

## BIBLICAL CHRISTOLOGY – THE WORK OF CHRIST (PART II)

*“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” 1 Timothy 1:15a*

### PRAYER

#### I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

- **The States of Humiliation and Exaltation:** “The whole NT teaches the *humiliated* and *exalted* Christ as the core of the gospel.”<sup>1</sup>
- **Humiliation:** incarnation, sinless life, atoning death
- **Exaltation:** resurrection, ascension, session, intercession, second coming

#### II. The State of Exaltation

##### A. The Resurrection of Christ

(Psalm 16:8-11; Isa. 53:10; Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; 28:1-20; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34; 16:1-8; Luke 9:22; 18:31-33; 24:1-53; John 2:19-22; 10:17-18; 20:1–21:25; Acts 2:32; Romans 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3-4, 12-22; Heb. 7:16, 24-25)

The works of the exalted Christ begin with the resurrection. According to the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 15 the resurrection is the ground of our faith and hope, and since it is the ground of Christian faith and hope, it is central to the writings of the New Testament.

The Gospels testify to the resurrection of Christ. The Book of Acts is the story of the Apostles’ proclamation of the resurrection of Christ and of continued prayer to Christ as the one who is living and reigning in heaven. The epistles depend entirely on the assumption that Jesus has indeed risen from the grave, and the book of Revelation repeatedly shows the risen Christ reigning in heaven in preparation for his return to conquer his enemies and reign in glory. Thus the entire New Testament bears witness to the resurrection of Christ, and if the resurrection is so central to the New Testament, we should ask why it’s so important for us.

#### 1. Christ’s resurrection ensures our regeneration

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 418.

(1 Peter 1:3; Eph. 2:5-6)

In his first letter Peter says that ‘we have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.’ Here Peter is explicitly connecting Jesus’ resurrection with our regeneration or new birth. When Jesus rose from the dead he had a new quality of life, a ‘resurrection life’ in a human body and human spirit that were perfectly suited for fellowship and obedience to God forever. In his resurrection, Jesus earned for us a new life just like his. We don’t receive all of that new ‘resurrection life’ when we become Christians, because our bodies remain as they were, still subject to weakness, aging, and death. But in our spirits we were made alive with new resurrection power. Thus it is through his resurrection that Christ earned for us the new kind of life we receive when we are born again.

## **2. Christ’s resurrection ensures our justification**

(Rom. 4:25)

In Romans 4:25, Paul says that Jesus “was put to death for our trespasses and *raised for our justification*”. When Christ was raised from the dead it was God’s declaration that he had accepted Christ’s work of redemption. By raising Jesus from the dead, God the Father was in effect saying that he approved of Christ’s work of suffering and dying for our sins, that his work was completed, and that Christ no longer had any need to remain dead. There was no penalty left to pay for sin, no more wrath of God to bear, no more guilt or liability to punishment—all had been completely paid for and no guilt remained. In the resurrection, God was saying to Christ, “I approve of what you have done, and you find favor in my sight.” **[SHARE GOSPEL]**

For those who have believed in Christ, since Christ was raised for our justification, and since we have been raised with him (Eph. 2:6), then by virtue of our union with Christ, God’s approval of Jesus is also his approval of us. When the Father in essence said to Christ, “All the penalty for sins has been paid and I find you not guilty but righteous in my sight,” he was at the same time making the declaration that applies to us who have trusted in Christ. In this way Christ’s resurrection also gives final proof that he had earned our justification.

## **3. Christ’s resurrection ensures that we will receive perfect resurrection bodies**

(1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Cor. 15:12-58)

The New Testament on several occasions connects Jesus’ resurrection with our final bodily resurrection. In 1 Cor. 6:14, Paul says, “And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power”. Similarly, in 2 Cor. 4:14, he says, “he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. Then again, in 1 Cor. 15, which is the longest treatment of the connection between Christ’s resurrection and our own, Paul says that Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. The term ‘firstfruits’ is an agricultural metaphor indicating that we will be like Christ. Just as he, ‘the firstfruits’ would be raised, so too will we be raised. Christ’s resurrection body shows what ours will be like when we are raised. We will be healed, glorified, whole, uncorrupted and not susceptible to corruption.

**[Questions]**

## **B. The Ascension of Christ**

(Psalm 110:1; John 6:61-62; 20:17; 16:4-7; Matt. 22:41-46; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-11; 2:32-36; 3:19-21; Ephesians 4:7-8; 1 Timothy 3:16)

## **The Ascension as the Linchpin/Prerequisite of Christ's Other Saving Works**

**The ascension is the prerequisite for the subsequent saving works of Christ: the session, Pentecost, intercession, and the second coming.** It is clear from Psalm 110:1 and Acts 2:33–36 that Christ had to ascend in order to sit down at the right hand of the Father, thereby beginning his heavenly session. By his ascension, therefore, Christ was able to take his place as the King over all creation until the time when all things would be wholly subjected to him.

