

From Heaven to Hell to Heaven: The Comings of Christ

What do you think of when you hear people mention the second coming of Christ? Do you have an image of that coming? If you are as I was, you most certainly do. In growing up in a typical protestant church, I was taught that Jesus was coming back for his church and that we will be caught up to meet him in the air. The teaching was based in part on a scripture from Acts chapter two where some of Jesus' disciples witnessed the ascension of Christ to heaven after the resurrection. The portion of the scripture germane to our topic reads:

Now when He (Jesus) had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, Who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts1: 9-11).

As a young child, I was taught that Jesus would return in the same manner that he was taken up. I had no problem knowing what to expect because the church provided me with not a few images of what Jesus looked like. As a child I watched and waited for the Jesus of the picture to return for my family and me to take us to heaven. Things got a bit confusing for me as I got older and began to attend other churches. They too believed as I did but their Jesus was not always the same as mine. In some cases, my white Jesus was presented as a black Jesus or some other color. I yet know people of my early childhood who are yet waiting on that "same Jesus" of the picture to return for the church.

Now let us examine the words of the two men spoken in Acts as quoted above. It is written that Jesus was taken up and "a cloud received Him out of their sight". Have you ever been to the top floors of a really tall building or maybe on high a mountain where you could reach out and touch the clouds? If so, you surely noted that clouds do not contain platforms to ride on; they are not conducive to air travel. This being the case, the cloud that received Jesus could not have been a natural cloud. If the cloud was not natural, in order for Jesus to be received by it, He too must not have been natural. Both cloud and Jesus were operating by a set of laws above the natural laws of the earth. They had to be operating by spiritual laws that have not the limitations of natural laws. If Jesus was operating by spiritual laws, then He was no longer natural. If no longer natural, He was not bound by gravity or any other natural law. In other words, Jesus was taken up by spiritual power and it is by the same spiritual power that the two men said that He would return.

We have not a few scriptures to show us the difference between natural power and spiritual power in the life of Jesus. As a natural man, Jesus was tempted as any other

man but without sin (Heb.4:15). He hungered (Mat.4:2). He also died (Mat.27:50). These natural acts proved him to be human or of the lineage of man (Mat.1:16). On the other hand, when the Spirit covered Jesus at the baptism of John, God called the One covered by the Spirit His beloved Son (Mat.3:17). Again on the mountain where he was transfigured, the Father called Him His Son (Mat.17:5). Before these two witnesses, Jesus was called Mary's son as we have seen in the aforementioned scripture. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to two disciples on the Emmaus road but they did not know who He was (Lk.24:13-16). He appeared unto the disciples in a fashion like unto the body He had during His time of earth in order for Thomas to believe that He was very Christ (Jo.20:26-28). He appeared unto Mary after the resurrection but she did not know who He was (Jo.20:15). Finally, He appeared in the book of Revelation unto John "with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire" (Rev.1:13-15).

To be sure, the Jesus of the picture of my early life was not even close to the description John saw in Revelation. The truth is that the resurrected Jesus was very Christ who could not be known but by revelation. After He had borne the image of the earth He had to bear the image of heavenly that His body might do the same (1Cor.15:49). A natural one can know other natural things, but the natural man cannot know the things of the Spirit (1Cor.2:14). I could not know Jesus to be the Christ as long as I worshipped an image of Jesus. It was not until I repudiated the image for a relationship with the true and living God that God made known His Christ unto me.

Christ's First Coming from Heaven

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God" (Jo.1:1-2). Who is this Word and where did He come from and why is He clothed in mystery? The Word is God's wisdom and power that came from heaven as the bread of life to give man life. He was clothed in mystery according to the will of the Father. This Word is said to have made all things and without him nothing was made (v.3). Angels and men did not know this Word until He was declared by Paul, who wrote:

"Wherefore I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ (Ep.3:7-9).

Paul's ministry was to "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ".

