

THE EXALTED CHRIST

Our Sanctification with Him
in His Exaltation

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE SECOND MAN, THE LORD.”

“How manifold is the character of Christ! No one metaphor can set forth all His beauty. Creation has to be ransacked for metaphors to unfold the mysteries of loveliness and power which lie hid within Him, waiting to be unfurled:

The whole creation can afford
But some faint shadow of my Lord;
Nature, to make His beauties known,
Must mingle colours not her own.

“In all men there is a fatal incompleteness. One quality seems to have grown rich at the expense of others. The soil of their soul has given all its nutriment to some exquisite flower or fruit of the Christian character; but just in proportion as it has poured itself in one direction, it has been drained away in others. Have you not often wished to take the characteristic qualities from the men in whom they are strongest, and put them all together into one nature, making one complete man out of the many broken bits, one chord of the many single notes, one ray of the many colors? But this that you would wish to do is done in Him in whom the faith of Abraham, the meekness of Moses, the patience of Job, the strength of Daniel, the love of the apostle John, blend in one complete symmetrical whole.”

- *“The Future Tenses of the Blessed Life “*

“And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it” (Ezekiel 1:26).

“And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain . . . There was a rainbow round about the throne” (Revelation 5:6, 4:3).

THE subject which we have to consider throws us more than usually back upon that Divine Spirit by whom alone our blessed Lord can be glorified in our midst. The subject is so stupendous in its sublimity, and so touching in its grace, that no mortal lips can do it justice. But while we stand in His presence, and behold His face, we may expect the Holy Spirit to reveal to us those deep things which are as strong and sweet as they are deep.

In the thought of the eternal God our Father the whole human race is summed up in two men; for we read in the inspired Word that the “**second man**” was the Lord from Heaven. For the first man we must traverse the glades of Eden, and find him there unfallen, in communion with his Creator, and fulfilling all the conditions of a perfected creation. That is God’s original thought for man. On passing through the gate guarded by the flaming sword, we discover him cursed with travail, fruitless toil, disease and death. And we cannot forget that, in virtue of our natural birth, we have inherited these conditions, and carry with us always an hereditary tendency or bias towards the evil which wrecked and marred his life; to say nothing of the guilt accruing from a broken law.

We scan in vain the succeeding ages of mankind, to find one able to undo the fatal tragedy of Eden, until, in the fulness of time, we encounter Him, around whom our thoughts revolve to-day, and who, whilst He was the Son of God, was the Son of Man, the second Adam, one with us in all the conditions of our life, sin excepted.

I present you with three pictures. It is the Passover at Jerusalem.

The vast central square before the Roman governor’s abode is filled with crowds rent with fanaticism, which Pilate is striving to quell. It is clear that he, a shrewd observer of human nature, had found something in this unwonted prisoner to arrest his attention, else he had never cried before them all, “**Behold the Man.**”

There were converging elements in His appearance and bearing which singled Him out as a man amongst men. Though He were suffering, and of that suffering there could be no doubt, for there was every trace of it in His pallid face and bloodstained garments, yet there was no trace of ignominy or shame, but the outshining of a nobility that could not but arrest eyes unprejudiced by hate.

His innocence was attested by the witness of those who knew Him best; yet there was no weakness in it; and though it was evident that this Man had done nothing amiss, He bore Himself with such a strange strength, that the representative of an imperial race felt himself the weaker. Moreover, He was the center of a strange conflict on the one hand, of the love and adoration of His followers, and of those who had shared His help; on the other, of the execrations and malignity of His foes; whilst nature herself seemed to sympathize with the wondrous scene, and stood aghast to gaze on the spectacle.

And as we to-day review that story we are constrained to feel that the Lord Jesus identified Himself with man in his sorrow and shame and the consequences of his guilt, was planted with man in the likeness of his death, touching him at his lowest, that He might lift him with Himself to heights that Adam and Eve in Eden could never have scaled. There could not have been an ascension of our race to the throne, if there had not been this previous descent to the death of the Cross.

Now for the second picture. It is the early morning.

The villagers have not commenced to bring into Jerusalem the produce of their fields. A little group have gathered not far from the beloved Bethany; surely a message will be sent to call for the two sisters and the brother to join the little group that gathers around One, who is not less man now that He has taken to Himself His body of glory than He was when we saw Him in the hall of Pilate. With outspread hands He blessed them, and as He blessed was parted from them, and began to ascend towards His home, as if the attraction of its blue depths were stronger than that of the earth.

The Church has always put special emphasis upon the atonement and resurrection of our Lord, but I am not sure that it has always apprehended the marvel of that scene upon which we are gazing as we stand on Olivet together. See how He climbs those upper steeps, as if the inherent buoyancy of His nature spurned the lower earth. Mark how yonder cloud waits, like a veil, through which He passes, irradiated with morning light.

