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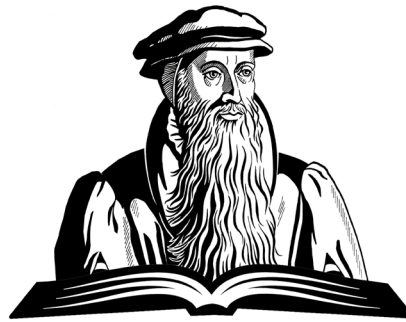
Shorter
CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #21

Christ's Exaltation
Catechism Question 28



The John Knox Institute
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Lecture #21

Christ's Exaltation

Question 28: *Wherein consisteth Christ's exaltation?*

Answer: *Christ's exaltation consisteth in his rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up into heaven, in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day.*

In our last lesson, we looked at how Jesus humbled himself, and did so as our Prophet, Priest, and King. In this lesson, we consider how he was exalted unto glory. In his humiliation, the Son of God brought himself low, even to the point of death, and that, the cursed death of the cross. In his exaltation, the Son of God incarnate is raised up to the highest glory that there is. He is exalted. To be clear, as he is the Son of God, he is equal to the Father, and always is most glorious. However, here we consider him as he is the God-man, that is, the incarnate Son of God, and our appointed Mediator between God and man. It is as the incarnate Son of God that he is raised up to the highest honor, as we will see.

Well, our Question today is Question #28 from the *Shorter Catechism*. It asks, "Wherein consisteth Christ's exaltation?" And the Answer, "Christ's exaltation consisteth in his rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up into heaven, in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day." Well, you'll notice that the Question contains four parts in its answer, all of which touch on various stages of Christ's exaltation. It mentions his rising, his ascending, his sitting, and his coming. These refer to historical events. His rising again refers to what we call his resurrection. His ascending up into heaven is known as his ascension. His sitting at the right hand of the Father refers to what is known as his "session." And his coming to judge the world is his return, or his second advent. We will simply take those four in order as each of these display parts or stages of his exaltation. Well first then for our lesson, will be that Christ was exalted in his resurrection. Second will be that Christ was exalted in his ascension. Third, Christ was exalted in his session. And fourth, Christ will be exalted in his return.

So first then, for our lesson, Christ was exalted in his resurrection. When we understand what Christ accomplished by his death, we rightly focus on that part of his work. And the Bible emphasizes his death, and rightly so. If Christ had not died as a substitute, there would be no hope of forgiveness for anyone,—no salvation whatsoever. But Christ's death satisfied God's justice, and so his death is rightly a focus for our lives. However, Christ's resurrection is likewise important. If Christ remained dead, we would have no hope of everlasting life. And this is what Paul indicates

in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 17 through 19. He writes, “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” Notice that if Christ only died, then the true victory and salvation would not fully have been realized. The more we study the Bible, the more we learn how important the resurrection is.

But what is the resurrection? The word “resurrection” simply means “to rise again”. The Bible is very clear. Christ did not rise again from sleep or a coma—he rose again from the dead. This is one of the features of the Scriptures, when talking about Christ’s death, it is very clear that he died—truly died. You have the witness of his shed blood, you have the witness of the Roman centurion, you have the witness of his disciples, all of which did indeed see him dead. Notice a simple expression, in 1 Peter 1, verse 3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” He rose again from the dead. Well, this is a miraculous truth. The word “miracle” is thrown around loosely today. But a miracle is that which goes beyond what is normal. Not only that, but it is something that cannot be done by natural ability, by natural strength, by natural law. It demands supernatural and divine intervention immediately so. Every morning, there are people who rise again from their beds, having slept, they’re awake. There are plenty of times when people have risen from a coma in a hospital. However, to rise from the dead, that is a miracle. It requires the supernatural power of God.

When we say that Christ rose again from the dead, we are affirming a Biblical truth, and an historical fact. We must emphasize this. The Gospels indicate that Christ’s resurrection is an historical truth. Each Gospel account give verifiable details. They’re not simply relating what was a sentimental desire or a wish of the disciples. They record and relate to us what actually took place in history. Paul emphasized this historical fact, in 1 Corinthians 15. Notice verses 3 through 8, he says to the Corinthians, “I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.” Paul does not merely say that these people believed that Christ arose. He asserts that they actually saw the risen Christ. The same Christ that died is the same Christ they saw after he had risen again. In his day, that is, Paul’s day, there were hundreds of eyewitnesses to this historical fact.

