

Life With A Purpose

by Norman Grubb

Two New Testament letters celebrate the Ascended Christ: Ephesians and Hebrews. Ephesians opens our eyes to what evidently to Paul's eyes had only been progressively opened, for there is no mention of it in his previous letters.

The Cross cut us off from our union with Satan; the resurrection gave us union with Christ in our personal living; the ascension gives us union with Him in His world Saviorhood. Here is the panorama of history. We stand on Mount Pisgah and view it. We are already out of this world in spirit, and in the heavenlies. See it, says Paul, and may the eyes of your understanding be enlightened.

It starts with God's foreordination. It ends with the final reconciliation of all things. Its marvelous middle term of grace is the formation of the Christ of eternity by the union of many sons with The Son. These many sons are the spoils of His victory, when He challenged their captor to battle on his own territory. Christ seized them from Satan and took them with Himself right through death to resurrection and ascension, right through to His throne in the heavenlies. There He reigns, and they with Him in spirit, far above all.

But, if the decisive battle has been fought, the war has not yet been won. The *enemy, though defeated, is not yet destroyed*. That day will come. Meanwhile, the Son with the sons, the Son in the sons, press home their victory. With spirits in heaven, but bodies on earth, they go to release other captives, millions of them. They go as one army, they keep their own equipment clean and weapons loaded, they endure the hazards and hardships of war. But they don't forget. They have seen the coming end. The shout of a king is among them. One day it will finish, and the hidden throne which they share in spirit will be the universal throne of grace and love; and they will be the body through which the Glorified Head will exercise His eternal ministry of loving service in the universe.

This is Paul's triumph song for the Church. A throne shared now. A throne in spirit, while the body that contains it bears the scars of war. It is Christ's throne. See the amazing power which lifted Him from the grave to the right hand of God in actual historical fact, both body and spirit. Believe that the same power has lifted us to the same exalted place in actual spiritual fact, though not yet in our bodies. Then act, not as if this was a glorified experience still to come, not as if this is some mystical throne millions of miles away that we are told we share, but as a throne shared where we are in our own spirits, and in our own defiant world.

Actually the enthroned Christ is everywhere: His throne, His lordship, His accomplished victory is in every square inch of the universe. Did He not say, "*Go . . . teach all nations . . . and lo, I am with you always . . .*"? And it is not the *resurrected Christ*, but the *enthroned Christ* who is with and in us. Let us get into the habit of recognizing this. I have found this to be the key to all situations—just when they are difficult, when all seems against deliverance, when the knots of disagreement seem beyond untying—to recognize Christ actually reigning there in the situation, and to take it for granted with thankfulness that we shall see that He is reigning. I have learned to enjoy the anticipation of it, and to pray not in needy supplication for a victory, but to take it for granted that the victory is already mine, and to relax.

It is noteworthy that, at the end of his letter, when Paul is making plain that though the great campaign was won, the war is not yet ended and the enemy is still rampaging around, he warns us of the mighty power and subtlety of this enemy, and that we "wrestle" with him, and not with the human agents he uses. But then note how he tells us to wrestle. Surely, we would think, with much fierce striving. But not so. It is again one of those

paradoxes of Scripture. We are to *wrestle by standing still!* For the point of spiritual wrestling is not some form of soulish or physical activity, but the continued wearing of the right armor; and when we look into that list of accouterments we find they are all varied representations of Christ living in us! Truth around the loins, righteousness for a breastplate, feet shod with the gospel of peace, a shield of faith, a helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit: in other words, stand in Christ our truth, our righteousness, our faith, and our salvation. As we sit with the Ascended Christ, indicating that the victory has been won, so we also walk with Him in our daily lives as He reigns in life, and we stand with Him, armed with the weapons of His conquest against a conquered foe.

When we turn from the Ascended Christ in Ephesians to Him in Hebrews, we find a concentration on Him in His office as High Priest rather than on the fact of His enthronement. Nothing is said in actual words about our enthroned relationship with Him. But I suggest that to the eye that can see it, a relationship is etched in, so sensitive and profound that it fully rounds out the high priestly ministry of the enthroned Savior, and our relationship to Him in it. It actually carries us on beyond the Ephesian revelation to the fullness of the significance of the ascension.

