

Introduction: In recent sermons, we marveled at the Heavenly help which God sent down to deliver both Elijah and Elisha from very real foes and spiritual dangers. Taking a break from their Old Testament stories, we look now at our Savior as He continues this Divine activity of *gathering, defending and preserving* His church on earth in the present day. Because of His victory over every form of opposition through the Cross, Christ is full of joy at the prospect of carrying on this work for us in heaven. It is from *that place* of Heavenly, High Priestly mediation that Christ continues to walk in the midst of His church (as Revelation 1-3 put it) for her comfort and salvation.

Monday: read John 20:17-18 & John 16:16-22. How Christ longed to start His Heavenly ministry of intercession for His suffering church on earth. In fact, He is so full of joy forty days prior to His ascension that He speaks of it as a *present* reality in John 20:17! He tells Mary Magdalene to announce the good news to the disciples that, *already so soon after His Resurrection*, He is “*ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*”

In the same way, He amazingly views the time between His ascension and His Second Coming as just “a little while” in John 16:16! These verses rivet our attention on the awesome subject of Christ our Mediator’s joyful rule for us in Heaven – as well as causing us to marvel at His great desire to have us with Him there!

Meditate and Pray: As the Puritan John Owen puts it, as soon as Christ vanquishes death on the Cross, He lands once again on the shores of our world, eager to find each of His disciples and to continue His work of *gathering, defending and preserving them as His church*. Give thanks for the great assurance that we have because of Christ’s ongoing activity on our behalf, remembering especially the expression of such assurance in Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 54:

54.Q. What do you believe
concerning the *holy catholic Christian church*?

A. I believe that the Son of God,
out of the whole human race,
from the beginning of the world to its end,
gathers, defends, and preserves for himself,
by his Spirit and Word,
in the unity of the true faith,
a church chosen to everlasting life.

**And I believe that I am
and forever shall remain
a living member of it.**

Tuesday: read Psalm 2. We want to begin this week’s notes by acknowledging how Jesus’ intercession in Heaven rules over our daily existence here – so much so that we should shout with joy in prayer: “Jesus, thank you that because of your Ascension, you exercise an all-prevailing and omni-present ministry for the good of your church:

- You ask for the nations (Psalm 2:8) – and world-wide missions are born because of your request!
- You ask for individual sinners to be converted, and the Spirit applies your redemptive work by working faith in each elect heart unto saving faith and repentance.
- You ask for sin and evil to be restrained, and revival breaks out on earth, as “repentance and faith are proclaimed to all nations” (Luke 24:47).

Meditate and Pray: Thank you for teaching us that everything arises because you have asked for it to be done. Oh, increase our trust in you as you ‘live to intercede for us and for the nations’ (Hebrews 7:25)! Increase our gratitude as we realize anew that all good things in our lives arise because you ask for them to be given. We magnify you as our *generous and giving* heavenly King and High-Priest. Amen.”

Weds/Thurs: read Revelation 1:1-20. Returning to the Book of Revelation, notice that, to comfort and strengthen the persecuted church at the end of the 1st century A.D., God reveals the glory of His risen and Ascended Son in Revelation 1:12-20. *But notice especially* how Christ is revealed in His ongoing Heavenly ministry in Revelation 1:13. It is “in the midst of the lampstands” that Jesus stands as our High Priest to intercede before His Father!

In other words, it is the embattled church on earth that Jesus helps as He walks among the lampstands, symbolizing not only each church in Asia Minor, (Revelation 2-3), but the church throughout history. Our Lord Jesus is much closer to us in our trials and challenges as His suffering church than we often realize! Listen to these words by Professor John Murray, that sum up Jesus’ ministry for the church on earth:

“The church on earth as the body of Christ is the sphere of His activity in His capacity as high priest at the right hand of God. To use the symbolism of the book of Revelation it is as the high priest that He walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks and in that capacity He addresses the seven churches in Asia. The epistles to the seven churches are, therefore, examples of the way in which, as a Son over His own house and as our apostle and high priest, He administers this heavenly office. Truly Christ executes His kingly office as head over all things to His body the church. But Christ is a priest upon His throne, and we must not allow the consideration of his kingly office to eclipse that aspect of Christ's heavenly activity with which we are now concerned ... What we are concerned with now is to recognize that His specifically high priestly ministrations are more operative and pervasive in the church upon earth than we are frequently disposed to appreciate.”

