

Session – Hebrews 1.1-3

...and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might and he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places... (Ephesians 1.19-20)

INTRODUCITON

The session is best described as Jesus assuming his rightful place at the right hand of God. It is the final step in a natural sequence of events that includes the resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Christ. We have discovered that the resurrection, ascension and exaltation reveal the glory of the resurrected Christ. So too, the session of Jesus is evidence of the power and glory of his person. The session depicts Jesus' present relationship with God. Though this subject is not often addressed from pulpits, nor for that matter is it a doctrine extensively developed in theological textbooks, it is nonetheless significant for a number of reasons. The session of Christ demonstrates the finality of his work of salvation; it is part of the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy of the Old Testament (Psalm 110.1); it satisfies Jesus' own utterances about who he is and where he was going (John 7.33; 8.14; 13.1; 14.2-3); it restores Jesus to the exalted pre-incarnate position he enjoyed with the Father (John 17.5); it confirms the relationship between the Son and the Father; it sets the stage for the ongoing intercessory work of Jesus as the believer's exalted high priest (Hebrews 7.27-8.1). As with the other post-resurrection narratives in the New Testament, the session focuses the reader's attention on the exalted glory of Jesus (Romans 8.34; Ephesians 1.15-23; 2.5-6; Colossians 3.1; Hebrews 1.3; 7.26; 8.1; 10.12).

Psalm 110 is quoted by New Testament writers as a prophetic reference to the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ sitting at the right hand of God (Matthew 22.42-45; Acts 2.34; Hebrews 1.13; cp. Romans 8.34; Colossians 3.1; 1 Peter 3.22). This position of authority is the means by which Jesus exercises his authority over the church; in his session he functions as the reigning high priest. He is the Lamb on the throne who will open the seven seals to bring judgment on the earth prior to the great day of the Lord (Revelation 5 and 6) when the last facet of his exaltation will be completed.

THE SURERITORY OF SON

For the purpose of this abbreviated study let us consider Hebrews 1.1-3 wherein the author introduces the role and work of the resurrected Jesus. The introduction to Hebrews (1.1-14) fixes the reader's attention on the heavenly Son. The author of Hebrews reasons that the Son is superior in every way: to angels, Moses, Joshua, the Aaronic priesthood, the law of Moses, and the old covenant. In the opening three verses he gives us seven reasons why the Son is superior to everything in creation.

1. The Son is the heir of all things (1.2). The psalmist writes, *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession* (Psalm 2.8). The author of Hebrews recognizes Jesus in these lines and regards him as singularly unique. Jesus is sovereign over the entire universe, not just the church. Adam was responsible for bringing sin into the world; Jesus, the

second Adam, brought salvation (Romans 5.12-14). Only Jesus is able to accomplish this because he alone is the rightful heir of His Father's kingdom. As God's one and only Son (John 3.16) he enjoys all the rights and privileges as God's son. John the Baptist bore witness to him: *This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me"* (John 1.15).

2. The author of Hebrews says that it was through the Son that God created the world (1.2; cp. John 1.3; Colossians 1.16, *For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him*). Even a cursory reading of Scripture does not allow for a naturalistic Jesus, like those who say that Jesus was merely an exceptional child who grew up to be an unusually gifted moral philosopher, whose innovative teachings became the foundation for a radical subculture that overturned the intellectual and moral structure of western civilization. Thus, Jesus became de facto the savior of all those who follow his teachings. To the contrary, the historical witness of Scripture portrays the Son of God as the second person of Trinity who came to earth and became incarnate in the person of Jesus through the womb of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, made atonement for sin by his vicarious death, and in his resurrection gave believers hope for eternal life. The New Testament speaks of Him as God incarnate and his disciples worshiped Him as God (John 20.28). The philosopher might say that the Son is the uncreated necessary cause of the universe. Bottom line, the choice is this: you either acknowledge the Son as the supernatural creator of the universe and its sovereign Lord and savior or you reject Him in favor of philosophical naturalism which leaves you with in a universe without an ultimate purpose, final cause, or any sort of legitimate spiritual dimension. You will find no solace in agnosticism; it is not an option in which you may take refuge. "Agnosticism is not a state in which the mind of an intelligent being can permanently rest... It will press on perforce to one or other of the views which present themselves as alternatives - either to Theism, or to Materialism and dogmatic Atheism" (James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, p. 51).

3. The Son is the radiance of God's glory (1.3). The glory of the Son is the glory of the eternal second person of the Trinity (Hebrews 1.3). It is that same Shekhinah glory which was manifested in the tent of meeting by God (Exodus 33.9). With Christ's incarnation the glory of God is revealed to man. Just as the radiance of the sun reaches the earth, so in Christ the light of God shines in the hearts of men (cp. Exodus 40.34-38; John 1.1, 14; 2 Corinthians 4.6). "It is the glory manifested on the occasion of Christ's transfiguration, again accompanied by the resplendent cloud of the *shekinah* (Mark 9:2ff), an event which demonstrated that this glory belongs to the Son and was not just a reflection of a glory not his own... The brilliant light, brighter than the midday sun, seen by Paul at his encounter with the Risen Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13) was the same radiant glory of the divine presence" (Philip Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 42). It was the radiance of His glory that John witnessed in the opening chapter of the Apocalypse (Revelation 1.12-16).