Now let us follow Him in His upward progress.

In Ephesians 1:21 the apostle gives us a clue to what succeeded. He tells us that our blessed Lord was raised by the power of the Father to sit at His own 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 world, but also in that which is to come. From a comparison with other passages, especially that in the last chapter of the same epistle (6:12), it seems very likely that these principalities and powers, through which our Lord passed, were evil and fallen spirits, who may even have striven to obstruct His passage, making one great last stand against Him.

But whether that were so or not, it is clear that through the ranks of spirits, whatever they were, He passed. They fell right and left to yield Him passage, and so He came at last to those confines where the holiest spirits could no longer accompany Him, for no created thing had ever breathed or could breathe the rare atmosphere into which He entered, and no created thing had ever gone where He took our human nature.

This is a marvel at which Heaven itself has never ceased to be astounded. There was no wonder that the Son of God should go back to God. But the wonder was that He took our nature with Him, and that He has borne our humanity where no created thing had ever gone before, until He sat down as a man at the right hand of the throne of God. **“For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham”** (Hebrews 2:16).

It is marvellous to think that the first-born sons of light are not bound so closely to God as men are, since God has taken our human nature into such intimate fellowship with Himself.

“And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.”

There is a third picture. We look through Heaven’s open door and see a throne excelling in beauty the luster of earth’s most precious jewels.

We hear at first the chant of angels and elders; and after a while a strong angel with a loud voice, asking for one able to open the scroll of divine decrees, lying in the right hand of the Supreme. No voice seems able to answer that challenge, and our tears flow only to stay when eager expectancy is excited as to who can assume so high an office. But as we wait with intense and eager yearnings, there appears in the midst of the throne not a lion, but a lamb; not a conqueror who had prevailed, but one who bore the marks of having been slain; not an archangel, but a man. Ah! marvellous spectacle! to behold a man in such a position, our brother, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh; and Joseph's brethren, as they stood amid the hucksters who had come to buy corn, could not have been more amazed when they discerned, beneath the strange garb of the Egyptian governor, their own brother, who said, "**It is I, Joseph,**" than we are, when we stand before the throne, to hear the man's voice come from it, saying, "I am Jesus, your brother."

Now, just let us notice that the throne of God means holiness, majesty, power, and judgment.

It means majesty, divine majesty; and the fact that Jesus Christ is in the heart of the throne as a man indicates, of course, His divine nature, His Deity. It seems necessary to emphasize the distinction between divinity and Deity. We are not content to speak simply of His divinity. We emphasize and accentuate our belief in His Deity. And we cannot understand the mental constitution of those who think highly of Jesus Christ as a man, as a teacher, as a philanthropist, but do not bow the knee before Him, or confess that He is God.

We cannot understand it. To us it seems clear that He must be either one of three things. We must either count Him impostor, fanatic, or Christ the Son of God.

He cannot be an impostor, for all His influence through the ages has been in favour of holy truth; and it is incredible to suppose that the temple of truth could be founded upon the sands of falsehood.

Equally impossible it is for us to think of Him as fanatic, for if ever there was a time when fanaticism, had it dwelt in His breast, would have declared itself, it was at that moment when the people came around Him to make Him king, and when it seemed as if a brief rush would have carried him to the palace of the Caesars; but with a divine restraint He withheld His followers, and quietly climbed the mountain, that from its height He might hold fellowship with His Father, and see the outposts of His home in the quiet stars.

Equally impossible therefore is it to think of Him as fanatic; and we, with all His church, must to-day bow the knee, and feel that His earthly life only prepared us to accept it as a blessed literal fact, that He who walked our world in the guise of human flesh was very God of very God. God the Father crowned His own assertion of oneness with Himself by the resurrection; and now in the throne of God, as He is crowned there and enthroned, we feel that God's own witness to His Deity and essential Godhead is incontestable. "**The second man is the Lord from heaven.**"

The throne also speaks of holiness.

The throne of the Holy God! As we stand before it to-day, we might well dread it, if it were not for the rainbow that encircles it.

Pliny says of the rainbow that where its arch rests there the flowers smell sweeter. Aristotle says that the rainbow is a great breeder of honey dew. And it was the old legend, as perhaps you know that there were pots of gold to be found by digging where the rainbow arch impinged. And surely to-day the flowers of our graces will be sweeter, more perfume will fill the air, and we shall be able to dig out gold of Ophir, whilst we consider this great sight, that our nature which has been so associated with sin is represented on the throne, and that around the throne around it, for we only see half rainbows in this world, the perfect circle is reserved for Heaven around the throne is a rainbow like the emerald. The emerald is deep and lovely green, as if the sardius and the jacinth and the more angry colours of the rainbow had been taken out, and only the mild glow of love were left. **“In sight like unto an emerald.”**

The rainbow is one of the most beautiful objects in nature. No painter can adequately depict it. If you were to take piles of Oriental jewels and build them together, you could not compose so fair a sight as this which God, the Master-artist, has painted on the canvas of the black cloud with the pencils of light.

