what we are part of today. The work did not begin in China but in Jerusalem. We are here in our day reflecting what Christ is doing in the heavens.

Authority and Rulership

When Christ was ready to ascend to the heavens, He met with His disciples on a

mountain and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:16-19). The Lord's charge to the disciples to preach the gospel was a reflection of the authority He had been given both in heaven and on earth (see also Mark 16:19-20).

With this authority He has charged us to disciple the nations. His first commission to the disciples was to go with His authority. I can testify to you that when I became clear that I should begin the work in the United States, I had the deep conviction that I would be there with Christ's authority. I was just a little man from China, with no prestige nor financial backing, but I arrived in the United States with the conviction that Christ's authority was with me.

For Christ to have His gospel preached to the uttermost part of the earth requires His leadership. As the Ruler of the kings of the earth, the whole earth is under His dominion. He has ordered world events and everyday human affairs for the spread of the gospel.

The Redeeming Lamb Executing the Testament

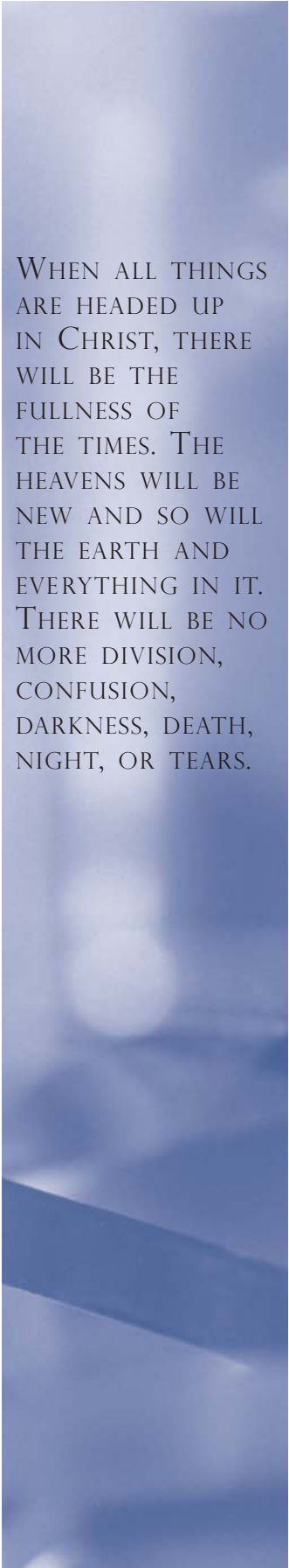
The book of Revelation also tells us that Christ is the Administrator taking care of all peoples. There are the Jews, God's elect; the heathen, the nations; and those in Christendom. We need to be aware that even Christendom and how it will progress are under Christ's administration. When all these categories of people have been dealt with according to Christ's rule, there will be the millennium, the kingdom of God on this earth. Afterward there will be a new age, eternity, with the New Jerusalem and the new heaven and the new earth. Christ is the Administrator of these peoples and ages.

This is what is unfolded to us, beginning in Revelation 4. The scene changes from Christ's tending of the lampstands (chapters 1 through 3) to "a door opened in heaven," and we are shown "the things that must take place after these things" (4:1). Christ is presented as the redeeming Lamb who is the Victor, qualified to take up the new testament, open it, and execute it. Such is the meaning of the sealed scroll in the right hand of the One on the throne (5:1). When a strong angel calls out, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?" (v. 2), only this worthy Lion-Lamb is able to come and take the scroll (vv. 5-7). He is qualified to take the new testament, open it, and execute it.

The new testament in the Epistles of Paul is mainly for our enjoyment of the riches of Christ, which have been bequeathed to us. There is, however, another aspect to the new testament. God deals with the universe according to His testament. How He deals with the Jews, the nations, and Christendom will all be according to His testament. In this testament are bequests for us as believers to enjoy. In this testament are also the matters of God's dealing with different peoples and even with the heavens and the earth. The Redeemer of the whole universe is qualified to take, open, and execute this new testament.

Eventually, everything in the universe will be headed up in Christ. The Jews, the heathen nations, and Christendom will all be dealt with, and God's kingdom ushered in on this earth. When all things are headed up in Christ, there will be the fullness of the times. The heavens will be new and so will the earth and everything in it. The whole universe will be in order. There will be no more division, confusion, darkness, death, night, or tears.

A day will come when there will be a new heaven and a new earth. All things will be



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headed up in Christ. Everything will be in order. Then everything will be fine. Who is worthy to administrate this new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem? Only Christ is worthy. He is the One who died to redeem the whole universe. He is the One who conquered Satan through His death. He is the One who consummated the covenant with His redeeming blood. He is the One who bequeathed the new testament to us.

How qualified He is! He is worthy to take up the scroll of the new testament, open it up, execute all that is written therein, provide us with every bequest, carry out every item contained in it, and bring everything in the universe into order. This is Christ's ultimate heavenly ministry, the carrying out of all that God designed. **AF**

Works Cited

Hymns. Living Stream Ministry, 1980.

The Propagation of the Resurrected Christ in His Ascension

The subject of Acts is the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension, by the Spirit, through the disciples, for the producing of the churches—the kingdom of God...His work of propagation is in ascension...The ascension is the nature and the sphere of the Lord's work on earth. Therefore, the work of the Lord today should have a heavenly nature and should be in a heavenly sphere...

The propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension is by the Spirit. His propagation is not by any gimmick or human technique. But consider the situation among Christians today concerning the propagation of Christ. Where is the propagation by the Spirit? In many instances, there is very little of the Spirit but much use of human methods and techniques...The propagation of the resurrected Christ is by the Spirit, in particular, the economical Spirit. In the book of Acts we see the economical Spirit for the carrying out of Christ's propagation...

Christ's propagation is through the disciples...The Lord's disciples in Acts are witnesses of a wonderful person, the One who was conceived of God the Spirit, who was born of a human virgin, who lived on earth and ministered, who entered into death and conquered it, and who came out of the tomb in resurrection, becoming the life-giving Spirit. This resurrected One has ascended into the heavens, where He is sitting on the throne. As He is sitting there, He is very active and aggressive in doing the work of propagation. The disciples are witnesses of such a One...

Through His witnesses the resurrected Christ in His ascension propagates Himself for the producing of the churches. This indicates that the churches should not be raised up and established merely by human hands. Every local church should be produced by Christ's propagation. Every local church must be born of Christ, brought forth by Christ's propagation in His divine and resurrected life...

The churches produced by Christ's propagation are the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a sphere of life produced by the propagation of Christ...The resurrected Christ, who is propagating Himself in His ascension, by the Spirit, and through the disciples, is the reality of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is His expansion.

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