



What is the Lord doing now?

Part A

Introduction

The prophetic passages in the NT tell us what the Lord will do in a *future* day, when He returns to the earth to establish His millennial kingdom fulfilling the unconditional covenant promises that God gave to Israel. The Gospels on the other hand focus on what the Lord *has* done. They tell of His messianic offer of the kingdom to Israel (which was rejected), His ministry as a “Light to the Gentiles” and His ministry to mankind according to the “acceptable year of the Lord.” They unfold the wondrous narrative of His life on earth as the obedient Son of God. His driving and singular purpose was to do His Father’s will, which was to provide salvation for fallen man. He did this through His willing sacrificial death at Calvary. The epistles in turn present the doctrinal aspect of what the Lord has done, revealing the blessings that we as believers enjoy personally and collectively as a result of His death and resurrection. There are however, particular portions of the NT that tell us explicitly what our Lord is doing *now*. This is our subject in this Series – the Lord’s present ministry, which we must hasten to note, is founded upon His past ministry. His past ministry was associated with His day of earthly rejection. His present (and His future ministry) is associated with His day of heavenly exaltation – an exaltation that answered His past ministry which was a perfect work, one that brought infinite glory to God. In a future day He will leave His place of exaltation, coming first to the air to receive His Bride, the Church and then coming a second time to the earth – sin apart, to restore a repentant and remnant Israel. Death and the grave could not keep Him in. Heaven could not keep Him out. And so we read of Him, “Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21).

The focus of this Series

Our purpose with the help of the Spirit of God is to outline the Lord’s present ministry. Before we can properly benefit from the rich provisions of that ministry, we must first have a sound understanding of what it involves. This is a vital first step even in secular matters. For example, before we can fully benefit from the services of a health or financial professional, we need to know the nature and scope of the work provided. If we fail in this, we risk not only losing any available benefits but we may well sustain physical or financial harm. There is an important lesson here for believers who go no further than the fact and experience of their conversion (precious and pivotal though that occasion is). They remain content with a modest knowledge of spiritual truth, seeing little reason to enquire into the deeper things that belong to them *because* of their conversion. Biblical subjects such as the one before us are sadly considered “optional extras,” and are best left to theologians and expositors. So by way of encouragement and the edification of the beloved in Christ, we must ask “what is the Lord doing now?” And, when we search the scriptures in pursuit of answers, we discover an untold treasury of truth which is part of the unfading inheritance of every believer in Christ.

When we ask what the Lord is doing now we are of course speaking about the time after His ascension. Though not the subject of this Series, it is important to mention two inaugural things that the Lord did as the ascended Christ. First, He sent down the Spirit of God, which took place at Pentecost (Acts 2). Second, He gave gifts to men for the perfection of His Body, the Church. “Wherefore he saith, when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Eph 4:8). These are subjects worthy of individual attention, but they do not fall within the scope of our Series. However, it would be careless not to point out that these two acts by the ascended Lord are vital to the man of God being engaged with the ministry of the Lord as High Priest and Advocate. For instance, the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost and His indwelling, enables the believer individually and collectively to partake of the provisions of the Lord’s High-Priestly ministry – with our Spirit-led priesthood engaged with His High-Priesthood.

But there is another reason why this Series centres on the nature and scope of the Lord's present ministry. It equips us with the ability to identify the error of the day. As others have faithfully warned, Satan seeks to attack the truth particular to the age. The pivotal truth of this age is Christ Jesus our Lord – His person and work. It is by no accident therefore that in this age, which will be consummated by the Day of Christ, Satan has false shepherds that intrude upon the work of the Under-Shepherd; false systems of gathering which deny the ministry of the Chief Shepherd in the midst; false priests that impose themselves and their vapid rituals between God and man, denying the exclusive, victorious blood-based ministry of Christ the Great High Priest and Advocate.

The antidote to the apostasy of the day is to know Christ and Him crucified and all that this entails for the believer. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever" (2 Pet 3:18).

The place of the Lord's present ministry

The corollary to the title of this Series may well be the question "*Where* is the Lord Now?" The Lord's past ministry was on *earth* – the somber scene of His rejection and humility, marked by the lowliness of the stable, the austerity of the carpenter's workshop, the sin-stained byways of humanity and, finally, the indignity of a felon's cross on Golgotha's Hill outside the camp. His present ministry however is in *heaven* – the radiant scene of His unbridled exaltation. He is there exalted, seated at the right hand of God by virtue of the excellence of His past ministry, born out of His obedient humility. Every mark of dark dishonor and every depth of sorrow, is "told in answering glory now."

