

**Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (15):
The Humiliation and Exaltation of Jesus Christ**

We have addressed the paragraph of Colossians 2:6-15 on the last three Sundays. We desire to move on today, beginning with verse 16 and continue through the end of the chapter with verse 23. But it probably will not happen. Because the passage that we have been considering is so rich with theological and practical lessons for us, before we advance farther there are a few more matters that I would like us to cover. It would be good for us to consider and reflect upon what underlies these verses before us and the verses that follow, that being both *the humiliation and exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ*. But before we do so, let us rehearse from our passage what we have learned with regard to the Christians' new life in Jesus Christ.

Last Lord's Day we gave attention to the believer's union with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. This union is set forth particularly in verses 11 through 13, in which Paul described the spiritual experience of these Christians in the church at Colossae:

In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses...

From these few verses we considered when this union takes place in the experience of the Christian. God brings His people into this state of blessedness--their union with Jesus Christ--at the time of their regeneration. The regeneration of the sinner, that is, his new birth, is described here as "*a circumcision made without hands*." This is a work of God's grace in His people whom He has purposed to save from their sins. It is upon the transforming event of the new birth that people are united with Christ in His death. In verse 11 the expression, "*by the circumcision of Christ*", is a reference to the crucifixion of Christ.

But believers are not only united with Jesus Christ in His death; they are also united with Him in His resurrection. This is set forth in verse 13: "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, *God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses*... Our new life in Christ, even as we died to our former life in this world, has established a new relationship between Christians and the fallen world about us.

Now again, it was through union with Jesus Christ in His death that every Christian died, or was severed, separated, from his former life, the life he lived as a non-Christian. This is what it is meant by the expression, "*by putting off the body of the flesh*"--through our union with Jesus Christ our former life has come to an end. This changed the way we relate to the fallen world in which we live. We are no longer bound to its rules or ways of the fallen world, for we have been delivered, or transported, into another realm, even the Kingdom of God over which the Lord Jesus reigns. The Lord Jesus accomplished this for us by what we read in verses 14 and 15:

¹⁴by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him.

It is because of our union with Jesus Christ that our former relationship with the fallen world came to an end. This is the basis for what Paul argues next in verses 13-23. Let us read these:

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

²⁰If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— ²¹“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” ²²(referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? ²³These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Now last Lord’s Day we also gave attention to the fact that the apostle connects the experience of salvation, which involves the new birth, with baptism. In a number of places in the New Testament baptism is so joined with the initial experience of coming to salvation, that it is seen as one event. The new birth, which results in repentance and faith, is shown forth in one’s confession in baptism. It was as one event: regeneration, repentance, faith, and baptism. And by the way, although some have tried to argue otherwise, it is quite clear that Paul is depicting baptism here as the full immersion of the convert in water.¹ Baptism by immersion portrays death, burial, and resurrection unto new life that is consistent with Paul’s language.

Now we have dealt with this passage with attention to *the believer’s union* with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. But as we consider the spiritual lessons and practical instruction for Christian living before us, I believe it would be important to take some time to rehearse the experience of *our Lord Jesus Himself* and how He came to represent His people in His life, death, and resurrection and why it is that this brings benefit to His people. And so, let us consider is what is commonly called *the humiliation and exaltation of the Son of God*.

I. Our Lord’s Humiliation

Now where may we begin? **The Westminster Shorter Catechism** is a good resource. Question #27 addresses the matter of our Lord’s humiliation:

Question 27. Wherein did Christ’s humiliation consist?

Answer. Christ’s humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition,² made under the law,³ undergoing the miseries of this life,⁴ the wrath of God,⁵ and the cursed death of the cross;⁶ in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.⁷

¹ William Hendriksen, an excellent commentator, who happens to hold to paedobaptism, dismissed the notion that baptism by immersion is suggested by Paul’s language in these verses. See William Hendriksen William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Baker, Academic, 1964), p. 117. I find his argument to be very deficient.

² **Luke 2:7.** And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. **2 Corinthians 8:9.** For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. **Galatians 4:4.** But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law

³ **Galatians 4:4.** But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.

⁴ **Isaiah 53:3.** He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. **Luke 9:58.** And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. **John 4:6.** Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. **John 11:35.** Jesus wept. **Hebrews 2:18.** For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are

This question and answer set forth the historic understanding of Reformed Protestants regarding this subject.

