

Consequences Of Resurrection And Ascension

The Wavesheaf Offering Fulfilled in Christ

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Last Sunday, millions of what we could call nominal Christians, as the sun rose celebrated their paganized version of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Many of whom attend a service on Easter Sunday, while they do not darken the door of a church for 8 1/2 months or so until Christmas, thinking that as long as they honor Christ on these two days, Easter and Christmas, they have done their part—they have done enough—thinking that is all He requires. (I felt sorry for those people in Denver who are getting up to go to an Easter sunrise service because Beth and I were leaving from the hotel to go to the airport right about that time and the car thermometer read 28 degrees, pretty chilly. Hope they brought their parkas while they had their service. I did not envy them in the least. I was glad I was not going.)

But later, dressed in their Easter best, maybe they had new dresses or a new hat, maybe a bonnet (and all of it probably in pastel colors), they participated in things like Easter egg hunts or Easter egg rolls or picnics and whatever the Easter dinner was and of course, you know that always features ham, of all things, and a lots of chocolate and other delectable candies in the shapes of bunnies and chicks and other kind of very fertile animals.

Exactly none of these things has anything to do with Christ's resurrection from the dead, but a great deal to do with pagan fertility rites. I would be willing to bet that the thought of Christ's resurrection was quickly forgotten in all those festivities. I think certainly what it means, if it was explained to them at all, was contemplated only by a rare few after the service ended because, "Hey! We're going to have fun now." I find that very sad.

The churches make a huge deal out of Easter each year proclaiming, "He has risen!" and they usually have a church sign out front of the church that says something similar. Often they have got, at least down here in the South,

usually three crosses on their lawn and on Easter Sunday they drape the central cross with a piece of white cloth representing that Jesus has risen from the dead. Now, He has returned to a life or His eternal life and glory.

But as I said, as soon as the sound of the preacher's Easter Sunday sermon quits rattling around in the rafters of the church, Christ is entirely forgotten in favor of candy and lawn games. The way to eternal life has been opened through the eternal life of Jesus Christ by the resurrection from the dead and the world says, "Hey Charlie, pass the ham will you?" That is all they think about, at least a high percentage of them. I am sure many people who hear this will think I am exaggerating and I am a little bit. I am making a caricature of it, if nothing else.

But what is no exaggeration is that a high percentage of modern nominal Christians, what we call in this church worldly Christians, focus on a small number of things like Christmas Day, Easter Sunday, and amazing grace. That is the extent of their Christianity. Their Christianity is made up of baby Jesus and Santa Claus, glorified Jesus and the Easter bunny, and total unmerited pardon and eternal salvation. That is the extent of Christianity for many. If I can narrow it down a bit more, it is concentrated on two fun holidays, especially for kids, and what they call free grace. That is all it is. And they wonder why America is in decline. There is no more foundation and we have read the verse where it says when the foundations are crushed what happens then.

All I have to say is that such Christianity, if you want to call it that, is a far cry from the Bible's version of Christianity, which is God's way of life. What they practice out there has only a glancing resemblance to the true way that Jesus Christ preached and the apostles taught after Him and has been carried down in the church of God from that time. Granted there are Christians that take it far more seriously. We belong to a homeschool group and Beth tells me all kinds of stories of people, evangelicals out there, who are really dedicated Christians for what they understand and know.

But millions of professing Christians are not that way. They are more like the caricature that I described earlier. To those who do not take it very seriously, Christianity is baptism as an infant or perhaps an altar call a little bit later on, receiving God's grace, and therefore what they believe is their

eternal salvation cannot be taken away from them. And each year, two big religious holidays and that is it. They can do pretty much anything else. Nothing more is required, they believe, except maybe try to be a nice person. That is about it. And of course try to be nice person as long as it does not disadvantage them somehow.

But Jesus said, "Many are called but few are chosen." And the chosen, He says, must enter by the narrow gate. That is very difficult, a very difficult way of life. He also said that we must be more righteous than the Pharisees and that He did not come to do away with the law except to show how it is supposed to be lived to fulfill it. He said we must bear our cross and put Christ first and bear the world's hatred and suffer for His sake and pluck out our eyes and cut off our arms or hands if they offend us, and we must forgive seventy times seven and love our neighbor and seek first the Kingdom of God and so forth and so on. Funny in that whole list of things, Christmas and Easter did not appear.