Scripture bears ample testimony to His exalted place in heaven. It is *announced* in the OT. "For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool" (Acts 2:34-35); It was *anticipated* by the Lord Himself. "Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69). It is *affirmed* in the NT. "[Christ] Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him" (1 Pet 3:22). We have it affirmed again in the Epistle to the Hebrews – many times over. "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself" (Heb 9:24 cf Heb 1:3; 4:10; 6:20; 9:12).

However, He is not only presented as exalted at the right hand of God, but also seated on His Father's throne, a throne of grace (Rev 3:21). The Throne itself is a mark of distinction in our Lord's ministries (as it marks the distinction in the dispensations). In His present ministry the Lord shares His Father's throne – a throne of grace. His past ministry was undertaken in the absence of a throne. His future ministry will be administered from His own throne – a throne of righteous government. "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt 19:28).¹

¹Three dispensations are identified here. One associated with the *vacant* Throne; one with the *shared* Throne and another with the *singular* Throne of His glory – the dispensations corresponding to the *Law*, the *Church* and the *Millennial Kingdom* respectively. Presently the Son shares His Father's throne. It is not His own throne for all things have not yet been put under Him – yet He is now "crowned with glory and honour." "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under Him" (Heb 2:8).

His exaltation seen in His *place*, His *position* and His *posture*

It is profitable to our spiritual understanding and a proper veneration of the Lord that we keep His exalted place of ministry in view - in part by learning more about it and in part by employing language befitting it. The Spirit of God has not left us in ignorance as to the proprieties when addressing the glorified Son of God. Indeed, it is a vital part of His sacred ministry. "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth" (Jn 16:13). Terms of misplaced familiarity are all too common. They are not according to the truth as taught by the Holy Spirit, the Vicar of Christ. They serve to profane the high dignity and honor accorded by God to the once despised and rejected Man on earth – Jesus of Nazareth. But it is not only familiarity that denies His glory. We hear it in the unsuitable use of the biblical titles, even by the redeemed. "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). To the redeemed heart, both Jew and Gentile, Jesus is **Lord**! Here the saved Jew and Gentile are on common ground – spiritually and dispensationally. For the Lord was "lifted up," "raised up" and "taken up." He was then set down at the *right hand* of the *Majesty on High*. It is the place and, we are careful to note, His *position* and *posture* within it that imparts a glorious distinction to His present ministry and its associated titles.

The precious and efficacious character of His ministry within the sanctuary is seen in the *reasons* for it and in the *results* or blessings that flow from it. The blessings that flow from His exalted place in heaven we know and outline later – His ministry as our Great High Priest and Advocate. The reasons for it we also know. First, He had to be exalted because the Church, which is His Body, had to be united to a risen and glorified Head in heaven. It is, by divine desire and design, a unity of a redeemed heavenly people on earth united to an exalted Head in heaven. "Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us together with Christ...and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:5-6).

It has been said, in regard to our Lord's present ministry, that "He has brought in more than He took away." It is indeed a blessed thought! However, its preciousness is enlarged when we consider the cost of "taking away" in order to "bring in." It is a matter deeply impressed upon us by the psalmist. "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" (Ps 22:12-18). The Lord's suffering was always before Him. "And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Lk 22:15).

And so we come to the second reason for His exaltation. It was due to His *willing* subjection as a perfect sin-bearing and *suffering* sacrifice at Calvary. He is here the Antitype of the sin-offering and the burnt offering – His *vindication* and *glorification* of God respectively. Wherefore *God* has "highly exalted Him." It is here that we sometimes miss the fact and significance of the truth that His present place of exaltation is one that was *given* to Him. In this He stands in marked contrast to fallen man, who naturally seeks to exalt himself, evident in that first and fallen man, Adam. Man's appetite for self adoration rises to its darkest hour in the coming man of sin – the Antichrist. "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thess 2:4). Not so our Lord! The spirit of God is careful to record that He exalted not Himself, but humbled Himself, and that because of this He was exalted. The divine principle

was declared by the Lord Himself. “For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:14).

The *preeminence* in exaltation

The exaltation of Christ is not an isolated truth. Blessed principles attach to His place of exaltation as we have noted. They also accompany the *preeminence* of it, seen in three aspects. First, we have His exaltation in regard to the **Church** and in the promise to it which was fulfilled at Pentecost. “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” (Acts 2:33). The second has the **nation of Israel** in view and the promise to it according to the prophecy of Daniel’s 70 Weeks, yet to be fulfilled. There the Lord returns to “finish the transgression” and “make an end of sins” of the nation (Dan 9). “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). Then we come to the third instance where the **whole world** is in view – even that which is above it and that which is below it. Observe now, that His exaltation and the promise is not in regard to the Church or to Israel, but in regard to the *Son* – the Son of God *and* the Beloved Son of the Father. “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philipp 2:6-11).