What does all of this mean? Well, it means many things. But one thing it does is it shows to us and to the world that Christ is who he claimed to be. He claimed to be the Son of God. He claimed to be the Messiah, the Savior that would die and rise again. And Paul picks up on this point, in Romans 1, verse 4. He writes that he was “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” The word “declared” means “to be marked out.” In other words, the resurrection marks out Jesus, or shows Jesus to be the Son of God. To be clear, the resurrection did not make Jesus the Son of God. Rather, the resurrection is a part of evidence. It’s pointing to, it’s marking out that he is indeed who he claimed to be.

This is an important part of his exaltation. He endured the shame of the cross in his humiliation. He was ridiculed and mocked. Remember those words which are heavy to us, to think of the glorious Son of God incarnate suffering these words that men cast at him. Matthew 27, verses 39 through 43 record these: “And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying,

Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.” Christ, in love, endured such ridicule. He’s given honor in his resurrection. His resurrection answers the challenges and the mockeries he endured. Think of those words, “If thou be the Son of God.” They’re saying it to Christ, they’re mocking him, “If you are the Son of God.” And you hear others say, “If he is the King of Israel.” Christ endured these mockeries. And his resurrection gives undeniable evidence and honor to him, that he is the Son of God, and that he is the King of Israel, the Savior of sinners. You see, his resurrection exalts him publically and lastingly.

But this is not the end of his glory. So second, Christ was exalted in his ascension. The Catechism reminds us of this historical fact—his “ascending up into heaven.” This means that he went up from the earth into heaven. Jesus prepared his disciples for this event throughout his earthly ministry. They didn’t fully understand it, as they didn’t understand his resurrection. You can read of his preparing them for this, in John’s Gospel, chapter 14 and chapter 15. After his resurrection, he spoke of his ascension again. He mentioned this to Mary, in John 20, and verse 17. He said, “I am not yet ascended unto my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” Well, this took place, as Luke indicates, in Acts, chapter 1, verse 3. He mentions that it took place forty days after his resurrection. Notice again the historical references. And he records this event as happening, in Acts 1, verses 9 through 11. He writes, “And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”

What an event that must have been, to see their Savior so mistreated by the creatures of this world, by the men, by the way, who he made and sustained! And now, to see him received up into heaven, in glory! Oh, how they must have been filled with wonder and hope, and to know, even as the angels shared with them, that he would return again! Oh, how encouraging this historical event was, to know that he entered victoriously into heaven, and gloriously unto that throne! What an encouragement and blessing! It’s no wonder that they who, prior to his resurrection and prior to his ascension were fearful; after his resurrection and after his ascension are bold. And they are they, who, as one said, turned the world upside-down with their fearless proclamation of Christ. Why?—well, God had given them grace, and he had done so in causing them to see and believe this Savior who had risen and ascended into heaven.

Well, we are no less privileged, because we have the record of this event in the Scriptures for our instruction and our encouragement. The ascension testifies to all that our Lord and Savior has conquered the world, and he stands victorious over it, and has been received in the heaven to reign. It’s true this world is full of misery, but our Lord has conquered it and reigns over it, and those who trust in him have every reason to live their lives with the assurance that this world will not conquer them, for their Savior reigns over it.

But what has Christ gone into heaven to do? Well, this brings us then to our third point. Christ was exalted in his session. The word “session” again refers to his being seated. The Bible tells us that Christ was seated at the right hand of the Father. Paul writes of this in Ephesians 1, and verse

20, when he speaks of God, who “raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.” The right hand, in the Bible, as well as in various cultures, is the position of the highest honor. Now this should not surprise us, as Jesus is the Son of God incarnate. However, we should not miss the wonder of what is taking place. The one who was shamed by men is now honored by God. At the right hand of the Father, the highest position of honor and glory is the humanity—the flesh, blood, and human soul—of the Son of God. The one who was mocked and ridiculed, the one who was spat upon, and beaten, and crucified, is now, in his flesh, at the right hand of the Father. How can we say this more clearly? A human, albeit much more than a human, and yet truly a human is at the position of the highest honor over all. To be clear, he is both fully God and fully man, and yet let us not miss and overlook this truth, that it is the incarnate Son of God who is exalted to the right hand of the Father. It is as seated in that position, that he governs over all the earth. And it is he that makes intercession with the Father for his beloved people. He continues in his position of honor to serve as the Prophet, Priest, and King of his people. What a glorious encouragement this is to us.

