

THE PRESENT MINISTRY OF CHRIST

Hebrews 8:1, 2 reads: "Now the main point of what has been said is this: we have a high priest, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not, man." There are three things in these verses the writer would have us know: 1) We have a high priest (see last month's *Living Waters Newsletter*). 2) He has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. (He has taken his seat at the right hand of the Father, a position of superior leadership and authority). 3) He is a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man. (The three and a half years of Christ's earthly ministry was preparatory; to prepare him for his present ministry as our high priest).

After covering the first seven chapters of Hebrews, the writer states: "The main point of what has been said is this: we have a high priest." Having a high priest enables the Christian to be able to "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in the time of need" (4:16). That is what having a high priest is all about. Why is it so hard to get Christians to see and to know what they have and who they are? There are two Old Testament examples showing how not knowing this can affect our lives. When Israel came to the edge of the Promised Land, Joshua sent two spies into the land and they were told "We know the Lord has given you the land, and the terror of you has fallen on us and all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before us for we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you and what you did to the kings of the Amorites whom you utterly destroyed. And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (Josh. 2:9-11). 40 years before they had come to the brink of the land and because of fear turned back and refused to go in and a whole generation died in the wilderness because they did not know the enemy was already defeated. They had won the victory 40 years before and didn't know it. Another example is in II Kings chapter 6. The king of Syria was warring against Israel and was losing the battle. The reason for their loss was Elisha the prophet was advising the King of Israel. When the King of Syria knew where Elisha was "he sent horses and chariots and a great army and they came by night and surrounded the city. Now the attendant of Elisha had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And the servant said to him, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' So Elisha answered, 'Do not fear for they who are with us are more than those who are with them.' Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O Lord, I Pray, open his eyes that he may see.' And the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." They were there all the time, but he didn't see them. All he saw was himself and Elisha and this vast army encamped against them and all he could say was "What are we going to do?" I John 4:4 reminds us: "he that is in you is greater than he who is in the world." But in adversity we still say "What in the world are we going to do?"

The parallel passage in the New Testament to these two examples is Ephesians 1:18-23 where Paul is praying for the church in Ephesus. After mentioning some of the great blessings they had, he says in verse 18: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened..." We hear a lot of prayers in fundamentalist churches and on TV for the Lord to save the sinner, especially the one closest to hell (whatever that means), but Paul isn't praying for the Lord to save sinners, he is praying that the Lord will do something in the lives of the Christian; he prays that "the eyes of their heart may be enlightened" not so they will be prosperous and have everything they want or think they want, but that they may know something, that they "may know what is the hope of His calling" (that they may know why God has called them, not their calling, but God's calling), and that they "may know what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints..." (not what their inheritance is. Most prayers are selfish because we are always asking the Lord to bless us in the way we want to be blessed, and here is the way we need to be blessed...not what God is going to give us, but what we can give Him...what His inheritance is in us). Verse 19-23: I want you to "know what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." This power is... "in accordance with the working of the strength of His might, which He brought about in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated him on His right hand in the heavenlies" and his power is "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and whose name is above every name that is named, not only in this age but in the age to come. And He put all things in subjection under his feet and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all." This is what Paul wants us to understand.

What does all this have to do with Hebrews 8? It has taken him 7 chapters to show that we have a high priest who has taken his seat on the right hand of the Majesty in the heaven. That is the greatest thing that has ever happened for mankind and the modern church doesn't even know anything about the priesthood, much less realize that we have a high priest. We have a *man* in heaven representing us, that is, Jesus Christ (I Tim. 2:5). In Acts 2:34 Peter said David did not ascend into heaven, but Christ did. That is the most significant thing in all Scripture...that heaven itself has been opened to man and that a man is representing us, therefore, we have access to heaven now. It is not something we enter into when we die, it is something that is ours right now because we have a high priest who is in heaven on our behalf. As William Strawson wrote in *Jesus and the Future Life*: "In few, if any, instances of the use of the word 'heaven' is there any parallel with modern usage. The gospel records of our Lord's life and teaching do not speak of our going to heaven, as a modern believer so naturally does. Rather the emphasis is on that which is 'heavenly' coming down to man. Our modern way of speaking of life with God as being 'life in heaven' is not the way the gospels speak of the matter. Especially is there no suggestion that Jesus is offering to his disciples the certainty of 'heaven' after this life." What Jesus offers his followers is a restored earth as our inheritance (Matt. 5:5; Rom. 8:19-22) in eternity and access to heaven now because we have a high priest.