Now, I want to admit right here that because of our past we have our own blind spots. As I mentioned before in previous sermons I gave a long time ago, in the early days of the Worldwide Church of God, in his preaching, Herbert Armstrong deliberately turned the focus of the church away from some true biblical things that seemed to be what we call Protestant. We have an adjective we call Protestant-y. We say, saying the name "Jee-sus" is Protestant. Well, that is the name we have in the Bible, we do not pronounce it that way, but we pronounce it Jesus, but it is the name that has come down to us of our Savior. Now we know His name was more likely Yeshua, but even so the anglicized version is Jesus and so we do not say the name Jesus very often. We have been taught in the church to say Christ or Jesus Christ because Jesus alone, our tradition has been, is a little bit too Protestant.

Or other things like we will not sing certain hymns because they were sung for a long time in Protestant churches, although if you read the words they are fine, but there is that association with our Protestant past, most of us, some of us came out of Catholic churches or nothing at all, but even so, the predominant Protestant way of religion in this country has been pushed to the side. And of course that is fine.

But we do not also talk about certain other things that are entirely biblical, like Jesus' birth and His resurrection, because those are things that are focused on by the world's churches so much. Now, when we do preach about them, we preach about them from Scripture of course, but we kind of tend to avoid such things because they have that taint, if you want to put it that way, of being Protestant, something that this world teaches.

We have had this problem too with an overemphasis, if you will, on law, and a terrible under-emphasis on grace. And it is because Protestants always talk about grace and never talk about the law. So the early Worldwide Church of God, or Radio Church of God, swung to the entire other end of the pendulum and spoke a lot about the law—the law, the law, the law—and hardly anything about grace, which is *wonderful*, and we better be happy that there is such a thing.

Such things like that we tend to avoid talking about, at least a lot, or as much as the Protestants do, and like I said, Mr. Armstrong did this with good reason. He did not want the people who had just come out of that sort of life to revert back to it, go back to that "old time religion," because the church of God was a lot like them. So he made sure that the church of God was very little like the Protestant churches, but it has made us hold back even today from saying or preaching some of those things just because of the association with the Protestant religion.

So while we keep the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread which focus on Christ's death and our overcoming sin, mainstream Christianity emphasizes Christ's resurrection and ascension to the Father. They happen right at the same time of the year all the time. Our focus though is often elsewhere. Our focus is on the Passover. Our focus is on the *meaning* of the Days of Unleavened Bread, of getting leaven out of our houses and out of our lives, and eating unleavened bread. That is, overcoming and growing and doing the things that God wants us to do. So we tend to, I do not know if neglect is too strong a word, but we tend to not talk about Christ's resurrection and ascension at this time. You know when we talk about Christ's resurrection? Trumpets, when we get the benefit of it at His coming, so we do not talk about it a lot in season.

We hardly ever talk about Christ's ascension. We go over the words that says that He is sitting at the right hand of the Father, but we do not talk about it a lot in terms of explaining certain things about Christ's ascension. We do now and then, but I was trying to remember if I had ever heard a sermon on Christ's ascension specifically and I do not know if I could say I have, but we talk about the wave sheaf offering a lot and that is where it comes up a lot in terms of our preaching.

So I want to do that in this sermon—to remind us of the wonderful consequences of Christ's resurrection from death and His ascension to God's throne in glory and eternal life. I do want to go back and touch bases on the Days of Unleavened Bread though, because that gives me a good way to kind of step into this subject from the Bible's point of view. If you would turn back to Exodus 13, we are going to read verses 3-8. We read some of this last week.

Exodus 13:3-8 Moses said to the people: "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. On this day you are going out, in the month Abib. And it shall be, when the Lord brings you out into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day, there shall be a feast to the Lord. [Here we are.] Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, "This is done because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt.""

This is God's emphasis during this Feast of Unleavened Bread, that the Israelites were brought out of Egypt at this time, and He commanded us in remembrance to eat unleavened bread and not eat any leavened bread at all. And we dutifully followed this command this week and for many years. This is where God's emphasis is, and He has not told us to celebrate the resurrection or the ascension. So I want you to understand that we have been

doing these this particular holy feast, this time of Unleavened Bread properly. I am just saying we can probably add to that through understanding a little more about the resurrection and the ascension.

But when we get to the part here in Exodus 13 in which we are instructed about how to respond to our children when they ask us about this feast and what we are doing, God tells us to say that we do this, we keep this feast this way in commemoration of what the *Lord* did. That this holy day, this one and the first day of Unleavened Bread and all the time in between, is a remembrance of *God's* actions for us, for our benefit, what He did in bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt, which is a type of sin.

