

OUR LORD'S ASCENSION.

– *JUNE 23, LUKE 24:44-53.* –

Golden Text – "And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

WHILE all who are still true to the sure foundation of the Christian faith and have not been moved away from the hope of the gospel recognize the necessity of Christ's death as the payment of our ransom, and see in his resurrection the pledge of salvation to all them that believe, few seem to consider what was accomplished for us and also for himself by his ascension. Yet this was a feature of the divine plan as necessary to our salvation as were the sacrifice and the resurrection.

This feature of the plan is clearly shown in the service of the typical tabernacle. It corresponds to the act of the high priest, Aaron, in entering the Most Holy with the blood of the atonement sacrifice and presenting it before the Mercy Seat together with the sweet incense which represented the human perfection of Christ.* As God said to Moses, referring to the Tabernacle, "See that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount," and required that the whole service of the Tabernacle should be performed with exactness according to the prescribed directions, so in the antitype every feature of the divine plan must be carried out in line with the type so carefully given.

*See Lev. 16; also *TABERNACLE SHADOWS*, p.48,50.*

Our Lord's ascension was therefore, according to the type, an essential part of the divine plan. Nor was it arbitrarily indicated in the type: there was a necessity for it, else it would not have been expressed there. In referring to it before his death, Jesus said to his disciples, "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 unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." – John 14:2,3.

If we inquire whither he went, we have his answer, "I go unto my Father." (John 14:12.) But why was it necessary that he should go away? Had he not finished the work of sacrifice? and could he not now have remained on earth for the personal direction and supervision of the work of the Gospel age? Granted that that work was the selection and the teaching, training and discipline of a people for his name, had he remained as the *visible* head of the Church would it not have been greatly to her advantage? Then all matters of faith and conduct could have had authoritative settlement; and the dissensions of "Christendom" would have been a thing unknown; and "that Man of Sin, whose coming was after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness," could never have arisen: no blasphemous popes or others could then have lorded it over God's heritage. Oh, how blessed would it have been, seemingly, according to human judgment, had the Lord remained with his people after his resurrection! Why might it not have been so? Why was it necessary that he should go away and leave them apparently at the mercy of every wind of doctrine and of all the machinations of the powers of darkness to overcome them – by arts, temptations, allurements, deceptions and by persecutions in every conceivable form?

Well, however it may appear or may have appeared to human judgment, the Lord himself said, "*It is expedient for you* that I go away." "But consider, "Lord, the disciples might have urged, "that the Church, as it increases in numbers, and as false teachers will surely arise among us, will greatly need a visible head to direct her course and to save her from endless divisions and discords. How can the Church remain one, as thou hast prayed (John 17:11), in the midst of the conflicting voices and influences that will arise?" But no, the early disciples asked no such questions: they were not so self-confident as the multitudes of professed Christians of later date, who seem to have

concluded that, since the Lord had so unwisely ignored the subsequent conditions and necessities of the Church, they would select from their midst one upon whom they would confer the title, "the vicar of Jesus Christ," and consider him and his successors in office the visible heads of the Church, who should be considered by all as infallible authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

Both the Church and the world are aware of the evil results of this heady philosophy, and of the monstrous usurpations of authority and power that have made both [R1829 : page 145] the church and the world to groan under the iron heel of oppression. And yet, strange as it may seem, though the folly of this measure has been so glaringly manifest, and the hated power of the false head of the Church has been cast off, again there is a great cry for his restoration to power and authority. The religious leaders of to-day are saying, We need and must have a visible head to reorganize and unify the divided hosts of "Christendom" – Christ's (?) kingdom; – and many are looking anxiously to the Papacy for that head.

Nevertheless, we are of those who still believe that it was expedient for Christ to go away; and that, too, without leaving any visible head to represent him in office. It was expedient for various reasons; and those in view of all the seemingly adverse conditions that could, and that the Lord knew were sure to, arise; for he foretold the very things that were to come to pass – the coming of the Man of Sin, the false teachers, and plausible false doctrines and how they would prosper, and the persecutions of the saints through long and weary centuries, and the treading down of the truth and the prevalence and prosperity of error.

His going away was expedient for the following reasons: –

(1) As already intimated, in order that, in accordance with the pattern given us in the typical high priest, Aaron, in the service of the typical tabernacle, he, as our great High Priest, should enter into heaven, into the presence of God – the antitypical holy of holies – for

us. To this the Apostle Paul refers, saying, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands [into the typical tabernacle, as did Aaron the typical high priest], which are figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." – Heb. 9:24.

If we would know what Christ our High Priest did for us after his ascension to the "most holy," to heaven itself, the presence of God, we have but to look back to the type which was made to illustrate it. There we see the high priest, after he had sacrificed the bullock which represented the humanity of Christ (while he himself then represented the new creature of the divine nature), entering the Most Holy with the blood of the bullock, and there presenting it before the mercy seat in the presence of the Shekinah glory; [R1829 : page 146] thus formally presenting to God the evidence of the typical sacrifice for the sins of the people, and so typically completing the work of atonement toward God. (See Lev. 16:6,14,17; Heb. 9:7.) And the Apostle in Heb. 9:7-14, shows that this work, thus typically accomplished by the typical high priest, was actually accomplished by Christ after his ascension to the Father, and that this formal presentation of the fact of his sacrifice for our redemption, was therefore a necessary part of the work of atonement, without which, according to the type (Lev. 16:2,3), his sacrifice would have availed nothing. It was only after the sacrifice had been made in exact conformity to the prescribed method, and after the evidence thereof (the blood) had been duly presented in the Most Holy, that the blessing of God could be granted to those for whom the atonement was made. Every part of the prescribed work was, in the antitype, as in the type, a necessary part, without which the whole would have been a failure. The typical sacrifices, of course, availed nothing, except to illustrate to our minds the actual processes of the work of atonement and the reasonable necessity of all its various features.