By chapter five of this Hebrews letter, we are ready to understand and share in the heavenly ministry of our great High Priest. These early experiences of union with Christ our Moses and Christ our Joshua are spiritual infancy and adolescence, as John explains to us in his first epistle (2:12-14). They are designed to release us from the sin and self-life which binds us to earth. They are His Cross and His resurrection in operation in us.

Now we mount up with wings as eagles to the ascended life. . . . He reminds them that they are God's redeemed people, but that instead of pressing on and through to God's full salvation, entering into His rest, they were stopping short, like Israel in the wilderness. Having got into clear water themselves, they should be piloting others; but instead, they were needing reminders of the elementaries of the Gospel. They were in dangerous waters; for there is no standing still in the river of God. There were turbulent rapids ahead, and the ship of their faith could be capsized, and they drowned. This was no light matter—it was not a question of the sins of daily life into which we all so easily fall. Rather, this was the beginning of a dangerous drift, the backsliding of neglect which hardens into apostasy, when we actually trample under foot the One at whose feet we were formerly prostrate, regarding as valueless the blood which was once most precious, and turning a contemptuous back on the Spirit who first wooed and won us to the grace of God, reaching the point of no return.

The writer of Hebrews does not mince matters, and piles warning on warning throughout his letter. There are only two ways for the believer, either forward to perfection, or back to apostasy. The storms of life blow fiercely—those to whom he was writing were feeling their icy blast: persecution, deprivation, exile, torture, and death. Who could withstand their fury?

Certainly not unsanctified self: only the Christ within. And we may well ask ourselves, "How would we stand them?" The answer is the same. We could not! But Christ in a redeemed self makes us more than conquerors. Paul could endure all things, because he could "*do all things through Christ which strengthens me.*"

Christ, our heavenly High Priest, replaced all the earthly makeshifts of mortal priests, ineffectual Law, and inconclusive sacrifices. See Him, eternal in His appointment, unchangeable in His ministry, irreproachable in His character. God's oath established Him: the power of an endless life sustains Him: A completed sacrifice crowns His advocacy. Limitless salvation for His people, nothing less, is the crown right of such a limitless Intercessor.

What is the first of these crown rights? An everlasting covenant, with no conditions attached. The former covenant was dependent on human obedience—a hopeless condition. Like all the rest of the Law, with its demands on man, it was “*weak through the flesh.*” The new covenant is briefly defined in the language of the Old Testament prophets as “*the writing of God’s Law in our hearts, so that all know Him.*” In New Testament language we can interpret that simply enough as “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*”—this inner union being based, again using the language of the prophets, on “*their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more*”—justification by faith. The new covenant is “*the grace of God which brings salvation*” in its completeness.

If the *first crown right* (Hebrews chapter eight) is God’s full salvation, the *second crown right* (chapter nine) is its *continued maintenance* by a *continual cleansing*. This is the High Priest who has entered once for all into the holy place with His own blood, the blood of sprinkling which is spoken of as eternally present in Mount Zion (12:24).

The *third crown right* (chapter ten) is the sanctification, separation and dedication of all redeemed human personalities for their predestined end. By the offering up of His body, our bodies have become His purchased possession. “*For their sakes I sanctify Myself [set Myself apart], that they also might be sanctified [set apart].*” We are the earthen vessels. We are the temples. We are the branches. We are the body. Wholly released by the blood of Christ for our sins, and by the body of Christ for our sanctification, we are instruments fit for the Master’s eternal use, prepared unto every good work.

The heavenly High Priest has His heavenly people, the kingdom of priests with the Royal Priest, eternally joined to Him by the covenant of union, eternally cleansed by His blood, eternally dedicated to their true destiny.

What is this destiny? The secret is found in recognizing that the High Priest, Jesus Christ, continues to fulfill His intercessory work by moving back into the world in His saving activity through us, the priests. Hebrews Eleven is the great list of those through history by whom He has been fulfilling His intercessory work in the world. In other words, the High Priest fulfills part of His ministry as intercessor for the Body in the presence of God by being our advocate with the Father, being Himself the propitiation for our sins through His blood.