**The ascension was also necessary for Christ to send the Spirit at Pentecost.** Christ makes this claim explicitly in **John 16:7**: “I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” Upon Christ's ascension he received the Spirit from the Father, and then as the great prophet, priest, and king poured out the Spirit upon his church as a blessing (John 7:39; Acts 2:33).

**Christ's intercession also required him to ascend.** In Hebrews 8, Christ's intercession is his current priestly ministry for his people. This heavenly ministry is possible only if Christ takes his position as a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. That position is not on earth but in heaven, and that position is achieved only by his ascension (Heb. 8:4).

**Finally, it is clear that Christ could come again only if he went away in the first place.** Peter declared this truth before the Sanhedrin in reference to “Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things” (Acts 3:21). Although we cannot fully grasp the mystery of God's plan, it does require that Jesus ascend into heaven and once there rule and empower his church so that the kingdom of God might spread. **Christ's ascension saves in that every benefit that the church receives from Jesus in heaven would be impossible unless he first ascended to take his position there.**

## **[Questions]**

### **C. The Session of Christ**

(Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:3-4; 8:1-2; Acts 5:30-31; Romans 8:33-34; Colossians 3:1-4)

**Jesus's session saves.** One specific aspect of Christ's ascension into heaven and receiving honor was the fact that he sat down at the right hand of God, which is what is referred to as Christ's *session* at God's right hand.

The Old Testament predicted the Messiah would sit at God's right hand in Psalm 110:1, “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’ And when Christ ascended back into heaven he received the fulfillment of that promise. This is what Hebrews 1 refers to when it says, “When he had made purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.”

This welcoming into the presence of God and sitting at God's right hand is a dramatic indication of the completion of Christ's work of redemption. Just like we sit down at the end of a hard days work,

satisfied with what we've done, so Christ also sat down visibly demonstrating that his work of redemption is complete.

Similarly, sitting down at God's right hand is an indication of the authority he received over the entire universe. This is what Paul refers to in Ephesians 1:20-21, when he says that God "raised him from the dead and seated at his right hand far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named.

And it is at the right hand of God that Christ now intercedes for his people...

#### **D. The Intercession of Christ**

(Leviticus 16; Psalm 110:4; Isaiah 53:12; John 17; Romans 8:31-34; Hebrews 6:19-20; 7:25; 8:3; 9:11-14, 24; 1 John 2:1-2;)

**The Bible teaches that the intercession saves.** But exactly how does the heavenly intercession of Christ save us? First, it saves us because it is the completion of Christ's priestly work. Christ's intercession is emphatically not the completion of his sacrificial work. His sacrificial work was forever finished on the cross. However, his sacrificial work was not the end of his priestly work. After making the final sacrifice for sins, he rose again, ascended into heaven, sat down at God's right hand, and poured out the Holy Spirit on the church. **As a result of these prior saving events, he now makes intercession for the sinners he came to save.**

If he had not risen from the dead, then he would have been unable to appear in the presence of God in our behalf as intercessor, and if he had not appeared in the presence of God in our behalf, his priestly work would be incomplete. The testimony of Scripture is that Christ has risen and that he has ascended to heaven and appeared in the presence of God in our behalf. And even now the exalted Christ in heaven is making continual and effective intercession for his people, thus guaranteeing our final salvation. This leads to the second way that the intercession saves.

**It saves us because it is one means by which God enables his people to continue in faith and obedience.** It is God's plan that his elect persevere in faith and obedience (Rom. 8:29-30), and one means by which God accomplishes his plan is the continual intercession of Christ on our behalf.

**Christ's priestly intercession is not only continual, but it is also effective.** God the Father listens to his Son, and the Father always answers his Son's requests (John 11:42). This means that Christ's intercessory prayers are always successful. As Jesus prayed for Peter (Luke 22:31-32), he prays for all his people. He prays that the elect will continue in the faith and persevere until final salvation, and God answers his prayers. He is always successful. He always lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). Jesus Christ is a perfect Savior for his people.

**McCheyne:** "If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million of enemies. Yet the distance makes no difference; He is praying for me."<sup>2</sup>

#### **E. The Second Coming of Christ**

(Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 25:31-34; Mark 13:26-27; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11;

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Murray McCheyne, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne*, Ed. Andrew A. Bonar (Edinburgh; London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1894), 158.

Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 9:24-28; 1 Peter 1:13; 1 John 3:2-3)

**Jesus's Return Means Our Being with Him and the Father.** Jesus himself asserts this in John's Gospel: "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2-3). Here Jesus likens heaven to a large house with many rooms. He has returned to the Father's house to prepare a place for each believer. The point is that the Father loves us and we will be "right at home" in his heavenly presence. We will not feel out of place; we will belong in our Father's heavenly house.

**Paul teaches the same truth when he clears up the Thessalonians' confusion concerning Jesus's return.** They had the mistaken idea that their fellow believers who died might miss out on final salvation. But Paul says that they are not to grieve, as the unsaved do, when their loved ones die. They will not miss out on final salvation, but Jesus will raise them from the dead. "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the LORD in the air, and so we will always be with the LORD" (1 Thess. 4:17). Jesus's second coming will mean salvation for living and dead believers. Salvation is here expressed as being with Jesus forever. It is triggered by the second coming at which time all the saints will go to be with the LORD.

