

Father's House

by James D. Nickel

At the moment Jesus gave up His spirit on the Cross, He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30).¹ These three words institute a culmination to all the purposes of God for all the promises of God are "yea and amen" in Him (II Corinthians 1:20). At the Cross, Christ finished the work of salvation. This work is an all-encompassing work designed to: (1) impact every realm of the created order (Colossians 1:19-20) and (2) initiate "times of refreshing" that will flood the entire earth and be perfected or consummated in the new heavens and the new earth (Acts 3:19-26; Isaiah 11:1-10; Revelation 21-22). All of history before the coming of Christ looked forward in anticipation to this finished work. The writers of the New Testament reported the apostolic declaration of the coming of the age of Messiah, the kingdom of God in Christ, in the proclamation of the Gospel. Those called out of the domain of darkness, the reign of sin, into the kingdom of God's beloved Son, the reign of righteousness, through the atonement of Christ look back with confidence and presently serve God out from the rest provided by this finished work (Colossians 1:13).²

When a Jew in New Testament times looked at the temple in Jerusalem, he understood this building to be "Father's House" (cf. John 2:13-21; Psalm 23:6). Why? The

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's House are many dwellings; 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. And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:1-6).

building housed the manifest presence of God, a visible presence located in the Holy of Holies. This shining Shekinah glory radiated above and between the wings of the cherubim hammered to the Ark of the Covenant. The temple veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was a

¹ Psalm 22 must be read in its entirety to understand what Christ meant by "It is finished" in the context of what He said earlier, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

² This rest, explained in Hebrews 3-4, is founded in the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer. The wicked, those choosing to be outside of the envelope of Christ's righteousness, do not know this rest and peace, "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. "There is no peace," says my God, 'for the wicked'" (Isaiah 57:20-21). The blood of Christ not only imputes righteousness to the believer in a legal or forensic sense; *the blood of Christ actually cleanses the believer's conscience* in a subjective or transformational sense. There are two sides to the coin of righteousness: (1) *forensic* and (2) *transformational*. Right standing generates right living. The righteousness of God in Christ removes the penalty of sin and the poison of its power. The blood of Christ clears the conscience of the guilt produced by sin. Only a person released from the inner torments of guilt can truly rest; i.e. is truly free. Free from what? Free from sin, guilt, and death. Free for what? Free to love Him in the delights and joys of Trinitarian fellowship. Free to serve God. Free to be truly alive. Free to live a transfigured life in the power of His Spirit (Hebrews 9:14; Romans 8:1-16).

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mere 600 yards from Golgotha, the place of Christ's death. At the moment of His death, this veil split in two, from top to bottom, an indication that the God whose glory glowed within was responsible (Matthew 27:51).

The epistle to the Hebrews explains the significance of this veil. First, the veil prohibited entrance into the holy presence of God (Hebrews 9:8). Only one person could enter through the veil, the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, and entrance was only allowed through blood sacrifice. This blood was to be sprinkled on the mercy seat, a seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant, a seat located between the glory of God above and the law of God below, inside the Ark. One function of the Law of God was to condemn man and convince him of sin, the sin that separates him from the glory of God (Romans 3:19-23). Since sin generates death (Genesis 2:17), sin can only be remitted through death; i.e., without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). It is only through the loving and merciful shedding of blood that the justice of God upon sin is satisfied thus providing a consecrated and gracious way into the glorious presence of God; i.e., joyful participation in Trinitarian fellowship. Christ, the One in whom justice and mercy enfold, is that way (John 14:6).

Second, this blood must come from the Burnt Altar. According to Hebrews, the death of Christ, while occurring physically on Golgotha, occurred in reality at the heavenly altar (Hebrews 9:12, 24-25). The Old Testament Tabernacle-Temple complex was only a shadow of heavenly realities. Father's House on earth was a reflection of Father's House in heaven. The court of heaven would accept only one blood sacrifice, a perfect and complete one, the one offered by the Lord Jesus Christ. When the veil in the "shadow" temple was split in two, it was a sign on earth of a heavenly covenant. At the moment of the tearing of this curtain, the Lord Jesus Christ, having yielded His spirit in death, walked into the court of heaven with His blood *to appear in the presence of God for us*; i.e., to permanently atone for the sins of His people; indeed, the sins of the whole world (Hebrews 9:12, 25; I John 2:1-2). The veil, according to Hebrews 10:19-20, represents His flesh, His body. The rending of the veil signifies His body broken for us. *His shed blood flowing forth from His broken body opens the way into Father's House, the way into the loving and interpenetrating presence of God.*