Meanwhile, in our worship, especially on that first day of each week, “we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb 2:9). The reasons for His death and the circumstances that circumscribe it, invite us to consider His exaltation. The Word of God implores it and the Spirit of God inspires it.

The principle predicating the Lord’s present ministry

We mentioned that the Lord’s present ministry is vitally connected with His past ministry. This too is clearly taught in Scripture, particularly in the Epistle to the Hebrews. “But this Man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb 10:12). The Lord’s present ministry is in the heavenly sanctuary. To enter the heavenly sanctuary He had to take away sin and vindicate the holiness of God. This He did once for all by the sacrifice of Himself, as the acceptable and perfect sacrifice.

The people who are the object of the Lord’s present ministry

It is clear even from the few passages of scripture noted above, that the Lord’s work now is not for the *sinner* but for the **saint** – and more particularly, the saints of the Church Age. The once rejected and despised Jesus of Nazareth is now *exalted* and *seated* at the right hand of God. He is seated because He has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself and in doing so He met every righteous claim of God against sin. The *divine requirement* is in view here. His shed blood *satisfied* God in regard to sin because it was the blood of a sinless and spotless sacrifice that met the claims of divine holiness. It also *glorified* God because it was the shed blood of a *willing* sacrifice – that of His Beloved *Son*. Here the *divine relationship*

between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity is brought out. There is a particular honour that a willing and obedient son confers upon a father when he acts according to his father's will. We have it in the unfailing ready obedience of Christ, who "must be about His Father's business" (Luke 2:49). "Then said Jesus unto Peter, put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn 18:11). He was forsaken by God as the Sin Offering – but "the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please Him" (Jn 8:29). "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost" (Luke 23:46). And so we read of the Son sharing the throne of His Father. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev 3:21).

This then is the assured testimony of the Word of God, that sin has been put away and a holy God has not only been satisfied by it, but also glorified by it. There is nothing more that the Lord can or needs to do for God in regard to sin; and *therefore* there is nothing the Lord can or needs to do for the sinner in regard to his sins. All has been done by Christ on the Cross. "[Christ], after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb 10:12). "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb 9:28). The resurrection and glorification of Christ at God's right hand is proof of it. His work in regard to sin and the sinner was accomplished on earth. The evangelist can then go forth to the ends of the earth, and in the power of the Spirit proclaim the emancipating message that "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16).

The Spirit of God would have every *sinner* know that "done is the work that saves – once and forever done. He would have every *saint* know, that because of this, our Lord is seated within the sanctuary and He is our title to draw near and enter within. His present ministry is within the sanctuary and partakes of its character. It is for the saint and not for the sinner.

"Done is the work that saves,
Once and forever done;
Finished the righteousness
That clothes the unrighteous
one,
The love that blesses us below
Is flowing freely to us now.

The sacrifice is o'er,
The veil is rent in twain,
The mercy seat is red
With blood of Victim slain,
Why stand ye then without in
fear?
The blood of Christ invites us
near."

The gate is opened wide;
The new and living way
Is clear, and free and bright
With love, and peace, and day.
Into the holiest now we come
Our present and our endless
home.

Enthroned in majesty
Our High Priest sits within;
His precious blood once shed,
Has made and keeps us clean;
With boldness let us now draw
near;
His blood has banished every
fear."

Horatius Bonar.

The particular aspects of the Lord's present ministry

On the one hand we are in the heavenly sanctuary, seated there in Christ and within the veil as purged worshippers. This we have in the Ephesian and Hebrew epistles respectively. Yet, on the other hand we are still in the world and walk as the children of God in a fallen wilderness. This we get in Romans, the First epistle of John and in the epistles of Peter. The Lord's present ministry makes provision for us in both spheres, and it is occupied with three things, all of which relate to the saints of God. It is a ministry *of* Christ for those *in* Christ.

1. A work of **prevention** which includes *representation, intercession* and *presentation*.
2. A work of **restoration** which relates to our *communion* with God our heavenly Father.
3. A work of **anticipation** which relates to the *consummation* of our salvation.

The first relates to the Lord as our Great High Priest and the second to Him as our Advocate; the third as the Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride. In this Series we focus on the Lord's ministry of prevention and restoration – His work as our Great High Priest (Part B) and Advocate (Part C).