4. The Son is the exact representation of God's being. What God is in essence, is made manifest in Christ (2 Corinthians 4.4). As a coin is the image of the die in which it was cast, so Christ is the image of the Father. To see what Christ is like is to see what God is like. Jesus does not reveal to us all that God is, but what Jesus reveals of God is precisely what God is like.

The patristic understanding of this passage is well summarized in the following comment of Gregory of Nyssa, who says: "The heir of all things, the maker of the ages, he who shines with the Father's glory and expresses in himself the Father's person, has all things that the Father himself has, and is possessor of all his power; not that the right is transferred from the Father to the Son, but that it at once remains in the Father and resides in the Son. For he who is in the Father is manifestly in the Father with all his might, and he who has the Father in himself includes all the power and might of the Father." Of the two expressions, "the radiance of his glory" and "the very stamp of his nature," the former, which implies the consubstantiality [consisting of the same substance or nature] of the Son with the Father, is balanced by the latter, which implies the distinctness of the person of the Son from that of the Father, and both designate the function of the Incarnate Son who, as the Light and the Truth (Jn. 8:12, 9:5; 14:6), is the Revealer of God to mankind. (Hughes, p. 44).

When there is a proper balance between the humanity and Deity of Jesus it is easier to understand why it is that Jesus must return to the Father and take his place at his Father's right hand.

5. The Son upholds all things by the word of His power (1.3). The author is here speaking of the ongoing dynamic working of Christ, not something that was done once for all in ages past. God created the world for his purpose; God sustains the universe and the things in it for his purpose and he will ultimately bring to fruition everything that he has begun and has sustained. All this is done in the person of the Son. The believer's confidence in the providential works of God is predicated on his understanding of the person and work of Christ. This doctrine of the creative and sustaining power of Christ is the bedrock upon which the Christian prays, *give us our daily bread* (cp. Colossians 1.15-20). "The word of the son is not less or other than the word of the Father for he who himself is the Word is the perfect and harmonious expression of the mind and will of God" (Hughes, p. 46).

6. The Son made purification of sins (1.3). This is the axis of history; it is the means by which Jesus accomplishes the Father's will and it is the final act of humiliation and obedience before he returns to his proper place at the right hand of God. The theme of redemption is the primary theme of Scripture and the author of Hebrews highlights that purpose by demonstrating that only the superiority of the Son is a sufficient atonement for our sins. God's holiness demands that he act justly by keeping faith with his intrinsic righteousness. He has done this by punishing his innocent Son instead of his guilty *children* (cp. Isaiah 53.4-10; 2 Corinthians 5.21).

7. *He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high* (1.3). The phrase "right hand..." is not meant as a literal location but is symbolic for authority; it is the capstone of Christ's exultation (Psalm 110; cp. Philippians 2.9). The work of redemption is now completed as is indicated by the image

of Christ sitting. This is not to suggest that Jesus is inactive, only that the work of purification is completed. There is the further contrast that is developed later in this epistle between Christ and the Aaronic priesthood. The Messiah is seated. The Aaronic priest (Hebrews 10.11) remains standing because his sacrificial service never came to an end. Once seated upon the throne Jesus is exalted to the highest place, possessing the name that is above every other name; at the very mention of this name, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus as Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2.9-11).

A FURTHER POINT

Having looked at something of the nature of the post-resurrected Jesus' session, it is even more remarkable to contemplate one of the most extraordinary revelations in Scripture, namely, that the Christian enjoys a positional relationship with Jesus in heaven: *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus* (Ephesians 2.4-7). The practical implications of this for the believer are mind-bending.

Victory over Satan and his demonic agents does not come from some sort of mystical experience, according to Ephesians. Triumph comes through the infusion of the resurrection-life of Christ, which is granted on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2.4-10). Believers are made alive with Christ, raised with Christ and seated with him. Not only was Christ raised from the dead, but he was also seated at God's right hand. By definition this means that he now rules over all demonic powers (Ephesians 1.21). It follows, therefore, that "all things have been subjected under his feet" (Ephesians 1.22). This statement, based on and rooted in Psalm 110.1, identifies Jesus as the Lord of David, the second Adam, who now exercises his rule over all creation." (Thomas Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, p. 233)

SUMMARY

The line of demarcation and the relationship between the exaltation and the session of Jesus is debated among scholars. What may be stated clearly is that the ascension of Jesus was followed by his heavenly session, and the end result of this is life changing for the believer.