

The Present and Future Work of Christ

Several years ago, a woman tourist was reported missing after she supposedly failed to return to her tour bus. The driver waited for an hour and then notified the police. Search and rescue teams were sent but the rescue efforts were called off at 3 a.m. It turns out the missing woman had been on the bus the whole time! She even participated in the search for herself. Apparently, before reentering the bus she changed clothes and freshened up, so the other passengers didn't recognize her. The local chief of police said that she didn't recognize the description of herself and she "had no idea that she was missing."ⁱ

Where is Jesus today? Some people say they can't find Him. They think He's missing! So, I guess it's up to us. Where should we look? How about His Word? And what we'll discover is incredibly encouraging. First, we need to understand:

I. Christ's State of Being Today

After the resurrection, Jesus' physical nature was different from what it had been before He died. He didn't have the same body He had before. It was similar, the scars were on His hands and side; He ate food with the disciples; but His body also had some new properties. With the men on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 and with the disciples in John 20, Jesus was able to de-materialize His body to disappear or walk through a locked door. Apparently, we'll have this ability one day when we have our resurrected bodies because I John 3:2 says:

...we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Won't that be a hoot? "I'm outta here!" Poof!

But do you fully realize what changed with Jesus after His ascension? Let me show you several important facts. First, He's back in the perfect environment of the presence of His Father. He left the hostility, unbelief and unfaithfulness that surrounded Him here and He was transported back to where He is now praised again by the angels and exalted by the Father and given: (Phil. 2:9-11)

...the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...

But these songs of praise now go beyond what He received before He came to earth. Dr. Millard Erickson says, "A new stanza has been added. Jesus had done something which he had not done [before]: personally experienced and overcome death."ⁱⁱ Think about that! The Author of Life experienced death.

But something else is different as well. Jesus is still the God-man. There's a continuing incarnation. In I Tim. 2:5 Paul says:

...there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

This is a new humanity, a perfected humanity and a humanity that, in some sense, we will enjoy. We won't be God-men, but we will have resurrected bodies. How encouraging is that? Secondly, we need to ask...

II. What Is Christ's Work Today?

In Acts 1 we read of when Jesus left this earth and was taken up into heaven. Now what? What's He doing up there? In Rev. 14, it says that the "son of man" (which means Jesus) is sitting on a white cloud with a gold crown on his head. This is undoubtedly where we get the idea that heaven will consist of sitting on clouds and playing harps. But as we learned when we studied the book of The Revelation of Jesus Christ a few years ago, it's a book made up of images that symbolize reality and images that ARE reality. In this same chapter, for example, the judgment of humankind is symbolized by the image of grapes being pressed in a winepress. So, Jesus on a cloud is probably a symbol of reality, not reality. But is there anywhere else in Scripture that tells us what Jesus is actually doing in heaven right now?

Yes, there is! In fact, I want to share seven passages that show us what Christ is doing today, and believe me, He can't do these things sitting on a cloud! First, Jesus is building His church. In Matt. 16:18 Jesus said, *"I will build my church and the gates of hell will not be able to stand against it."* So, how exactly is He doing that?

1. **GATHERING HIS CHURCH** - The Holy Spirit is the "on-site" manager here, but Jesus is actively directing the work of gathering His church THROUGH His Spirit. Jesus described all this in John 14:16, 20:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor (paraklayton - Helper; 'one who is called to someone's aid') to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth... On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Peter says: **...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood.** (1 Peter 2:5) Christ is gathering His church.

2. **DIRECTING HIS CHURCH** - In Eph. 5:23 Jesus is called the "head of the church." As the human head gives direction to the entire physical body, so Christ, gives direction to His church through the Word of God (Eph. 5:26).

3. **NURTURING HIS CHURCH** - Jesus, right now, is bringing His church into maturity. Eph. 5:29:

After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church. Christ is the source of the nourishment and He is the means to nourish His church.

4. **CLEANSING HIS CHURCH** - Jesus is performing "progressive sanctification:" ongoing cleansing of the church, His Bride. Eph. 5:25-27 is urging husbands to do for their brides what Christ is presently doing for His:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Do you get these last two? Do you see how personally involved Jesus is in caring for your soul? He's feeding you, He's bathing you. Your spiritual condition, your spiritual health isn't just for your benefit - do you see it? You're a bride!! Every bride I know works hard to look and be her best for the wedding. She doesn't say, "Hey, I've got the ring. He can't get out of this now! Who cares what I look like for the

wedding? I think I'll wear my sweatshirt and sneakers." No! Have you ever seen a bride do that? No!! The brides I know spend months getting ready for the big day.

A big day is coming for you! Your spiritual wedding day is the day you meet Jesus! Spiritual growth, spiritual health aren't just for your benefit – it's for your wedding day! You should want to be clean, radiant, without a stain or blemish, your spiritual clothes pressed, white and gorgeous. And what will bring this about? If you are daily being washed, cleansed and nourished by the Word of God!! Your wedding day is coming!!! Now's the time to get ready!!

5. **RESOURCING HIS CHURCH** – Jesus is the source of spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit distributes and administers these spiritual gifts. Eph. 4:11-13 lists several of these gifts or special abilities, like teaching and serving, and then it says that the purpose Jesus has for giving these gifts to us is so that the church might be "built up" and united and "become mature" until we attain the "whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Now, there's just two more actions that are part of Jesus' work here in the present, but isn't this remarkable already? He's Gathering, Directing, Nurturing, Cleansing and Resourcing His church. Did you realize that He was this busy? Now, watch this: He's also:

6. **PRAYING FOR HIS CHURCH** - In Matt. 26:64, Jesus told the high priest at His trial that not only was He the Messiah but...
...In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One...