When we consider the different manner in which the Son of God has existed through history, it is common to think of Him in three different “states.” Technically “a ‘state’ is one’s position or status in life, and particularly the forensic (legal) relationship in which one stands to the law.”⁸ Most argue that Christ should be understood to have existed in 3 states. These would include, first, His pre-existence as the eternal God, second, the earthly state of his incarnation from the incarnation unto His death and burial, and third, His present heavenly state of exaltation.

The different “states” of the Lord Jesus are reflected in these passages:

2 Corinthians 8:9. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

Galatians 4:4, 5. “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

Philippians 2:6-11. “Who (Christ), being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Hebrews 2:9. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.”

Now as we consider our Lord’s state of humiliation, we should understand it as having two “elements.” When the Son of God “left” His state of glory to become a man, He both (1) “emptied Himself”⁹ and (2) He became subject to, that is, under the law of God.¹⁰ With regard to the first, He emptied Himself in that He assumed a human nature, coming into this world in the form of a servant. The eternal Son of God, who was the eternal Word of God, surrendered His divine majesty as the Ruler of all creation and assumed our human nature, coming in the form of a servant. With respect to the second, in His incarnation

tempted.

⁵ **Psalm 22:1.** My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? **Matthew 27:46.** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? **Isaiah 53:10.** Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. **1 John 2:2.** And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

⁶ **Galatians 3:13.** Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: **Philippians 2:8.** And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

⁷ **Matthew 12:40.** For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. **1 Corinthians 15:3-4.** For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

⁸ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), p. 331.

⁹ This is commonly referred to as His *kenosis* (Greek), taken from Philippians 2:7, He had “emptied Himself” when He became incarnate.

¹⁰ This is referred to as His *tapeinosis* (Greek), in that in His incarnation He became subject to the authority and the cure of God’s law, and that He was obedient unto that law throughout life, even unto death.

the Son of God had become in Jesus Christ subject to both the rule of the law and the curse of the law. This is great humiliation.

Reformed theology understands the Scriptures to set forth Christ's humiliation in 5 stages. These include (1) His incarnation, assuming a human nature, (2) His suffering in this life, (3) His death, (4) His burial, (5) His decent into Hades.¹¹ Let us consider each of these briefly.

(1) Christ's humiliation included His incarnation, Him assuming a human nature.

First, let us affirm that it was the Second Person of the Holy Trinity that assumed a human nature, whereby He who was God also became a man. It was not God the Father or God the Holy Spirit who became a man, but the Son of God only. It has been suggested, therefore, that rather than describing God as becoming man, it is better to say that the Word became flesh.¹²

And yet all three persons of the Trinity had a part in the incarnation of the Son of God. We read of God the Father's role in the incarnation. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). We also read of the involvement of the Holy Spirit: "But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit'" (Matt. 1:20). Also Luke reads, "And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God'" (Luke 1:35).

The humiliation of the eternal Son of God in the incarnation involved the infinite God entering into a finite world of time and space. In the incarnation the infinite Creator became one of and one with His creatures. He came to be one of us, who was also frail and weak, who would experience emotions and trials as we do, who would be subject to pain, hardship, suffering, and death, just like each one of us.

And yet we recognize that the incarnation did not change the divine nature of Jesus Christ. As to His eternal divine nature, He was the same after the incarnation as He was before. His divine nature underwent no change. Rather, the divine Son of God took upon Himself in addition to His divine nature His human nature, thereby He, as the eternal Son of God, in addition became fully man. But He remained the unchangeable Son of God in His incarnation.

(2) Christ's humiliation included His sufferings in this life, both spiritual and physical.

We may say a few things regarding this matter. First, we should understand that His sufferings were encountered throughout His entire existence on earth. Certainly His sufferings were intensified in His Passion, but throughout His earthly life He experienced suffering. He was the Holy One living in a fallen, sin-indulgent world of sinners. We read in the Scriptures that God "delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) (2 Pet. 2:5). If Lot's righteous soul was pained by daily interaction with the wicked souls of Sodom, what must the Son of God experienced as He moved about in this fallen world among fallen sinners?

Christ suffered in both His body and soul. He was troubled outwardly and pained inwardly. Some tend to emphasize only His physical sufferings, as great as they were. But the sorrow of His soul was far greater, it could be argued.

And Christ lived out His life knowing what sufferings were before Him. He knew the nature and intensity of His struggles in both body and soul that He would suffer.

¹¹ Interestingly, Lutherans see as many as 8 stages of His humiliation.

¹² "It was not the triune God but the second person of the Trinity that assumed human nature. For that reason it is better to say that the Word became flesh than that of God became man." Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 333.