Meditate and Pray: How often do you think of Jesus’ ‘prayer-life’ on your behalf in Heaven? How often do you recognize His role in giving you answers in your life to prayers you have not prayed? Do you, as so many do, view what happens in your life as flowing merely from God the Father’s sovereign Providence? To be sure – God’s Providence rules over all things for your good! But Christ Jesus is far more concerned with us than to merely rule over our lives! He asks personally for all needed blessings and provisions to be given to us in His Name! And every grace we receive from Heaven flows to us through His nailed-pierced hands!

Sing about Christ’s Heavenly intercession with the words of hymn # 305:

*Arise, my soul, arise; shake off thy
guilty fears;
The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf
appears:
Before the throne my surety stands,
Before the throne my surety stands,
My name is written on His hands.*

*He ever lives above, for me to
intercede;
His all redeeming love, His precious
blood, to plead:
His blood atoned for ev’ry race,
His blood atoned for ev’ry race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.*

*Five bleeding wounds he bears,
received on Calvary;
they pour effectual prayers,
they strongly plead for me.
"Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
"forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
"nor let that ransomed sinner die,
nor let that ransomed sinner die!"*

*My God is reconciled;
his pard'ning voice I hear.
He owns me for his child,
I can no longer fear.
with confidence I now draw nigh,
with confidence I now draw nigh,
and "Father, Abba, Father!" cry,
and "Father, Abba, Father!" cry.*

Fri/Sat/Sun: read John 13:3; 14:1-7 and John 17:24. The Lord Jesus endured sufferings and the Cross buoyed by His hope of Heavenly reward and glory. Conscious that "He had come from God and was returning to God," (John 13:3), Jesus longed for His disciples, who had known so much of His humiliation and sufferings, to also see Him in His coming glory. He intended to blaze a trail for them and for us, taking His victorious, risen humanity up to Heaven to represent men there and then one day welcoming us to live with Him forever. Indeed, He promises His whole church that He has gone to "prepare a place of us," (John 14:2) and He has prayed for us to be with Him there in His glory, as John 17:24 makes clear.

But Thomas interrupts Jesus' words of comfort about Heaven to contradict Jesus' statement that "they knew the way to where He was going," John 14:4-5. We like Thomas can have our doubts about one day really experiencing the promised comfort of "the place prepared for us." How then can we grow in our assurance that there truly is a way that has been opened for us to gain Heaven? Well, take note that in John 14:6 Jesus ties this way of salvation firmly to His accomplished work, as follows:

- "I am the Way:" Because Christ opened the Way to Heaven with His own blood as our Priest, through a "new and living way opened for us through His body," (Hebrews 10:20);
- "I am the Truth:" Because Christ has revealed to us the Truth in the Gospel as our Prophet;
- "I am the Life:" Because Christ as the King, victorious over sin, Satan and Death, can give all the subjects of His Kingdom Eternal Life – even as He promised Martha in John 11:25-26);

Because all this is true: therefore, the way to Heaven has been clearly secured for us. There is a safe passage through death into the other world. Our doubts and fears are silenced!.

Meditate and Pray: Sing Hymn # 550 (verses 4-6) in our Trinity Hymnal with great humility but also thankfulness that one day all our fears of passing through death to Heaven will be removed:

*But tim'rous mortals start and shrink to cross this narrow sea;
and linger, shiv'ring on the brink, and fear to launch away.*

*O could we make our doubts remove, those gloomy doubts that rise,
and see the Canaan that we love, with unbecclouded eyes;*

*Could we but climb where Moses stood and view the landscape o'er,
not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood, should fright us from the shore. (Isaac Watts, 1707)*