So our true focus during this feast is not what *we* have done. Oh, we are so good, we took leaven out of our houses! It is not on that, it should not be, but it is upon what God has done to release us from sin. It is by His works that He makes the little that we do possible. He is the one that does all the heavy lifting that allows us to do what we need to do in response to what He does. So the focus is always on Him, not on us, and then our appreciation of all those great works that He does for us should motivate us to do what He requires. If God has done so much, then the little that we do should be easy. Now we know it is not easy, but we should have the motivation that God has done His utmost to make it so that we can live His way with the help that He gives.

Let us move forward to Leviticus the 23rd chapter. So, our focus needs to be on God's works. We are going to read verses 4-11 and then we are going to read verses 14-16.

Leviticus 23:4-11 'These are the feasts of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. [And by the way, Easter and Christmas are not in this list.] On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Lord's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation [Here we are again.]; you shall do no customary work

on it." And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.'

Leviticus 23:14-16 'You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain or fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord.'

We are here on the seventh day of this feast in response to this command, as we find there in verse 8, to keep this day. But on its heels comes instruction about another feast, a separate feast. That is the Feast of Firstfruits, as it is called here, we often called it the wave sheaf offering. But on the day of the wave sheaf offering, or the Feast of Firstfruits, a sheaf of barley is waved before the Lord for acceptance. And this signals, as we saw there in verse 14, the beginning of the early grain harvest. They could not eat any of the other grain until this particular ceremony was completed. It marked the opening that on that day they could go out and harvest their early grain, mostly barley, and bring it in. So it is called the Feast of the Firstfruits. Those were usually the sheaf that was cut and offered and was the first ripe grain of the season and it was also, we could say, the whole harvest was the first harvest of the year. So it is the firstfruits of all their labor.

Now, it says this occurs the day after the Sabbath. The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, the day after it would be the first day of the week, and so this wave sheaf offering was always to be made on a Sunday, the first day of the week. The only real clue we have as to which Sabbath this should be counted from, or which Sabbath should be the one after which we make the grain offering, is that this command appears immediately after the command to keep the Days of Unleavened Bread. And so it is only reasonable and logical to think that the Sabbath that God is mentioning here is the one that

the people have just passed through, as it were, during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

This year the first Day of Unleavened Bread was a Sabbath and so that was the day, the Sabbath day, the weekly Sabbath that we should use as the start of this particular account. It is only one day, but it is on the day after the Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So that meant that the Feast of Firstfruits for this year (2018) was last Sunday, which just happened to be the same day that the people of this world were keeping Easter Sunday. And as we see in verses 15 and 16, this particular day, the Feast of Firstfruits, is the first day of the count to Pentecost. So fifty days from that day, fifty days after the Sabbath, seven weeks then from that day, is the Feast of Pentecost.

Let us put all this together. The Feast of Firstfruits, or the wave sheaf day, is a separate feast, but it has ties to both Unleavened Bread in which it appears, in which it is done, celebrated, and also to Pentecost, which is also a Feast of Firstfruits. I am tempted to call it a bridge festival in that it bridges or connects, it links the two larger feasts—Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. It ties the two of them together. The way I look at it is this way: Without what the wave sheaf pictures (because remember we are supposed to be looking at what God has done), God's work in the Passover, that is Jesus paying for our sins on the cross with His own life, and God's work in Unleavened Bread, that is freeing us from sin and enabling us to walk in His way to the Kingdom of God, cannot culminate in what Pentecost pictures, that is the acceptance of the firstfruits as holy after a lifetime of growth. You need the Feast of Firstfruits there within the Days of Unleavened Bread to make sure that the end product of Pentecost happens.

Do you understand what I mean? That the Feast of Firstfruits is a necessary part to get us from Jesus Christ's death in the forgiveness of our sins and our being free then to live God's way and have His help along the way. If we do not have what happens there at the Feast of the Firstfruits, then we will never be resurrected, raised to acceptance before God as Pentecost pictures. We need this intermediary feast.

So what does the wave sheaf or Feast of the Firstfruits represent? I do not know if you are aware of what happens on the offering of the wave sheaf, but it is one of the more interesting offerings of the entire slew of offerings

that are given in the Bible. Remember, we are dealing with a sheaf of grain, of barley, and two things happened to that sheaf of barley. The first is that it is cut from where it has grown.