It is in this context that we understand what Jesus is saying in John 14:1-6. He told His disciples that He was going away. Where? To Father's House, i.e., Father's presence, where there are many dwelling places.³ Why? To prepare a place⁴ for them so that where He is, in Father's presence, there they may be also. They cannot go there now, but He will come back and take them with Him to Father's House. The epistle to the Hebrews tells us of the covenant made in the heavens after the death of Christ, a ceremony that was *invisible* to any human eyes. This heavenly transaction was similar to what happened with the blood of the first goat on the Day of Atonement. No Israelite could see that blood was being sprinkled behind the veil on the mercy seat. Revelation 4 and 5 also depict this same covenant ceremony. Revelation 4 reveals the throne room of God, Father's House. Revelation 5 reveals the atonement secured by the Lamb of God, the One worthy to open the sealed scroll⁵, and His blood-bought universal redemption of worshippers from every tribe, tongue, people,

³ In the King James Version of the Bible, the Greek word *monē* is translated as "mansions." This word, in the Greek, means places of abode or abiding, i.e., dwellings or abiding places. Unfortunately, John 14:1-6 is far too often used as a "funeral" text using the referent "mansion of heavens" as the place prepared for someone after death. In the Gospel, Father's House is a place of fellowship to be experienced, not at death, but in life abundant (John 10:10)!

⁴ Place, in the Greek is *topos*, meaning a "space marked off or set aside."

⁵ What happens in Revelation 6-11 is an unfolding of the contents of this opened scroll. These chapters reveal God's covenantal judgments that occurred in the first century AD. Hence, the sealed scroll, opened as a result of Christ's

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and nation (Revelation 5:8-10). This scene answers to the Son of Man coming on the clouds and ascending to the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9-14 to receive a kingdom and everlasting dominion (cf. Psalm 2:6-7; Ephesians 1:19-21; Matthew 26:64; 28:18).

In John 20:19-23, Jesus showed His disciples His hands and feet. By doing so, He was telling them that the offering was complete; He had finished the work of redemption. Next, as the final High Priest, Christ blesses them, "Peace be with you" (cf. Number 6:24-26). Next, He sends them, by the breath of His Spirit, on their mission to the world with the word of forgiveness as a new, universal, and royal priesthood (I Peter 2:5-9; Revelation 1:5-6).

The heavenly place has now been prepared and secured (Ephesians 2:6). Christ the final High Priest, as the representative man, brings God to humanity and humanity to God. He brings God to humanity by being God's word of grace and forgiveness. Christ is the exegesis of God the Father; He has made Him known to all who come to Him and learn truth in Him (John 1:1-18; Matthew 11:25-30; John 8:31-32). As one representing all, He brings humanity to God by the final offering of His life on the Cross, by which He submitted to His Father's judgment on the sins of all mankind, accepting the just verdict of guilty, not on Himself, but for us. Indeed, by His action, Christ is the mercy seat; by His public display of righteousness, He is the just and justifier of all who trust Him (Romans 3:25-26). On the Cross,

"mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10).

Just before He physically leaves them for the last time, Christ tells His disciples to wait for the promise of the Father, the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). It is in the person of the Holy Spirit that Christ would come back to His disciples, to be with them, to comfort and strengthen them, and to escort them to the place, the abiding place, prepared for them (John 14:15-28; 16:5-33). This preparation, having been accomplished in the heavenly realm by His sacrifice on the Burnt Altar of the Cross, would become a reality to them in the person of the Holy Spirit.

The coming of Jesus Christ to them in the person of the Holy Spirit is like the second goat on the Day of Atonement. Every Israelite could visibly see this goat being led away into the wilderness. Every Israelite knew then *for certain* that their sins had been forgiven and that they were accepted in Father's House through the shedding of blood. The Holy Spirit efficaciously applies the eternal redemption of Christ, wrought by His blood, visibly to those who trustingly believe, designated in the New Testament as God the Father's elect in Christ, the Elect One.⁶ The Holy Spirit's ministry on earth is like the wind, blowing where it wishes, birthing men in the new creation by the drawing power of Christ's finished work proclaimed in the Gospel (John 3:8; John 1:12-13; II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; John 6:44f; John 12:32). After this regeneration, the Holy Spirit's continuing ministry is like fire (cf. Acts 2:1f) in that He not only purges and cleanses, but also empowers Christ's blood-bought worshippers for service in reaching the uttermost parts of the earth with the good news of the kingdom (Acts 1:8).

atonement, is a revelation of the outworking of the reign and authority of Christ in history as exemplified in the first century.

⁶ God the Father chose Christ as His elect one (Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 12:18). Those who receive Christ by believing are chosen in Him (John 1:12; Ephesians 1:3-5), the many are elected in the One. We must never sever the doctrine of election from Christ. Our view of election must be Christo-centric and predestination must be seen as the purpose of God to create a beautiful, holy, blameless, and loving family who share in His Trinitarian fellowship. To go beyond this, to delve dogmatically into man-made logical schemas regarding the decrees of God before time (e.g., infralapsarianism or supralapsarianism), is to go beyond, I believe, not only what the Scripture reveals, but engenders hermeneutical eisegesis; i.e., reading into Scripture texts a presupposed logical schema. Scripture reveals truth for our edification, not for our curiosity or logical necessities.