In Heb. 10:12, it describes Jesus as our High Priest, sitting "*...at the right hand of God.*" The right hand of God is not a place of rest! It's a place of authority and power and active rule. How could you possibly think for a minute that He doesn't care what is happening with you? He's praying for you daily!!!

But Jesus' prayers do something else as well. They restore our fellowship with the Father when it's been broken by our sin. In I John 2:1 it says:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

He is interceding with the Judge of the Universe for you! Do you understand that? Jesus is ready 24/7 to plead your case when you repent.

7. **PREPARING A PLACE FOR US.** We read it earlier. Jesus said:
Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14:1-3)

Now, we're here in Connecticut, the third richest state in the country so somebody here might be thinking, "He's preparing a 'room' for me? Is that all I get; a room? Is heaven like a dorm?" The Greek word translated here as "room" is *monai*. It literally means "a place to live." The King James translates it, "MANSION." Whatever its size, I think you'll be pretty happy with it because, what is it they say in real estate? Location, location, location!!

Okay, so those are seven actions that Christ is performing right now for you. Now, let's apply this locally. A couple of years ago, we voted as a congregation on a list of eight values, eight statements of where we felt God was calling us as a church over the next ten years. In the pew rack in front of you, we have a re-statement of those same eight values organized into the three categories of UP, IN and OUT. Do you see that?

The UP values are: Worshipping and Praying

The IN values are: Knowing and Growing

The OUT values are: Caring, Serving, Reaching and Sharing

(A more detailed explanation of each is on the back.)

Now, look at this – if you match our values against Christ's work on our behalf, what do you find? You find perfect co-ordination.

Our Values

Praying, Worshipping [UP]

Knowing, Growing [IN]

Reaching, Sharing [OUT]

Caring, Serving [OUT]

Jesus' Work

Praying

Directing, Nurturing, Resourcing

Gathering (of His church)

Cleansing, Nurturing, Preparing

Why are these coordinated? Is it just coincidence? No, we took our values directly from God's Word! God's Word will always, always, always lead you to God's will. Ps. 119:105:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

And Jesus said: (John 5:17)

My father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.

Jesus' work displays His values. His work is building His church, praying for us, preparing a place for us and bringing glory to His Father. While Jesus was still on this earth, He prayed and asked His Father to give His followers "*the full measure of my joy.*" Do you have that today - His joy? If not, it's available to all who will join Jesus in His work. Lastly, we come to the most encouraging truth of all...

III. Christ's Work in the Future.

Jesus will continue to build His church and pray for us and prepare a mansion for us until the Father tells Him to stop. Even He doesn't know when that will be. He's just going to keep doing His work until the Father says, "Stop!" And when that day comes, it'll be time for Jesus the King to truly reign. The first time Jesus came to earth, he came not to condemn but to save. The second time He comes to earth, He will come to judge and destroy all evil. If the order of events in Revelation are the chronological order of events when Jesus returns (and I think they are) then here's how it's going down:

1. Church is rescued in a rapture. (No church is mentioned after Rev. 4.)
2. Evil escalates through seven years of severe Tribulation. (Rev. 5-18)
3. Jesus appears as the rider on the white horse coming with the army of heaven to judge and make war against evil (Rev. 19).
4. Satan is thrown in the abyss for a thousand years and Christ rules on earth for a thousand years with resurrected Christians. (Rev. 20)
5. Satan is released from the abyss for a short period but then is taken to the Great White Throne of Judgment, where he and all those whose names

are not found in the Book of Life will be condemned to the eternal Lake of Fire. (Rev. 20)

6. Then, a new heaven and new earth are created and the Holy City comes down out of heaven where the LORD God Almighty and Jesus will live with us. Listen to this description of it from *The Message: (Rev. 21:3-5)* *I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: "Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They're his people, he's their God. He'll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good – tears gone, crying gone, pain gone – all the first order of things gone." The Enthroned continued, "Look! I'm making everything new."*

When will this all take place? We don't know. Jesus doesn't even know. But the apostle Paul, who was taken to heaven once to learn about all these things, says this, again, from *The Message*:

But let me tell you something wonderful, a mystery I'll probably never fully understand. We're not all going to die – but we are all going to be changed. You hear a blast to end all blasts from a trumpet, and in the time that you look up and blink your eyes – it's over. On signal from that trumpet from heaven, the dead will be up and out of their graves, beyond the reach of death, never to die again. At the same moment and in the same way, we'll all be changed. In the resurrection scheme of things, this has to happen: everything perishable taken off the shelves and replaced by the imperishable, this mortal replaced by the immortal. Then the saying will come true:

Death swallowed by triumphant Life!

Who got the last word, oh, Death?

Oh, Death, who's afraid of you now?

It was sin that made death so frightening and law-code guilt that gave sin its leverage, its destructive power. But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three – sin, guilt, death – are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!

With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort. (I Cor. 15:51-58)

Friends, this world is not going to end because of global warming, a nuclear war or because we get hit by a giant meteor. This world will end when Jesus returns as King of Kings. He will destroy this physical world and build a better one and, if you repent of your sinful rebellion against Jesus before you die, you'll have the great privilege of living in that New World with Him. If you haven't done that, you'll go with Satan to the Lake of Fire – whatever and wherever that may be. I don't know about you, but after hearing this description of what it will be like to live with King Jesus, I know where I want to be. How about you? Have you made your decision yet? It's getting pretty late in the game. Today would be a good day to decide. Let's pray...

ⁱ PreachingToday.com, News That Illustrates: Sept. 10, 2012

ⁱⁱ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, 84, 85), p. 778