At this point Paul is careful not to say his ministry was to preach the unsearchable riches of Jesus because Jesus being natural was opened to search by other men. Christ, on the other hand, is God's Son and as God is a Spirit, so too is His Son. It is by Christ that God made all things and kept this mystery hid until Paul's day that he might be honored to bring forth the revelation as to who Christ is. In the due course of time, God raised up a man who lived up to "the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ep.4:13). As Jesus was the only one who had done so, God honored him to be called Christ. Matthew wrote, "...and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (Mat.1:16). Jesus was born a natural birth but he fulfilled a spiritual requirement that every member of the church will reach, namely, "the stature of the fullness of Christ".

The first coming of Christ from heaven to the earth was as "the bread of life". The typical teaching is that Jesus is the bread of life, but this cannot be because Jesus was Mary's son who had never been in heaven. The Jews did not understand the scripture pertaining to the "heavenly bread" anymore than many today. They said that Moses gave their fathers manna or "bread from heaven to eat" (Jo.6:31). "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven"(v.32). Jesus was not disputing the words of the Jews regarding Israel receiving manna in the desert. What he was doing is given revelation to the manna. The manna came down day by day unto the Jews as a type of the true bread that would come down from heaven at a later point. The manna was given to teach the Jews that God would send His Son unto men. "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (v.33) but the Jews did not believe that Jesus was that bread because they did not receive him as the Christ of God.

The Christ of God did not make His first appearance during the birth of Jesus. After all, the Father created all things by Christ. Additionally, all the prophets prophesied by "the Spirit of Christ which was in them" (1Pet.1:11). Moreover, the children of Israel "drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1Cor.10:4). Some of them even tempted Christ and were destroyed of the destroyer (v.9). These things took place long before Jesus was born but when Jesus was born, God attributed to Jesus the works of creation and all subsequent works of God because Jesus was Christ or covered with the Spirit of God (see John's baptism of Jesus in Jo.1:32 where the Spirit remained on Jesus). When the Spirit covers anyone or thing, it is not that one or thing that acts or interacts, but rather the Spirit that covers. Jesus is referred to as Christ Jesus because the anointing covered the natural man and from John's baptism, Jesus was never known again as Mary's son but as the Son of God because the anointing swallowed him in the Spirit.

Looking back on my early teachings concerning Christ, I now understand why so many of God's children lack understanding regarding the principles of the doctrines of Christ; they were never taught to see Christ as the eternal Spirit as God's Son. As did I, they made Jesus, the son of Mary, to be God's son. This could not be because flesh or things natural can only bring forth other flesh or natural beings. The Spirit likewise can only bring forth spiritually (Jo.3:6). The images of Jesus that were used in worship confirmed that we were carnally minded. Being carnally minded, we gravitated toward doctrines

that agreed with our natural minds. Chief among the doctrines was the teaching that Jesus was God and Christ an office Jesus held. We simply refused to believe that Christ is the eternal Spirit of God through whom even Jesus was brought forth (Mat.1:18). Our religion required a great man after our image; someone who could be understood through natural not spiritual means.

Many of us with inquisitive minds wanted to know how Jesus could be the bread of life that came down from heaven inasmuch as Jesus was flesh and blood and flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1Cor.15:50) Moreover, we wanted to know who the Hebrew writer was speaking when he said to his Father that a body had been prepared for him to come to earth (Heb.10:5-7). Could Jesus have been the one speaking and yet is the body prepared? There were no reasonable answers to our queries. Simply speaking, when our doctrines did not fully square with scriptures, our leaders told us that some things were mysteries that we would only learn once we get to heaven. This trite explanation does not stand up to what is clearly taught in the Bible. For example, Paul wrote that it is the job of the leaders of the church to declare the mysteries of God (Eph.3:3-4) and to serve as “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1Cor.4:1). He further wrote that the saints of God do not wait to get to heaven after time expires in the earth, but rather that, we sit in heavenly places in Christ (Eph.2:6).

The Road Leading to Hell

God created man in His image and likeness. He gave man authority to reign in the earth and the power to name, subdue every thing that offended and to replenish the earth (Gen.1:28). Adam was also given a wife named Eve. The two of them went about their daily lives in the will of God’s until the serpent deceived Eve to believe his word and not the word that God had spoken to Adam regarding eating from the trees of the garden where they were placed (Gen.2:17). In disobeying God’s word Adam gave up heaven for hell and life for death. Paul explained it as follows: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness” (Rom.6:16). Of course, God knew that man would sin and had prepared His “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev.13:8) to redeem man back unto Him.