He lived His life much alone. No one understood Him. No one could really share with Him in His sufferings. His hometown friends had rejected Him. His family had stood aloof from Him. Even His own disciples could not enter into a true realization of the nature and extent of His sufferings.

In many ways His sufferings were far more than any man has or ever could experience. Here is an effort of **Charles Spurgeon** to depict the sufferings of our Lord, with particular attention to His sufferings being tempted:

I call your attention, first, to the feeling that is here expressed: “in that he himself hath suffered being tempted.” Many persons are tempted, but do not suffer in being tempted. When ungodly men are tempted, the bait is to their taste, and they swallow it greedily. Temptation is a pleasure to them; indeed, they sometimes tempt the devil to tempt them. They are drawn aside of their own lusts and enticed; so that temptation, instead of being suffering to them, becomes a horrible source of pleasure. But good men suffer when they are tempted, and the better they are the more they suffer. I know some children of God to whom temptation is their constant misery day and night. If it took the form of external affliction, they would bravely bear it; but it takes the shape of evil suggestions and profane insinuations, which leap into their minds without their will, and though they hate them with their whole heart. These suggestions continue to annoy some dear saints whom I know, not only daily, but nightly, and that month after month. These thoughts beset them as a man may be surrounded by swarms of midges or flies, from which he cannot get away. Such brethren are tempted, and they suffer being tempted. Our Lord Jesus Christ enters into this trying experience very fully; because his suffering through being tempted must have been much greater than any suffering that the purest- hearted believer can know, seeing that he is more pure than any one of us.

It was a trying thing to the Blessed Christ even to dwell here among men. He behaved himself with most condescending familiarity, but he must have been greatly sickened and saddened by what he saw in this world of sinners. They were no fit company for him, for their views of things and his were as different as possible, and they had no points of agreement in character with him. They were as much company for him as a patient may be to a surgeon; nay, not so much as an imbecile may be to his teacher, or as a madman to his keeper: they could not come much closer until his grace changed and renewed them. Our Lord and Master had such a delicate sensitiveness of soul with regard to holiness, that the sight of sin must have torn him as a naked man would be torn by thorns, and thistles, and briers. There was no callousness about his nature. He had not made himself familiar with sin by the practice of it, as many have done; neither had he so associated with those who indulge in evil as to become himself lenient towards it. We inherit the customs of our ancestors, and do not raise questions about that which has been commonly done: we begin at an evil point, and start from a wrong point in morals; but it was not so with our Lord; he had no original, or inherited, or birth sin; neither did he learn evil in his bringing up. We also commit sin through a comparative ignorance of its evil, but he knew the horror of it: he felt within his soul the shame, the wrong, the inherent baseness of sin against a holy law and a loving God. His infinite knowledge helped him to understand and measure the heinousness and hell-desert of it; and hence, to be in contact with it must have been a perpetual sorrow to him. He suffered in being placed where he could be tempted.¹³

(3) Christ’s humiliation included His physical death on the cross.

The death of the cross was itself a humiliating way to die. The Lord probably hung naked upon His cross after He had been derided and mocked by the crowds and Roman soldiers. All who saw Him hanging there assumed that God had forsaken Him. It was reasoned that if God were in the least favourable toward a man, He would not allow Him to suffer the shameful death of the crucifixion.

When our Lord hung on the cross, He did so bearing the guilt and weight of the sin of the world upon Him. The curse of God was upon Him for the sin of the world. “He bore, in body and soul, the wrath of God

¹³ Charles Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 33 (Pilgrim Publications), #1974.

against sin of the whole human race.”¹⁴ And it was God the Father that heaped His eternal wrath upon the sin-bearer. “The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6).

It was not that many weeks ago we read question and answer #37 of the Heidelberg Catechism. It expressed the nature of the sufferings of our Lord:

Question 37: What does it mean that He suffered?

Answer: That all the time He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, He bore, in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race; in order that by His passion, as the only atoning sacrifice, He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the grace of God, righteousness and eternal life

When the Lord Jesus died upon the cross, He paid in full the debt to God owed by all of His people for all of their sins that they had committed against God. In His death the sentence of the law of God against sinners was executed upon Him.

(4) Christ’s humiliation included His burial in the tomb of His body.

The returning of our bodies to the earth is the punishment for sin. God had said to Adam, “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3:19). There are verses of Scripture that also suggest that our Savior’s burial was an aspect of His humiliation. We read of our Lord’s words prophetically spoken in Psalm 16 regarding the time He would be in the grave. He said, “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” This is also quoted in Acts in one of Paul’s sermons: “And that He (God) raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’ Therefore He also says in another Psalm: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption’” (Acts 13:34f). For our Lord’s body to be laid in the tomb in His death was itself one manifestation of His humiliation.