Now the interesting thing on this little step here is that it is cut at the end of the Sabbath. It is very clear if you go back into some of the Jewish books, like the Mishna, where they tell how these offerings were conducted. This offering was cut as the Sabbath ended, not actually on the day of the wave sheaf offering, but the very last minutes of the Sabbath before, the day before. So it is cut then on the Sabbath and they went through this elaborate ritual where the priests that are out there cutting it asked each other three times: "Shall we cut this grain on the Sabbath?" "Yes, you shall cut this grain on the Sabbath." Shall we cut this grain? Because they are doing work! They say this thing three times: "Shall we cut it on the Sabbath?" "Yes, we shall cut it on Sabbath." "Shall we cut it on the Sabbath?" "Yes, we shall cut it on the Sabbath." Everybody understands that this is being done in a ritual way and God authorizes them to do this reaping on the Sabbath.

And so they cut it and they carry it then back to the Temple. Well, the night passes and early in the morning, it is usually around nine a.m. if my memory is right, that they have another ritual. This is when the sheaf that they cut the evening before is presented before God at the altar and it is waved before God. They raise their hands with the sheaf in it before God for acceptance. So they ask God to accept this sheaf and that is basically the extent of the ritual.

Now there is more here, but we did not read them. There is a lamb that is offered, and a grain offering, a drink offering too that it is all part of it. But the most important part for us today at least is the fact that they cut the grain on the Sabbath and then the next morning it was offered to God and waved before Him for acceptance.

That should tell us just about everything that we need to know. So from the cutting of the sheaf at the end of the Sabbath to its waving during the morning hours of the next day, it pictures the resurrection and ascension of Christ to be accepted by the Father as the First of the firstfruits.

This is exactly how the resurrection of Jesus Christ and His ascension to the Father happened in 31 AD. He was cut as it were from the earth, raised from humanity at the waning moments of the Sabbath day. He had been in the tomb three days and three nights. He had been put in there, as we understand it, in the very waning moments late in the evening, you might say, of Wednesday of that crucifixion week. He stayed in the tomb three days and three nights and He was resurrected, brought back to life, in the waning moments of the Sabbath, just when we believe the priests were cutting the wave sheaf offering, they were cutting the barley to make the wave sheaf offering the next morning.

And when we go to places like John the 20th chapter, we find certain things happening there. Christ does not ascend to the Father until after His meeting with Mary Magdalene. We will get to that in a bit. But that was fairly early in the morning, on that first day of the week. I am sure that the writers of the gospels made sure that they put that wording in there so that we would grasp the fact that what was happening there was fulfilling the wave sheaf offering. And of course it was fulfilled exactly the way it was shown here in Leviticus 23 about how that is supposed to happen and of course the other instructions that the Levites got about how it should be done.

But before we see any of that in John 20, let us go to I Corinthians 15. This is the resurrection chapter. I want to tackle the resurrection first.

I Corinthians 15:20-23 But Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

So the apostle Paul here in this little section deals with a couple of interesting issues regarding resurrection. The first and I would think would be the easiest to see, is that Christ has become the firstfruits of the dead. That accords very well with what we saw in Leviticus 23 where this feast is called the Feast of Firstfruits. Of course it is because that feast commemorates the very Firstfruit of God's Kingdom, which is Jesus Christ Himself. He went

through the process as our Forerunner, as our Archegos, the one who is blazing the trail. He told us how to live, He taught us what to think, He taught us how to speak, and He lived it perfectly throughout 33 1/2 years of His life. Then He died for our sins and did all the work that He was supposed to do in that part of His mission. And He was raised from the dead as a result.

That is the path, that is the way that the rest of us are to follow. He blazed the trail, we follow right behind Him and do what He did, and if we do what He did, then we are guaranteed that we are going to have the same result. Of course we have a lot more help because we have Him on our side showing us how to do it and we will get to that in a little bit. But that of course is the easiest thing to see.

Now when it says that He is the firstfruits of the dead, it presupposes that He would not be the only one who would rise from the dead, but that many would follow. I mean, if you have *a* firstfruit and nothing else, then why are you calling it a firstfruit? You might as well just call it the only fruit. Usually when you say first, you go on to second, third, fourth, and on and on for as many as God will have in His Kingdom and He would want everyone. So there is not just the firstfruit, singular, but there are firstfruits that come along afterward. And there are those, the elect in God's Word, who are called firstfruits.