**And Jesus's Return Brings Glory.** Paul asserts that Jesus's return will mean glory for Christians. Although we live on earth, "Our citizenship is in heaven." From there "we await a Savior, the LORD Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil. 3:20-21). Our mortal bodies are lowly because they are subject to illness and death. At his return Christ will exert his almighty power and cause our lowly bodies to share his resurrection glory. His second coming will mean great glory for all of the redeemed.

**God has spiritually joined every believer to his beloved Son,** so that his saving benefits become ours. We spiritually died with him, were raised with him, and are presently seated in the heavenly places with him (Col. 2:20; 3:1, 3; Eph. 2:6). We are so united to him that twice Scripture teaches that Christ's second coming will mean a second coming for us, so to speak. "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4; see also Rom. 8:19). Paul means that Christians' true identity is only partially revealed now because it is obscured by sin. We are so joined to Christ spiritually that our full identity will be revealed only when Jesus returns. In that sense we will have a "second coming" too. Our LORD's return means the revelation of our true identity, and that involves appearing with him "in glory."

**Jesus's Return Also Brings Eternal Life.** Jesus's message concerning the sheep and goats in Matthew 25 is the most famous biblical passage on the eternal destinies of human beings. He teaches powerfully that the sheep will be blessed with a rich inheritance in the final kingdom of God, but the goats will be cursed forever in the fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. Jesus leaves the following words ringing in his hearers' ears: "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:46). As we consider these sobering words, it is important to keep in mind the way Matthew introduces Jesus's teaching: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne" (v. 31). It is the returning King Jesus who will condemn the wicked to hell and bless the righteous with

everlasting life.

**The Bible concludes on a similar note.** Near the end of Revelation, a speaker says, “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done” (Rev. 22:12). The speaker is Jesus, who will come again and reward his people (and punish the wicked). Next, John utters a beatitude: “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life” (Rev. 22:14). Here again Scripture pronounces Christians as “blessed,” filled with joy, at the end. Why? Because they have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb and as a result have “the right to the tree of life.” The tree representing eternal life with God was found in the garden of Eden and reappears at the end of the biblical story. Adam and Eve were banished from the garden so that they would not eat from the tree and live forever in a sinful state. At the end all sin will be removed from God’s people, and they will have free access to the tree, which symbolizes abundant life (Rev. 22:2).

### **Jesus’s Return Brings Joy.**

Both Paul and John speak of the consummate joy of the redeemed. As we just saw, John, after recording Jesus’s promise to return, speaks of the bliss awaiting the saints: “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life” (Rev. 22:14). Paul’s message is similar. After extolling the grace of God that brings salvation, he directs our attention to “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us” (Titus 2:11, 13–14). The apostle speaks of the returning Redeemer. How does he describe Christ’s “appearing”? It is “our blessed hope” (v. 13). The hope of the LORD and Savior’s coming again fills Christians with joy as they anticipate being with him forever.

### **Jesus’s Return Brings Deliverance**

Another benefit that Jesus brings at his return is deliverance. This deliverance takes two forms. First, he will deliver his people from any persecution they are enduring. Paul makes this plain in the beginning of 2 Thessalonians: “God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the LORD Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire” (1:6–8). On that day he will come “to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at” by all true believers (v. 10). The next passage tells us why. Second, Christ will deliver his people from eternal punishment. At the beginning of his first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, the apostle proudly rehearses the testimony of the church in that city. People in surrounding areas “themselves report . . . how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:9–10). Because Jesus’s (death and) resurrection save, when he comes “from heaven” he will bring final deliverance “from the wrath to come” (v. 10).

### **Jesus’s Return Brings the Kingdom and Our Inheritance**

In the same message about the sheep and the goats referred to above, Jesus promises more blessings to the saints at his return. Before he condemns the goats, who are on his left, he gives words of comfort to the sheep, on his right: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). Here Jesus combines familial and royal imagery. God is our Father, and all who trust his Son for salvation become God’s children and receive an inheritance. God is also King, as is his Son, and the inheritance of the sons and daughters

of God is “the kingdom prepared for” them “from the foundation of the world.” We learn from other Scriptures that the final dimension of the kingdom of God, our inheritance, is nothing less than the new heaven and new earth!

### **Jesus’s Return Brings Cosmic Restoration**

Peter speaks of Jesus’s sufferings to his hearers in Jerusalem and then invites them to repent. What will be the results? That the penitent hearers may know the forgiveness of sins and that “times of refreshing may come from the presence of the LORD, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things” (Acts 3:20–21). Jesus’s return will bring many blessings for his people, as we have seen. It will result in God’s “restoring all things” according to Old Testament prophetic prediction. Here again the second coming issues forth in the new heavens and new earth foretold by Isaiah (65:17; 66:22–23).

**Application:** Worship Jesus Christ, the risen, ascended, reigning,  
and returning Lord of glory!

**Revelation 22:20** He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!