(5) Christ’s humiliation included His soul’s decent into Hades, or Sheol.

Sheol should be understood as the abode of the dead, whether they are redeemed or had died in their sins. It is not that all are in the same “place”, but that they were in the same disembodied state. The souls of the righteous are in a place of peace and comfort. The souls of the unrighteous are in a place of punishment and torment, awaiting the final judgment.

The verses that we considered above could be cited regarding this matter of our Lord’s soul upon death being in Sheol. Psalm 16:10 reads, “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol...” When a human being dies, his soul is separated from his body. His body is normally placed in the grave. But the soul is consciously in a state awaiting the day of the resurrection and the final judgment. There are many different interpretations of what actually occurred with the soul of Jesus between His death and His resurrection. Some have taught that He went to suffer in the flames of hell of the three days, and in doing so paid in full what His people would suffer. This is terrible error. Christ accomplished the full atonement for our sins on the cross. When He died, the payment for sin was “finished.” But Protestants have differed among themselves regarding the right understanding of this matter. Some have argued that our Lord did not descend into the abode of the (righteous) dead. They say that His (human) soul went to be with God during this time. Our Lord declared to the thief on the cross, “Verily I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). They argue that Paradise is in heaven with God. Others have said that the expression, “You

¹⁴ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 339. This is not a statement that supports universal atonement, rather, it speaks of Christ bearing the sin of the whole world judicially, in that the infinite wrath of God upon sin in its entirety was upon Him.

will not leave my soul in Sheol”, describes His sufferings while on His cross. Interestingly, this was John Calvin’s view.¹⁵

It is my view that when our Lord died upon His cross, while His body was in the tomb to be raised on the third day, His (human) soul was in the Sheol, the abode of the righteous dead, all of the redeemed through history waiting for the day of the resurrection.

But there was an end to the humiliation of Jesus Christ. He was highly exalted from His state of humiliation. And so, let us consider:

II. Our Lord’s Exaltation

Again, the Westminster Catechism may be cited respecting this matter:

Question 28. Wherein consisteth Christ’s exaltation?

Answer. Christ’s exaltation consisteth in his rising again from the dead on the third day,¹⁶ in ascending up into heaven,¹⁷ in sitting at the right hand¹⁸ of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day.¹⁹

In Reformed theology, Christ’s exaltation may be seen as having 4 stages. These include (1) His resurrection, (2) His ascension, (3) His Session, or present service in heaven, and (4) His return to judge the world. Let us consider each of these.

(1) Christ’s exaltation involves the resurrection of His body.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the reuniting of the soul and the body thereby coming back to life. But it was not a mere reversal of death, a return to the same kind of “life” as before His crucifixion. His body was raised to a higher level than before. Rather, when the Lord Jesus Christ came forth from the tomb, His body was in a state of glorification. Prior to His death, the body of the Lord Jesus was subject to weakness and death. But the resurrected body of our Lord was incorruptible, incapable of death or decay. His body was of a nature that is far different and better than our natural physical bodies. He could transport Himself from one place to another instantly. He could ascend into the sky into a cloud. He could eat and drink as before, and have table fellowship with His disciples, but clearly His glorified body was far superior to theirs and different from theirs.

The resurrection of Christ set forth three important realities. (1) The resurrection was God the Father asserting that death had been defeated, the penalty of sin was paid, and God’s condition was met so that

¹⁵ Berkhof, p. 342.

¹⁶ **1 Corinthians 15:4.** And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

¹⁷ **Psalm 68:18.** Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them. **Acts 1:11.** Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. **Ephesians 4:8.** Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

¹⁸ **Psalm 110:1.** The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. **Acts 2:33-34.** Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, **Hebrews 1:3.** Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

¹⁹ **Matthew 16:27.** For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. **Acts 17:31.** Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

everlasting life may be granted to His people. (2) His resurrection set forth what God purposed would happen to His mystical body, the church. The members of his body would be justified and glorified in their future resurrection and judgment. (3) His resurrection effected and secured the redemption of His people. Consider these verses that speak of the benefit His people accrue from His resurrection.

Romans 4:25. Christ, “who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”

Romans 5:10. “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

1 Peter 1:3. “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”

(2) Christ’s exaltation involves His ascension.

His ascension was into heaven to the throne of God. It may be said that the ascension was part of the resurrection, one movement from the resurrection to the throne of God. The ascension was the exaltation of not only the eternal Son of God to the throne from which He had ruled from eternity. It was the exaltation of the human nature and human body of our Lord Jesus to the throne of God. It was the Son of David assuming His promised place as King over an everlasting Kingdom that God had promised to His father, King David.