See TABERNACLE SHADOWS OF BETTER SACRIFICES.

(2) His going away was expedient also for himself, and again for us indirectly. This our Lord illustrated in his parable of the young nobleman going into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. (Luke 19:12.) Paul tells us that our Lord's great exaltation, which included, not only his change to the divine nature, but also his official elevation to the right hand of God, was granted to him as a reward for his atoning sacrifice – "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. *Wherefore*, God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name." This full exaltation, it is manifest, could not have been experienced until the sacrifice had been, not only made, but presented as well, as the fulfilment of this part of the divine plan. This full exaltation was that "glory" to which the Lord referred when he said, "Ought not Christ [according to the Scriptures] to have suffered these things, and *to enter into his glory?*" (Luke 24:26.) His going away was necessary, therefore, to this exaltation to the right hand of God – an exaltation which also is greatly to our present as well as to our future benefit.

But let us consider further what is said of this glorious exaltation for which purpose it was necessary that our Lord should go away. The Apostle Paul says (Eph. 1:17,20,21), "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,...raised Christ from the dead and set him at his own 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 world [age], but also in that which is to come." And in his Revelation to John on Patmos, Jesus said, "I am set down with my Father in his throne." The inference is plain, therefore, that our Lord was exalted as Jehovah's Prime Minister in the throne of universal dominion, for which exalted office he was also duly qualified, being made a partaker of the divine (immortal) nature, a dignity never before conferred upon any created being. Such has been the honor and glory of our blessed Lord ever since he ascended up on high, there to appear in the presence of God for us.

But what does it signify to us that our Lord was thus exalted so far beyond even our comprehension of the glory? Oh, it signifies much! it signifies that "when he ascended up on high, he led captivity [death] captive;" for he that ascended thus into the heavens is he, the very same Jesus, "that descended first into the lower parts of the earth [the grave]; [and] he that descended is the same also that ascended up, far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." (Eph. 4:8-10.) It signifies that we have now "a great High Priest, *that hath passed into the heavens* [one who is now on the most intimate terms and in the closest possible favor with the Sovereign of the whole universe],... and not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but [one who] was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin;"..."a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people;" and "in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." It signifies that, "if any man sin, we have *an advocate* with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;" and therefore, we may "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:14-16; 2:17,18; 1 John 2:1.) His very presence there in the glory of his enduring priesthood is the only appeal that is necessary on our behalf; for Jehovah himself loveth us – the dear purchase of the precious blood of his Anointed One (John 16:27); in fact, the whole plan of this reconciliation was of God, and is wrought out in Christ. Yes, praise the Lord!

"Before the throne my surety stands;

My name is written on his hands." – Heb. 7:22; Isa. 49:16.

Yet the ascension of our blessed Lord to the right hand of power signifies more even than this: it signifies his ability now to "give gifts unto men." At the appointed time – the times of restitution of all things – he comes forth from that holy of holies, heaven itself, whither he hath entered for us, and he will lift up his hands and bless the people (Lev. 9:23), and there will be a thousand years of his glorious reign. But this is not all; for as soon as he had ascended up on high and presented his

sacrifice on our behalf, he sent the Comforter, the holy spirit of adoption, into the hearts of his disciples (on the day of Pentecost), whereby they were enabled to cry, Abba, Father. It was with reference to this gift that Peter said on that day, "Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." (Acts 2:33.) And this gift has continued with the Church ever since. It was sent according to his promise – "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you: but if I depart I will send him unto you." This gift, the Apostle John shows, could not be given to the disciples until after the Lord's ascension. "For the holy spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." – John 7:39.

With some idea at least of the necessity of the Lord's departure in their interest, and assured of his coming again in glory and power, we can understand the rejoicing of the disciples as they returned to Jerusalem after his ascension. They were comforted and blessed, not only by the hope of his return, but also by the promise of the Comforter, as a token of his love and of the Father's favor, not many days after. [R1829 : page 146]

A REVIEW OF OUR LORD'S MINISTRY, ETC.

– JUNE 30. –

Golden Text – "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." – Heb. 12:2.

In view of all the precious lessons of this quarter gathered from the life and death and resurrection of our Lord, we have only to repeat to those who are endeavoring to follow in his footsteps, the exhortation of the Apostle: "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so [R1830 : page 147] easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross,

despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

He who by his example and teaching has inspired our faith will, if we continue to follow his leading, finish, perfect it. He will establish, strengthen, settle us so that we cannot be moved; and finally present us to himself "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." He will also perfect us by present experiences for our office as the "royal priesthood" as he was "made perfect through suffering" for his office as Chief Priest. **[R1830 : page 147]**

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

– *JULY 7, EXOD. 20:1-17.* –

Golden Text – "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." – Luke 10:27.

For a full presentation of the subject of this lesson, the reader is referred to the following articles in previous issues of this journal; viz.,

- (1) The Divine Law, Universal and Eternal. – Nov. 1-15, '94.
- (2) The Law of God. – Nov. 1, '92.
- (3) Taking God's Name in Vain. – May 15, '93.
- (4) The Bond of Perfectness. – Oct. '91.