And yet, there is more glory to our Savior. His sitting at the right hand of the Father is not all. In fact, notice the expectation of Hebrews 1, verse 13, “But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?” In other words, his session continues until a certain point. This brings us to the fourth part of our lesson. Christ will be exalted in his return, or what is known as his second advent. This but one further part of Christ’s exaltation. And it is a part of his exaltation that is yet to come. It refers to his glorious and bodily return to this world. The same body that suffered, died, and was buried is the same body that rose again, ascended, and is seated; and it is the same one that will come in glory again to this world. Christ mentioned this to his disciples before his death. Notice John 14, verses 2 and 3. It says, “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 unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” Our exalted King has not left us or abandoned us. He will come again, and what blessedness to those who believe in him, he will receive them to himself.

But this is not the only thing that will happen when he returns. Notice the Catechism states that in coming, he will come to “judge the world at the last day.” This event is yet to come. His return will be the end of this current world as we know it. What a glorious day that will be unto Christ. Christ will be the single focus of every creature, every angel, every human. All that is will be focused on him and his glory. The one who has been ignored, and despised and rejected, the object of so much hatred by sinners will now be seen as that glorious one who alone is glorious. He who was refused and ridiculed will stand as the Judge over all the earth. Every man, every woman, every child, all nations, all tribes, all tongues, all generations, every single individual will answer to this glorious King. Paul mentioned this in his sermon in Athens, Acts 17, verse 31. He said, “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

Now, this is a most sobering truth. It should grip us. It should direct our thoughts, and impact our lives. And indeed Christ calls us to consider this well. I encourage you, after this lesson, to sit down with your Bible and read through Matthew chapter 25, and you’ll see Christ’s exhorting of us, and his calling of us to consider these things. But notice in particular, verses 31 through 33 of that chapter. He says, “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and

he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.” All the world will be gathered before him. There will be a great separation marked by that day, those who did not trust in him, and those who did trust in him. To his people who trusted in him and served him in love, he will say, as verse 34 of Matthew 25 indicates: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” But to those who did not trust in him, he will say, as verse 41 indicates, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” The horror then, to summarize in verse 46, “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” What a day, that will be!

Realize this, you and I will be there at that day. You and I, with our eyes, will see him. You and I, with our ears, will hear his voice. And so, you and I must prepare for it. Our Savior shall come again. Paul gives us encouragement for believers, Philippians 3, verses 20 and 21: “For our conversation”—that is, our life and conduct—“is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” You see, the believer does not need to cower in fear for that day, but with longing expectation, looks for that glorious day to come.

Let me close with just two points of application. First, it may be that you are a member of a church. It may be that you consider these things to be true. And it may be indeed that you acknowledge them to be true, and share them to be true to others. However, it may be that you do not trust in the Savior. If that’s the case, let me both warn and encourage you. The glorious King will come again to judge with vengeance all those who refused to embrace him. If you are one who does not embrace him by faith, on that day he will have no mercy. On that day he will not spare. The Bible tells us that on that day, the men of this world will look, and then they’ll look to the mountains and cry out that they would fall upon them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. That day will not be a day of mercy, but of judgment. That should sober you. Because if you’re not trusting in him right now, that day will come upon you with a fierce wrath against you for your sins. And yet, there is encouragement for you. The King of heaven and earth has ordered your life right now that you should hear this warning and consider that day before it comes to pass. Is this not a merciful display from so great and honorable a King? Is it not a way he’s calling you to repent, that this would be the day of mercy for you?

Well, second, it may be that you are one who’s trusting in the Lord. And I may not know all of your trials and difficulties, but I do know this—your Savior, who lives, your Savior has entered heaven and is seated in glory over all, and your Savior will come again for you. My dear believer, you have hope. It is in Christ who has conquered the world, is reigning over all, and will come again for you.