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Christ's universal⁷ and international body was called the people of the Way in the New Testament (Acts 9:2; 22:4; cf. John 14:6; Hebrews 10:18-20).⁸ United to God the Father through Christ's efficacious atonement and the effectual ministry of the Holy Spirit, the people of the way now abide in Father's House, seated on heavenly thrones (Ephesians 1:3; 2:6; cf. Revelation 3:20-21). To sit on a throne means to rule with authority from rest.⁹ As Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty to rule with authority from rest, so too does the body of Christ who, by virtue of the merits of her Redeemer, also rule with authority from rest under her Covenant head, her representative (cf. Revelation 2:26-27).

We can derive this call to "ruling authority" from the meaning of Greek word *ekklesia* translated in English as church. In the cities of Ancient Greece, certain select people were called out from the city to form the governing council of that city. This governing council was called the *ekklesia*. Jesus and His apostles used this word to describe both the characteristic and function of God's called out ones. Christ's church, called out of the world by Him in whom all authority in heaven and on earth is given, is the instrument through which the governmental rule of God is actuated in every earthly realm according to the pattern set in heaven (Matthew 6:9-10; 28:18-20).

The people of the way are reflectors of the glory of God inhabiting them as the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; II Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 2:19-23). That the temple, Father's House, is now intimately tied to the church, both individually and collectively, is significant and replete with understanding and application.¹⁰ This connection is affirmed in the description of the New Jerusalem, identified as the bride of Christ, in Revelation 21. Note especially that this city, a city to which the believer has definitively come to in Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24), *is described in symbol as a perfect cube* (Revelation 21:14-17). Where have we seen this before? In the Holy of Holies, a structure whose dimensions are also a perfect cube (cf. I Kings 6:20). By making this cubic connection, the Apostle John was identifying the bride of Christ as the locale of God's manifest presence, the Shekinah Glory in the person of the Holy Spirit. Father's House is now the body of Christ, His church. The believer abides in the Triune Godhead and the Triune Godhead abides in the believer (John 14:20; John 15:1-10), a people called out from the world to be a part of His governing council, the instrument of God's rule on earth.

In the atonement, the blood of Jesus Christ has provided a new and living way, access for His people into the very presence of God. Based only upon the merits of the final High Priest, this access is permanent and immediately direct, available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. What is the purpose of this provision? According to the epistle to the Hebrews, *this access has been provided as a means of enablement*.

⁷ The Gnostic heretics, who infiltrated many quarters of Christianity during its first four to five centuries, denied that Christ had come in the flesh (I John 4:3). They were also responsible for coining the word Catholic, meaning universal, as a name for Christians, specifically those who believed that Christ died for the sins of all humanity, all races, all colors, all tribes, all tongues, Jew and Gentile. This Catholic designation was in contradistinction to the Gnostic assertion that the blood of Christ paid *only* for the sins of the elect, i.e., a particular view of atonement determined by the secret counsel of God before time, a counsel in which they alone were privy as the "elect" and the "few" insiders.

⁸ The early church, post-New Testament times, testified in unison that the way of the righteous, quoting Psalm 1 many times in this context, is the way of Christ. That is, the way of Christ is to walk in Christ, to walk in the love of the Father by the power of the Spirit that enables the believer to obey, from the heart, the full intent of God's holy statutes (cf. Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:8-12).

⁹ Note the connection between the mercy seat and the rule of God in the Old Testament economy (cf. I Samuel 4:4; II Samuel 6:2; II Kings 19:15; Psalm 80:1; 99:1-2).

¹⁰ In this connection, study Isaiah 66:1-2; Psalm 132; Ezekiel 47:1-12; John 7:37-39; I Corinthians 3:5-17; I Peter 2:5-10; Hebrews 3:1-6.

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“For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:13-14)

Redeemed and cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, every believer, with humble boldness, can approach the throne of God to obtain needed mercy and grace (Hebrews 4:14-16) since Christ is their intercessor, the One who lives in and for them by the Holy Spirit. For what purpose? *The mercy and grace thus dispensed empowers the petitioner with the ability to carry out God's marching orders.* Access to Father's House is given to Christ's blood bought worshippers to glory them, to weight them with significance, and to empower them to do what God requires them to do, to love Him and serve Him in *living works* by spreading the aroma of God's Triune presence leading to the obedience of faith to the nations (II Corinthians 2:14-17; Romans 1:5; 16:26).