James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

Revelation 14:4 [speaking of the 144,000] . . . They were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

So not only is Christ the firstfruit, but those who are raised at His coming and are part of the 144,000 are firstfruits. We often say He, Jesus Christ, is the first of the firstfruits.

That is the first issue. The second interesting issue is what Paul says in verses 21 and 22. I want to read these again.

I Corinthians 15:21-22 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

The issue here is that because Christ rose from the dead, the way is *open* for others to rise from the dead. Notice verse 45.

I Corinthians 15:45 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam [Christ] became a life-giving spirit.

In other words, if He had not risen from the dead, no others would have been able to be resurrected to eternal life. So Christ's resurrection, which we see, we know about historically, was the essential key to eternal life for all the rest of us who aspire to it. Look at it the way Paul did. As Adam's sin opened the floodgates for sin and death, Jesus' righteousness and rising to eternal life cleared the way for others to join Him in God's Kingdom. Just just as one brought bad things, the other one brought all good things. Revelation 1:5 calls Him the firstborn from the dead and Romans 8:29 calls Him the firstborn among many brethren. So He was the one, if you will, who opened the womb. He was the firstborn to pass through the matrix as it were into the Kingdom of God.

If He had not done it, none of us would have been able to do it either. I think that it is easier to see it from a negative point of view rather than a positive one. It helps us to understand the positive consequence more easily. So if Jesus had failed in His mission by sinning, by in any way crossing one of God's lines that He should not have crossed, had He done that His death—which no longer would be an unblemished sacrifice, it would have been blemished by sin—would have paid only for His own sin. And that would have been very tragic because the Father would not have resurrected Him to eternal life. He would not have deserved it. Justice would call for death and that would be it. He could pay only for His own sin. Justice would not call for life at all. Remember:

Romans 6:23 The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

In Jesus Christ. It took Him giving an unblemished sacrifice and God responding then by giving Him His *deserved* eternal life through resurrection from the dead that allows the rest of us to follow in that path because we only make it because of Jesus Christ, because we are in Christ. We have to be given grace because we do not deserve it. We are covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. If so, had He sinned in any way, we would have no Savior, no forgiveness of sin, no salvation, and no hope of eternal life through the resurrection from the dead.

But forget about all that because He did do what He was supposed to do, He succeeded in His mission. He lived sinlessly. He died sacrificially. And the Father gave Him the gift of eternal life, raised Him from the dead. And so it can be given to us in Christ. We can have grace.

I Peter 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

So through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, then, we can have this inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away. We have a hope that if we continue in this way—if we continue to overcome and grow, to produce that fruit, stay in God's way—that He will make an entrance for us into His Kingdom. It is a guarantee if we continue on because of Jesus Christ, there is always Jesus Christ in the mix. He is the one that opens the door, He is the key, He is the door to the sheep. He is the one that allows us to enter. He is the one that shepherds us along the way. Without Him we can do nothing.

It may be a little bit odd to bring this in here at just this point, but I think it fits very well. In Revelation 5:9-10, the song there says that because the Lamb is worthy, we can reign with Him. "Worthy is the Lamb." He was the one that was able to take the scroll because He was pure and undefiled, the sacrifice for all men. And it is because of His worthiness that we can reign as

kings and priests on the earth. We would never get there if He had not done His job completely and perfectly.

That is the resurrection from the dead. We know a lot about that because we talk about it a lot. We talk about it, as I said, on Trumpets a lot.

But what about the ascension, His ascension to heaven? That second part of the wave sheaf offering? What are its consequences? What are the consequences of Him being there at the Father's right hand?

As I mentioned, we will go now to John the 20th chapter. Let us just go to verse 1 just to set the scene. John writes there,

John 20:1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

Right there knocks out Easter sunrise services. The tomb was already open before the sun had even come up—it was still dark and Jesus was gone. This tells you, thinking logically, that He had been raised from the dead sometime before. It does not say specifically here when that sometime before was, but it certainly was not at dawn on Sunday morning, so at least we have that.

I am going to drop down to verse 11, but in the meantime, what happened was that she saw that the tomb was empty and the stone had been taken away, so she runs and tells the disciples. Peter and John come running, they look in and find that she was right. So time has passed. How long it took her to run from the tomb to where the disciples were, probably somewhere around the Temple, I do not know. A couple of minutes, 15 minutes, half hour. I do not know. They had to run back. They ran back pretty quickly, so we are a little bit further on in the morning.