The second point is he “has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens.” Psalm 110:1-2: “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit on My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’ The Lord will stretch forth your strong scepter from Zion, saying, ‘Rule in the midst of your enemies.’” And in the beginning of verse 4, he said the Lord will be doing something upon the earth because he is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Verse 5 shows that because “he is at Your right hand, he will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. He will judge among the nations. He will fill them with corpses, he will shatter the chief men over a broad country.” He is going to be doing something in the world. So when things start to happen around us, when things begin to crumble, we are not to cry out like Elisha’s servant and say “what in the world are we going to do?” We are to realize that the Lord is at work...because he is sitting at the right hand of the throne on high. *Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* states: sitting at the right hand “indicates that he has become a partner in God’s universal government.” Sitting on His right hand is a figure of a position of authority. It is a position of rulership because He stretches forth His scepter ...God does it through Christ...Christ does it through his body, his church. Commenting on this passage James D.G. Dunn in his classic *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* stated: “One of the scriptures which quickly became luminous for the first believers was evidently Psalm 110:1 ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit on my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’ The first Christians now knew who ‘my Lord’ was who was thus addressed by the Lord’s God. It could only be Messiah Jesus. He was now God’s vice-regent.”

Twelve passages in the New Testament speak of the fact that Christ has taken his seat at the right hand of the Father or at the right hand of the Majesty on high. This means several things: it means that he is able to save us completely...to save us forever, since he is always interceding, Hebrews 7:25: “Therefore he is able to save completely (Greek: *entirely*) those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” When we become a believer this means we are *in Christ*. We need to realize this means our sufficiency is of God...that all our needs are met in Him. The Apostle Paul addresses this in Ephesians chapter 1: “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenly places *in Christ*” (Ver. 3)... “*In him* we have redemption through his blood (the wages of our sin, death, was paid for by Christ on the cross), the forgiveness of our trespasses (the sins we daily commit), according to the riches of His Grace which He lavished on us” (Ver.7, 8)... “*In whom* after listening to the message of truth, having believed, you were sealed *in him* with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ver. 13). Hebrews 9:24: “For Christ did not enter the holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one but he entered heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” The only reason Christ went to heaven in that body as he did was to appear before God on our behalf...“that he might appear in the presence of God for us.” It wasn’t for God’s sake, it wasn’t for himself, it wasn’t for the angel’s sake; it was for us and that is the reason he is there today, that is to make intercession for us. “Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need” (Heb. 4:16). That is where our help is. Both the Psalmist and the Hebrew writer show that Christ is seated “on the right hand of God until his enemies be made the footstool for his feet” (Ps. 110:1; Heb. 1:13, 10:12, 13). If he can send the entire Jewish nation into oblivion (70 AD) and destroy the last enemy (death: I Cor. 15:25), he can handle our problems.

The third point: Hebrews 8:2, not only is he our High Priest, “seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven,” he is “a minister in the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man.” As we noted above, the three and a half years of Christ’s earthly ministry was preparatory to prepare him for his present ministry as our high priest. Somehow the modern church has missed this and as Peter Berger stated in *European Intellectual History* they “presume a Christ with no serious work other than redeeming humankind. On the right, they foster ‘vampire Christians,’ who only want a little blood for their sins but nothing more to do with Jesus until heaven, when they have to associate with him. On the left, they foster the Phariseeism of a more or less social self-righteousness.”

Acts 1:1: “The first account I composed (the book of Luke), Theophilus, about all that Jesus *began to do and teach* until the day he was taken up.” This affirms the earthly ministry of Christ was only the beginning of his ministry, that of guaranteeing and mediating the New Covenant (Heb. 7:22, 8:6, 9:15) a ministry that began when he took his seat on the right hand of God. For example, when the new covenant stated: “I will be merciful to their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more” (Heb. 8:12), he guarantees this and that all the promises of the Covenant will be fulfilled. Because “he is able to save completely those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). It is in the context of God desiring all men to be saved that the Apostle Paul states: “There is one God and one mediator also between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5). The mediatorial ministry of Christ is stated by the Apostle John in these words: “If anyone sins we have an *Advocate* with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he himself is the *propitiation* for our sins” (I John 2:1-2). To quote *Thayer’s Lexicon* again; he defines *Advocate* as: “one called to another’s side, hence one who pleads another’s cause... of Christ, in his exaltation at God’s right hand, pleading with God the Father for the pardon of our sins,” and *propitiation* as “satisfaction.” God accepts the mediation of Christ for his people.

When the writer states that Christ, seated on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, is a “minister of the sanctuary” shows this is not a sedentary position. He is not just “seated” on God’s right hand, he is administering the authority the position entails. All though God’s throne is in heaven (Rev.4:2), He is, also along with Christ, dwelling in His people (John 14:18, 23; Col. 1:27; II Cor. 6:16). The book of Revelation, in symbolism, pictures Christ as the abiding presence in the churches, walking in their midst, directing their work, correcting and complimenting them as needed. (Rev. 2, 3).

The ministry given to Christ seated on the right hand of God is not limited to his being the head of the church. The Apostles Paul sums it all up when he said “God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And He put all things in subjection under his feet and he is the head over all things...” (Eph. 1:20-22). Centuries before the Psalmist had written: “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’ The Lord is at your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of wrath. He will judge among the nations. He will fill them with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country” (Psalm 110:4-6). This is the present ministry of Christ.