

Jesus at the Right Hand of God. Bethesda meditation. 30 March 2008.

Hymn : Praise 498 – verses 1 and 2.

*The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now;
A royal diadem adorns
The mighty Victor's brow.*

*The highest place that heaven affords
Is His by sovereign right,
The King of kings and Lord of lords,
And heaven's eternal light.*

(Thomas Kelly, 1769-1854)

I have two readings this morning. The first is found in Mark 16 ...

Verse 1 : 'And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him'.

Verse 5 : 'And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting *on the right side*; and they were alarmed'.

Verse 19 : 'After the Lord had spoken to them, He was taken up into heaven, and sat *at the right hand of God*'.

And now in Hebrews 1 ...

Verses 13 and 14 : 'To which of the angels has He said at any time, *Sit at my right hand*, until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet? Are they not all ministering¹ spirits, sent forth to render service² for those who are to inherit salvation?'

Given that it was Easter, last Lord's Day we focused our attention particularly on our Lord's death and resurrection. And I understand that in SMAB today, John Bodger will be looking at the subject of our Lord's ascension. For our meditation this morning, I should like to consider with you just one aspect of what results from that ascension – namely, our Lord's present session at the right hand of God – and, in particular, the question posed by the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 1 verse 13 ... 'to which of the angels has He (God) said at any time, Sit at my right hand'.

It is clear that for someone to sit at another's right hand in the ancient world was to occupy the position of the very highest honour and eminence.³

When the Jewish historian Josephus reported the seating arrangements in the camp of King Saul, then probably at Gibeah, he said that 'there sat by him (King Saul) his son Jonathan *at his right hand*, and Abner, the captain of his host, at his other hand'.⁴

We read in 1 Kings 2 that, when 'Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, the king ... sat down on his throne, and he caused a throne to be set for the king's mother; and she sat *at his right hand*'.⁵

And, again, when Tiridates, king of Armenia, visited Nero in AD 62, the emperor gave Tiridates a seat *at his right hand* in the theatre as a token of respect and honour.⁶

But our Lord Jesus is *not* seated at the right hand of any Israelite king in either Gibeah or Jerusalem, nor at the right hand of any despot in Rome!⁷ Chapter 8 of our letter opens by speaking of Him as 'sat at the right hand *of the throne of the Majesty* (of 'the Greatness') *in the heavens*'.⁸ Yes, indeed, Mr. Kelly, 'The highest place that heaven affords is *His*'.

And it is unthinkable that any angel should presume – should dare – to sit in that place of supreme dignity and honour. It is not that angels cannot sit – for we know they can – but that they cannot sit *there*!

We read in Matthew 28, for example, that 'an angel of the Lord descended from heaven ... rolled back the stone (from the entrance to our Lord's tomb, that is), and *sat* upon it'⁹ – and in Mark 16 that, when the women from Galilee arrived on the scene, they saw an angel, in appearance as a young man, then *sitting inside* the tomb.¹⁰ Indeed it would be difficult to miss the contrast struck by Mark there; that, according to verse 5, the 'young man' was '*sitting on the right side*' of the tomb, whereas, according to verse 19, 'the Lord ... was received up into heaven, and *sat on the right hand of God* – the same Greek word¹¹ being translated 'right side' and 'right hand'. An angel could sit at 'the right hand' *of the tomb*; but no angel could ever sit at 'the right hand *of God*'!

An angel could announce our Lord's coming into the world. An angel could minister to Him following His temptations in the wilderness. An angel could strengthen Him during His agony in the garden. An angel could make known His resurrection. And angels could witness His ascension.¹²

But no angel could – or can – ever sit where He is now sitting. According to our verses from Hebrews 1, though He 'sits', they are only 'sent'.

The gospels tell us of occasions when our Lord sat while He was in the world. We read, for example, that, when He was twelve years old, Mary and Joseph 'found Him in the temple, *sitting* in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them, and asking them questions'.¹³ Just think of that – the very Lord of hosts, who the prophet Isaiah had seen in his great temple/palace vision '*sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up*', then *surrounded by the seraphim* and with the train of His robe filling *the heavenly temple*¹⁴, now *sitting on the ground*¹⁵, *surrounded by a group of Jewish Rabbis in the earthly temple*.