John 20:11-18 But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid

Him. [She had not quite figured it out.] Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? ["Why do they keep asking me this?"] Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her. "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say Teacher). [Maybe He had always said Mary in that way and she would say, oh yeah, I know who that is. But then verse 17, this is the critical verse here.] Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God." Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.

The important part here is what Jesus says to her about not clinging to Him and that He must ascend to the Father. It seems like she just wanted to clutch Him. He had died. They thought He was dead, they had mourned for Him for three days, and here He was. He was not dead and all she wanted to do was hug Him. Maybe she had fallen down and was clasping His feet. Some people think that is what she was doing. Others think that it was a full-on hug and she was just happy that He was there and she wanted to hold on to Him so He would not leave. That is the impression I get, that she was just trying to keep in touch literally with Jesus, so He could not sneak away again. That she would always then have Him with her. She was not going to let Him get away this time.

But Jesus tells her not to cling to Him. I do not think this has anything to do with purity or impurity and that sort of thing. I think specifically what He was telling her was, in a gentle way, saying, "You need to let Me go, Mary. You need to let Me do what I have to do. And to do what I have to do, you have to loosen your grip a little bit." Because He also had something for her to do. They both had jobs that needed to get done. Her job was that she needed to take a message to the disciples. Of course His job was that He needed to ascend to the Father.

Remember this was in the early morning hours of the first day of the week, of Sunday, so He needed to do this in order to fulfill the Feast of the Firstfruits and the wave sheaf offering. There was a timing matter here that He had to make sure that He got to His Father at the right time. He had an appointment to make and God had said nine a.m. sharp on the first day of the week, on the day after the Sabbath, You must come before Me and I will judge. And so Jesus, being a dutiful Son, He did everything that the Father told Him to do. He was going to submit to His will in the matter and so He had to meet the most important Person in the universe and He could not be late.

So, "Mary, let go. But before you go, I have a message for you to give to My brethren," He says, My disciples. His message given through her is essentially, "I have accomplished My mission. I am ascending to My Father and to your Father." Things have changed now since He had accomplished His mission, since He had died as their Savior and their sins then could be forgiven. He had risen from the grave because God had judged Him worthy, opening the way to salvation for all in eternal life. And now He had this one more task to do and once they heard about it it would be fait accompli. It would be done. And now everything that He had said, everything He had promised the disciples about what could happen, would happen.

Now He goes to My God, He says, for acceptance and because I go to My God for acceptance, you will be able to go before God and be accepted. He is not just My God and My Father, He is your God and your Father. He is saying, "It is done! It's going to work, it's going to happen. Your eternal life is assured if you stay in the way." Now the disciples could have confidence that His promises to them about eternal life and the Kingdom of God will surely come to pass. He had done the hard work, He had done the heavy lifting, and it would happen for them too. Because He was God! He was the Savior. He was victorious and He could make it happen for them.

Let us go to Romans the fifth chapter. Just this one verse plucked out of its context. Not completely, but just use this one verse without going to the rest of the context.

Romans 5:10 [Paul writes here] For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Now this would seem to apply more to His resurrection. But think of it in terms of not just that He was raised to life. Do not stop just at the resurrection—that He was raised to life after being dead. But think of it in terms of that He *continues* to live. It is not just that He lived, but that He *continues* to live and He still lives. He is ever-living. He lives eternally. He will never die again.

Because of the eternal life then of the Life-giver—remember He is our Creator, He is the one that gave Adam life in the first place—we have assurance of *complete salvation*. I want you to kind of zero in on that phrase "complete salvation." Not just the forgiveness of sin, not just that our sins are covered, but that the whole process can be completed. We can have justification and reconciliation with God through the death of His Son. The death of Jesus Christ accomplishes both of those things. It is very clear here in Romans 5:10 that Paul says that we were *reconciled* through the death of His Son. And if you go up a little further, it says we were *justified* through the death of His Son. We can be justified and reconciled through the death of His Son, yet we can still fall away, can we not? It is not complete until we are actually resurrected to eternal life in the Kingdom of God. That is when it will be fully complete.