He fulfills another part by returning to the world in the person of the Spirit, to dwell in His Body and preserve them blameless until His coming, thus saving them to the uttermost. He fulfills yet another part by reaching out to save the world through His Body, continuing His intercessory work for a lost world. He continues His dying and rising through them; they fill up that which is lacking of His afflictions; they partake of the fellowship of His sufferings and are made conformable to His death.

These people of faith in Hebrews Eleven were not just a glorious company of martyrs; they were Christ’s saving agents in each generation—Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, the apostles, right up to every member of the Body of Christ. They lived with a purpose. Each could say, as Jesus Himself said when on earth, “*To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.*”

Now the Ascended Christ, the Great High Priest, is seen as the dynamic Savior doing His saving work, as much as ever, through His Body. Or perhaps it should be said that He was the Savior once for all in His own body, but now He is the Intercessor in and through our bodies—to gather the spoils of His victory.

We may speak of “the heavenlies” as some distant place, the Mount Zion where He and the Father are, with the Church of the firstborn, the spirits of just men made perfect, the heavenly Jerusalem, and we locate it way off somewhere. But the writer of Hebrews says, “*You are come to Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God*” (12:22); not, “*You will*

come one day!" We are, therefore, already part of this wonderful heavenly company, and must regard "*the heavenlies*" as inter-penetrating our world, with our Great High Priest occupied in fighting the battles of salvation in this lost world by us.

Then how does this work out in normal daily living? Like this. A priest is an intercessor. An intercessor is one who recognizes that he is set apart by God to stand in some gap against the enemy of souls (Ezek. 22:30). How and where? Just exactly where you are. Open your eyes so that God is looking through them at your situation, and you will surely see your commission for those who can see it.

Then accept the commission. That will be bearing about in your body the dying of the Lord Jesus, because it may well go against your human grain to accept it. You may have a real battle to do so. The way to fight and win is to recognize that it is He and none else who is living just there in you, and put you there, and brought to you the pressure and burdens which form your present environment. Accept it, even though you feel the opposite and continue to feel it. You are now consciously in the privileged position of being an intercessor, a royal priest.

But an intercessor does more than accept a situation. He accepts the fact that he is specifically God's agent in it, and that God has put him there because He is going to do something definite through him. So an intercessor is not a vague drifter, just passively yielding to some difficult situation. He is a person with a purpose, because the purposing Christ is within him. This next stage, then, is the challenging one. An intercessor, so far as he is given to do so, takes the place of those for whom he intercedes, even as Jesus took our place. Jesus went all the way just as we go—right to death, and "*through death destroyed him who has the power of death.*" That is to say, He bore all we bear, but He bore it in faith, whereas we natural humans bear it in despair.

Now we are to be as Jesus Christ—Christ in us, in our places of intercession. We are to bear people's unpleasantness, their sharp tongues, their taunting of us as hypocrites, their selfishness, their overreaching us. How can we do that? We shall feel it certainly; but as we put ourselves in their place, we think more of their inner miseries in such a condition than of the hurt they do to us; that is what it means to turn the other cheek, and as God gives grace, we shall bear with them and keep loving them. There may be plenty of cost in this, and it may last a lifetime. But it is a *life with a purpose*. We know what we are doing when we are intercessors. We have an objective in view, and we pay any price God gives us to pay to obtain it. "*Who, for the joy set before Him, endured the Cross . . .*"

With a direct commission, with the acceptance of it, and with the price being paid, there is the authority of faith. It means that, if God appointed us to this situation, and the situation to us, then God's purpose of grace will be fulfilled; indeed in the sight of Him who "*calls the things that be not as though they were*" it has already been fulfilled, and was fulfilled before the situation arose—the supply before the need. We persist, then, in the affirmation and expectation of faith.

The priesthood, and the intercession which is the ministry of the priest, is the topmost pinnacle of God's ways with us. We have come full circle. God is love. Love is pure self-giving. By the sacrifice of Himself, He has won back to Himself millions who had become His enemies. Living in them, He now loves through them. Love is pure self-giving. We now give ourselves that millions more may find Him. When they do come to Him, He lives in them as in us. They then love with the love of God. And so the eternal stream of God flows on.