Again we read in John 4 that 'He came to ... Jacob's well Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, *sat* just as He was at the well'.¹⁶

And again we read that 'Jesus *sat* opposite the (Temple) treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury'.¹⁷

Yes, when in the world, our Lord Jesus sat *to hear, to rest and to observe* – and one day He will return to the world in glory, when heaven, which opened *on* Him more than once when He was in the world, will open *for* Him, and then He will come forth, in the imagery of Revelation 19, *seated* on a white horse, followed by the armies of heaven.¹⁸

But, in the present – now, this morning – He is seated where no angel has ever sat, or ever will sit. The apostles Peter and Paul stress this clearly. For his part, Paul speaks in Ephesians 1 of the exertion of God's '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, for his part, Peter speaks at the close of chapter 3 of his first letter of 'the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and *is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to him*'.¹⁹

We have come this morning to remember our Lord Jesus – and, by means of His appointed symbols, to proclaim His death. And, as we do, we remind ourselves that He sits today at God's right hand, not only by virtue of *God's personal invitation* – 'sit at my right hand' – but also by virtue of *His own completed work*.

For it is, we are told at the beginning of chapter 1, *as having made purification for sins*, that our Lord Jesus 'sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high'.²⁰

It is, we are told at the beginning of chapter 12, *as having endured the cross, despising the shame*, that our Lord Jesus has 'sat down at the right hand of the throne of God'.²¹

And it is, we are told in verse 12 of chapter 10, *as having offered one sacrifice for sins forever*, that 'this man ... sat down at the right hand of God'.²²

Say it again, Mr. Kelly ... 'The *highest* place that heaven affords is *His ...*.'

Endnotes

¹ Λειτουργικα.

² Διακονιαν.

³ The ancients made a careful distinction of the relative value of a person's two hands. This is seen when the placing of the hands of aged Israel upon the heads of Joseph's sons seemed unfair to their father, because the left hand was being placed upon the elder and the right hand upon the younger, Gen. 48. 13-19. Similarly, in our Lord's parable, the goats (i.e. the wicked) are set at the left hand of the great Judge, while the righteous appear at His right hand, Matt. 25. 33. This is apparent also from Psalm 45. 9, which addresses the Mighty King: 'kings' daughters are among your honourable women; at your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir'. See also, 'Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand, upon the son of man whom you made strong for yourself', Psa. 80. 17.

⁴ 'The Antiquities of the Jews', Book VI, Chapter XI, Section 9. Compare 1 Sam. 20. 25.

⁵ 1 Kings 2. 19.

⁶ Suetonius: 'De Vita Caesarum', section XIII. See too Edward Champlin, 'Nero', page 75.

⁷ Also, in the Ugaritic myth, the skilled craftsman god Kothar-and Khasis ('Very Skilful and Intelligent One') is described as sitting at the right hand of the storm god Ba'al, CTA 4, v. 108-110. (NET Bible, notes on Psa. 110.1 – net.bible.org – and 'Baalism in Canaanite Religion and its Relation to Selected Old Testament Texts' by Greg Herrick, Ph.D on bible.org)

⁸ Heb. 8. 1.

⁹ Matt. 28. 2.

¹⁰ Mark 16. 5.

¹¹ Δεξιτοις.

¹² Luke 2. 10-12; Matt. 4. 11; Luke 22. 43-44; Matt. 28. 5-7; Acts 1. 9-11.

¹³ Luke 2. 46.

¹⁴ Isa. 6. 1-3.

¹⁵ 'The hearers sat on the ground, at the feet of the teachers who were themselves seated', I Howard Marshall, 'The Gospel of Luke' in the New International Greek Testament Commentary, on Luke 2. 45-46.

¹⁶ John 4. 5-6. And I note that the One who Himself experienced weariness at first hand later, in the context of the feeding of the four thousand, expressed His sympathy for the multitude, telling His disciples that He had 'compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with me three days and have nothing to eat ... if I send them away hungry to their own houses', He added, 'they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar'. Oh yes, He knew all about weariness.

¹⁷ Mark 12. 41. See also Matt. 9. 10; 13. 1-2; 15. 29; 24. 3; 26. 7, 20; 26. 55; Mark 2. 15; 9. 35; 11. 7; Luke 4. 20; John 6. 3; 8. 2.

¹⁸ Rev. 19. 11, 14.

¹⁹ Eph. 1. 20-21 and 1 Pet. 3. 22. Our Lord's exaltation to God's right hand means that He towers over all angels and every form of heavenly intelligence.

²⁰ Heb. 1. 3.

²¹ Heb. 12. 2.

²² 'Christ had sin on Him once, but He does not exist in that state any longer ... He is gone up to heaven, and He did not take sin with Him', J N Darby (Collected Writings, volume 16, page 266). That our Lord Jesus is now at the right hand of God is the certain proof that every question raised by the sins of His people has been forever settled.