The ascension may be described as the visible ascent of the person of the Mediator from earth to heaven, according to His human nature. It was a local transition, a going from place to place. This implies, of course, that heaven is a place as well as earth. But the ascension of Jesus was not merely a transition from one place to another; it also included a further change in the human nature of Christ. That nature now passed into the fullness of heavenly glory and was perfectly adapted to the life of heaven.²⁰

The ascension of Christ has three important messages to us. (a) It shows that the sacrifice on the cross was accepted by God and that it secured our Lord’s enthronement, which is a universal Kingdom that is a rule over all creation. (b) It was a prophetic declaration of the future exaltation of all believers who will ascend to rule with Jesus Christ. (3) His exaltation secured a place for His people who would follow Him.

(3) Christ’s exaltation involves His present Session, or service in heaven.

When the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, God His Father gave Him authority to reign as King, access to God to serve as High Priest to His people, and the authority to serve His people as their Prophet (through the Holy Spirit He gave to His people).

First He ascended to be *the promised King* over the promised kingdom of God. It was the realization of Daniel’s prophecy in chapter 7:13-14.

¹³ “I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.

¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages

²⁰ Berkhof, p. 350.

should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.

The kingdom which was inaugurated when He was enthroned in heaven upon His ascension, is the Kingdom promised through the Scriptures, but again we can cite Daniel. In Daniel 2 we read of Daniel being summoned to interpret a dream of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. We read the following:

³¹“You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. ³²The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, ³³its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ³⁴As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. ³⁵Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

³⁶“This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. ³⁷You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, ³⁸and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. ³⁹Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. ⁴⁰And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. ⁴¹And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. ⁴²And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. ⁴³As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. ⁴⁴And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, ⁴⁵just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.” (Daniel 2:31-45)

Daniel interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar speaking of four world empires that would exist until the time when God would establish the kingdom of the Messiah, even the promised Kingdom of God. There would first be Babylon, then Persia, then Alexander's Greece, and then Rome. It would be in the days of the Roman Empire when God would cause the Promised Kingdom to be inaugurated. This was realized when the Lord Jesus came forth from the grave, ascended into heaven, and began His present Session as King of kings and Lord of lords.

But not only did the Lord Jesus ascend to be enthroned King, but in ascending into heaven He became *the promised Priest*, even King-Priest after the order of Melchizedec, who himself was a king and priest. Our Lord Jesus intercedes to His Father on behalf of His people. As their Priest He prays for His people, He renders grace to help in their time of need, they apply the merits of His sacrificial death to their account before the Father.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest *who has passed through the heavens*, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:14-16)

The Lord Jesus serves His people by applying the benefits of His death to secure their justification, applying His blood and imparting grace to affect their ongoing sanctification.

But the Lord also serves in His present session as *the Prophet to His people*.

Before He parted with His disciples He promised them the Holy Spirit, to aid their memories, teach them new truths, guide them into all truth, and enrich them in all truth, and enrich them out of the fullness of Christ, John 14:26; 16:7-15. The promise was fulfilled on Pentecost; and from that day on Christ, through the Spirit, was active as our great Prophet in various ways: in the inspiration of the Scripture; in and through the preaching of the apostles and of the ministers at the Word; in the guidance of the Church, making it the foundation and pillar of the truth; and in making the truth effective in the hearts and lives of believers.²¹

(4) Christ's exaltation involves His return to judge the world.

When our Lord ascended into heaven, He was declared to be the one who would one day judge the world, of all its inhabitants as well as all of the angels. His present service as Prophet, Priest, and King is not the culmination of His ascension and exaltation; rather, it is His Second Coming when He will judge the world at the end of history on the Last Day.

Jesus Christ will return literally, bodily, in great glory. When He returns He will cause the souls of the redeemed who are with Him to be reunited to their bodies, even as He translates all living saints, instantly transforming them into glorified bodies, who ascend to meet the Lord in the air. He will then summon before Him all the human race to render an account of their lives before Him. He will separate His people from the lost, consigning the lost to everlasting hell and the righteous to everlasting glory in a new heavens and new earth.

All that Jesus Christ is, all that He has experienced in His humiliation and exaltation, is for the glory of God and for the glorification of His people in Him. As Paul wrote, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). May each of us may be found to be in Him, for our present existence is a blessed one and our future existence is destined to be glorious.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:20f)

²¹ Berkhof, p. 353.