So we can say then that we cannot truly have real or complete salvation except through a *living* Savior. Because life must come from life. There has to be a living Savior in order to give us eternal life. John 1:4 says "in Him was life" and He gives it to His elect. Let us go to John 6. This is the section where it talks about the bread of life. Notice this:

John 6:53-58 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you [This is how He tells you "This is really important. This is something that I really want you to key on. This is really, really vital to understand and very true."], unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever

eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise Him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

So we have to live a time, it is a time of our sanctification. We have to live through a time in which we are eating and drinking of Him in order to have life. We cannot stop just at justification and reconciliation. There has to be a period in which we are growing in life, in His life, and we do that by eating His flesh and drinking His blood, in the metaphor there. We have to begin to put Him in us. We have to start living His life as best we can.

Let us go back to I John 5 and he explains that, if you will, using particularly Johannine phraseology.

I John 5:11-13 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

So He gives us eternal life and then He tells us to continue in eternal life in the Son. In that way we have an assurance of salvation. He is talking about a process that goes on beyond the time of justification and reconciliation at the very beginning of our conversion. There has to be something more that happens along the way and that is that we have a period of time where we share life with Christ as a human being. We have to live His life in us in terms of growth so that we, as the Scripture often says, by the end of that time are complete, or are perfected. There has to be a time of overcoming and growing and learning to be like Him.

The first thing I really wanted to get across to you was that one of the consequences of the ascension was that now we have the opportunity to have

life and to have continuing life with Him and of course eternal life, ultimately. But because He died and rose from the dead and then ascended to the Father, we now have the opportunity to live in this life like Him. We will add to this here.

Hebrews 8:1-2 Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

The two things that are said there is that we have a great High Priest, such a High Priest, no higher priest ever has been, and that we have a Minister, a Servant of the sanctuary. Those are very important terms.

This verse points out two consequences here of the ascension. The first is that Christ sits at the Father's right hand. He ascended from being on the earth and now He is at the very throne of God—at His very right hand. You could say that He went from earth, a remote planet in the solar system, to the very power center of the universe. He went where it is all going on. He went to where the government was happening and now He is right there with Him, with the Father. Jesus says to the disciples as He is about to ascend for the final time after those forty days before the day of Pentecost in AD 31:

Matthew 28:18 "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

So by His ascension to the right hand of God, He has been given the keys to everything. He has ultimate power and this should be very reassuring to us because our Savior is now supreme. Of course the Father is still over Him, but it says that these things have been given into His hand. The Father in a way said, "You have accomplished all this, now I'll take a little step back and You run everything." He says it right there in Matthew 28:18. "*All authority* has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." That sounds pretty absolute to me. He has the power then to move heaven and earth to fulfill His promises to His elect. There is nobody that is going to stop Him.

He says in John 10:28, "I give [My sheep] eternal life and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." He has all power. Who is going to snatch anyone from Him? Now, if you fall, it is not His fault. And I hope that none of us do fall. But there is nothing outside that is going to stop what He has promised He will do—except ourselves. Let us go to Colossians 2.

Colossians 2:9-10 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead [or of the divine nature or of deity] bodily; and you are complete in Him [That is in Him you will be completed.], who is the head of all principality and power.

That is the one of the great points, great consequences of His ascension. He has *all power* now. He is at the very throne of God and He is running things and He will follow through on what He has promised.

The second thing that we see there in Hebrews 8:1 is that by His ascension to the Father, He became our High Priest and a Servant of the sanctuary, or as it says in verse, a Minister of the sanctuary. He went, He rose to an office of service. He rose to an office of mediation between man and God. One commentator wrote, "His life [in Christ's life now that He is continually living] is the efficacious cause of our salvation." He was writing this about Romans 5:10, but it applies here too because it says there in Romans 5:10 were saved by His life. This is what he was referring to when he said this.

What he means there is that the work that Jesus Christ now does as our High Priest effectively completes our salvation. He is at the steering wheel, He is the one that has got the accelerator, He is changing all the gears and we are along for the ride, and because He is living and He is doing what He does as High Priest and as a Minister of the sanctuary, we will be completed. If He has any say in the matter, and we know He does, He will do *His job* that He has been assigned to do to get you into the Kingdom of Heaven, as it were. To make sure that you qualify, that you have done what is required. You have responded to Christ and the Father in the proper way. That you are living, trying to live the right way of life.

So what does He do? Well, I have got a list of things that He does in His position of High Priest and the Head of the church. Colossians 1:18 says that He is now the Head of the church and because He is the Head of the church and because He is our great High Priest, it is His job to bring us to perfection, bring us to completion, bring us to salvation, bring us to spiritual maturity, however you want to say that. He has been given this task and He is going to do it.