Oh, how exquisitely beautiful! but to Noah how much it meant! It meant that God had entered into covenant with him, not because he was good, for he was weak and liable to sensual excess, to which we know that once, at least, he yielded. He was indeed a preacher of righteousness, though liable to be swept by the passions and storms that have ravaged all human hearts save one; but he knew that for no goodness of his, for no desert of his, the eternal God had entered into covenant with him, and had bound Himself never to let loose from its leash the flood of waters. If ever the rain began to fall, or the tides poured in upon the land, he looked at the bow and was satisfied.

Thus, to-day we look up, and there, upon the back of the retreating storm, we see that rainbow, and we think of the dark cloud that spent itself on Calvary, and has retreated, so that we are forever to the windward of the storm. The storm has passed over. It has passed, and the rainbow of God's covenant speaks of His mercy. And we may dare to come to that throne and stand before it, not because we are good, not because we have attained to any stage of perfection, not because of our resolutions or prayers or tears, but because in the eternal council-chamber the blessed Trinity entered into a compact, and God the Father covenanted with God the Son that He should stand the surety for us, so that because of what He should be and suffer and do, our sins should be remembered against us no more forever.

There may be some burdened consciences, those who have been overtaken with the gust of passion, and rolled deep in the mire of despondency; some who are tormented with the accusations of Satan, who tells them that for them, at least, there can be no certain forgiveness. Let such look to the throne to-day. Let them see that rainbow, and let them hear the voice of God, who says, **“For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee”** (Isaiah 54:9-10).

Once more. That throne speaks of rule.

In the very first chapter of Genesis man was made to rule; and we have been accustomed to speak about ourselves as an imperial race; but, ah! who of us can boast of our rule? We look back upon our own lives, and see that, so far from being able to rule creation, we have not been able to rule ourselves; and man is like some dethroned monarch, the crown rolled from his brow, and the sceptre torn from his hand.

Alas! we might imagine the heart like another paradise, and its various passions standing as the wild beasts stood before Adam to receive their names. But in our history our heart has been full of evil beasts and things which have taken the empire from us.

The biographies of the best men might well be termed, like Augustine's, "*Confessions*." And history is full of the story of riot and war and wild passion. The chosen emblems of human life are Laocoon struggling ineffectually with the serpent, Sisyphus rolling the stone up the hill from which it is ever returning Hamlet, for whom "the hue of resolution is sicklied over by the pale cast of thought."

We see not yet all things put under man. What then, are the great assertions of the Psalmist (Psalm 8) vain? Was it for nothing that the Creator gave man the sole right to have dominion over the works of His hands? (Genesis 1:26.) No, these visions of rule are all to be realized abundantly. Indeed, they are being realized.

Our representative, the second Adam, the man Christ Jesus, sits at the right hand of power. In His earthly life His supremacy was acknowledged by fish and storms, by nature and providence, by men and devils; and in His resurrection, all authority is given to Him in Heaven and on earth. They who are one with Him share it. He makes them kings and priests, He gives them power over all the power of the enemy.

What part of Christ's body are you? You may not dare to think of yourself as in His head, or heart, or lips, or hands, but you are at least in His feet, and if you are but there you are above the devil, because all enemies are under His feet.

Oh, you who are one with the living Saviour, united to His mystical body by a living faith, dare to appropriate this wondrous spiritual power, which is stored in Him as in some spiritual dynamic battery, and use it for the great needs of men, as well as for the right ordering of the empire of your inner life! "**We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.**" We are the young brothers of the King, and are called to exercise something of His power and rule.

The throne also speaks of judgment.

"The **Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.**" This was the crowning announcement in the address of the apostle on Mars Hill. "**He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained**" (Acts 17:31).

We need for our judge one able to detect, with the unerring glance of omniscience, the secret workings of our hearts, the conditions of our lives, the various influences that have tended to mar or make us; but we need One who has the tenderness, the sympathy, the pity, the fellow-feeling of man and all these elements are combined in Him who is Son of God, and made of a woman, our Brother Man, who is also the great God.

What can we do else than prostrate ourselves and adore Him, who has gone from the low pit of our nature in which He was hewn, to the highest throne of the universe; has opened to our race a destiny which it could never have attained in an untainted Paradise; and will still lead us forward into the golden ages that are yet to be, when the fabric of this material universe, in which we were reared, has been wrapt together by His hands, as an old and worn-out robe.

To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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