These nine things that I have of what He does now as He sits at His Father's right hand as our High Priest:

1) He gives us gifts.

I will not go to any scriptures on this. I just will give you some verse citations so you can maybe look at them later. But many of them are things that we know. Romans 12:4-8 is where Paul says, after we are to give ourselves as a living sacrifice, Jesus Christ responds and says He gives gifts to the people of the church. That is also what He says throughout the entire chapter of I Corinthians 12, that He gives gifts to the church and the church is His body and He is going to make sure that the whole body then becomes part of the Kingdom of God. We can also refer to Ephesians 4:7-10, where it says that "He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." And that is His job here, that once He ascended then on high, He gave gifts to men.

2) He gives gifts to the church, not just individually, but He gives corporate gifts to the whole body.

The big one here is Ephesians 4:11-16, where it says "He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." The next verse is most important for what I have to say. The reason? "For the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

So He gives corporate gifts so that we can all be taught, exhorted, edified to the point where we become like Him and then we can serve and do works for one another and for others who cross our path.

3) He intercedes for us before God. This is said in Romans 8:34.

I want to read Hebrews 7:25 where it says, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them." So He lives eternally and one of His chiefs jobs as our Mediator before God is to intercede, to help us in our prayers and our desires before God. And as it says in Romans 8, when we do not even know how to say it right, He tells the Father what it is that we really need. That is also in Hebrews 10:19-23.

4) He is there at the right hand of God to pour out the Holy Spirit upon us.

This is one of the first things that Peter said about what Jesus' ministry now is after He has ascended. This is in Acts 2:33. He says, "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear." Remember these people who are listening to his sermon had seen the tongues of fire and the rushing mighty wind and visibly the Holy Spirit had come upon them, and audibly. And so he is saying "There it is!" Proof that He is sitting at the right hand of God doing His job. He is pouring out the Holy Spirit upon His people.

5) He aids us when we are tempted. He gives us that little help to overcome.

That is in Hebrews 2:18. Remember we have a High Priest that has been through a lot of stuff, the same type of stuff that we have to bear with in our lives and so now He is fit to aid us when we are tempted because He has been tempted just as we have been.

6) He heals us when we are sick. That is pretty simple one.

That is what James 5:16 says, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Well, that comes before Jesus Christ and He has the

power and He will heal us. Just as He has saved us spiritually, He will heal us physically by His stripes, as it says.

7) This is a great one. He guards us from Satan.

II Thessalonians 3:3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.

We have Him giving us help when Satan tries to get behind our defenses.

8) This is a good one. He gives His servants power to do greater works than even He did.

John 14:12 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father."

And among many, many, many, many other things we are finally down to the last one.

9) He prepares a place for us in God's Kingdom.

John 14:1-3 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

So while He is up there doing all these other things, He is preparing us for a job. He is preparing us for an office, a place, a part of His government. And so that colors all that He is doing with us. He has a specific plan for each one of us to bring us to a place where we can slide into very easily a place in His government so that we can rule with Him forever.

He is a busy Being, is not he? He does a lot. He works all the time. That is what John 5:17 says, "My Father has been working until now and I have been working." He works all the time to make sure that He makes the best

use of what He has been given in His ascension as God, after His crucifixion. The work of our Creator, Jesus Christ, fashioning us in His image, never stops and we can be very thankful of that. What He is doing is what is found there in Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

If I were you I would do this at some point in the future. Go through the entire New Testament and mark every place with a certain color, with a certain symbol, or however you want to do it, where the apostles mention Jesus Christ being resurrected or ascending to heaven. You will have a great deal of your New Testament in that color or with that symbol because the apostles spoke and wrote frequently about Christ's resurrection and His current position at the right hand of God in heaven.

They were astounded! It was marvelous and wonderful that these things had happened before their eyes and they wanted to tell *everybody* the good news that Jesus Christ not only died for our sins, but the Father made Him rise from the grave and He lives now and He is at work in our behalf. It was clearly a vital part of their lives. It was vital to their understanding, a major tenet of their faith. We need to have the same appreciation for these things since they form the basis of our hope of eternal life in God's Kingdom.

I want to finish by reading five verses from Ephesians 1. Just listen to the apostle Paul's emotion in all of this. Cutting into a sentence,

Ephesians 1:17-21 [T]hat the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated

Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all
principality and power and might and dominion, and every name
that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

I hope we appreciate what has been done for us and what is still being done
for us as we try to remove sin from our lives.