The redemption of man required God’s Son to die and to go to hell. As God is a Spirit, His Son is likewise. When Jesus was overshadowed with the Spirit at John’s baptism, his flesh was overlaid with the Spirit and from that point Jesus was shown to be the Christ of God. As God is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Ghost, man is also a three part being: spirit, soul and body. In the earth men have natural bodies to house their souls and spirits. When God covers their body with His Spirit for His holy purpose, Paul said that it is no longer I but Christ in me (Gal.2:20). This same Christ Spirit is in every child of God having caused a rebirth in them from a natural being to a spiritual in the image of their heavenly Father. Their natural body is not taken from them but they are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ unto a “perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph.4:13). Jesus is man’s perfect example in all godliness and holiness. He had to grow into the “measure of the

fullness of the stature of Christ” in order to bring His body, the church to that same state. We see Jesus having reached that state at the baptism of God when the Holy Ghost came down from heaven and remained on him as I have shown above.

As a youngster, I was not taught that every child of God must become perfect. To the contrary, our leaders taught that no man is perfect even though Jesus taught that we are to be perfect even as our heavenly Father is perfect (Mat.5:48). Not understanding spiritual things, our leaders relied on their natural understanding showing, I could not reach perfection in the flesh precluding me from God’s stated goal, which is the fullness of the stature of Christ. The child of God is not called on to reach perfection in the flesh, but contrary in the spirit. We are told to work out our soul salvation with fear in trembling (Phi.2:12). Working out one’s soul salvation is an act of faith. The work part reveals that the person has the faith of God. As James has written: “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thou works, and I will show thee my faith by my works” (Jam.2:18). The work of salvation is a faith work requiring a believing heart. Without faith in God’s it is impossible to please Him (Heb.11:6).

The road to hell is paved with unbelief. The Christ of God had to cut through the unbelief of men and women to save man. John has written that Christ “...was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came to his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (Jo.1:10-12). The sons of God are like their Christ having been “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (v.13). They are buried with Christ “by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom.6:4).

God’s plan for the first coming of Christ had two important objectives: 1) propitiation for sins and 2) restoration of life. To implement these objectives God’s wisdom involved both a child and a Son. The child was a natural being through whom the overcoming power of God’s Son, a spiritual being, enabled him to live a sinless life (Isa.9:6). The child was born Jesus via the Virgin Mary but the Son was given: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jo.3:16). Propitiation was needed because God is righteous but man in Adam is unrighteous. It is through Christ and Christ only that an unrighteous man can be made righteous. Paul has written that the righteousness of God is by faith of Jesus Christ to all men “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Jesus overlaid with the Spirit) whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom.3:23-24).

Propitiation for sins could not have covered all men if God did not have a righteous man to lay the sins of the world upon. Jesus was born into the nature of man but agreed perfectly with the Father’s plan of salvation even to the death on the cross. As the child grew up he became one with the Spirit. In other words, Jesus’ human spirit, soul and

body were all covered by the Spirit of God making him Christ Jesus. Though Jesus had overcome the world, the flesh and the devil in life, he had to overcome death to realize God's second objective. The death on the cross brought Jesus Christ into fellowship with every sinner because God had said anyone who hung on a tree was cursed. Paul shows how the child Jesus and the Son (Christ) combined to bring about salvation and the restoration of life. He wrote: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal.3:13). Because Jesus was declared to be God's Son or Christ, the crucifixion cursed both the child (Jesus) and the Son (Christ) because they were inseparable. Christ died as He was separated from the Father (Mat.27:46). This death was a spiritual death yielding salvation. Later Jesus died (v.50) because in Adam all die (1Cor.15:22).

Here is wisdom. God used the child to bring the Son into sin and the Son to bring the child out of sin in the resurrection.

The Twin Christ of the Second Coming

The resurrection of Christ is the second coming of Christ, the first having been to bring salvation. The second coming of Christ is revealed in the Old Testament in type. Malachi wrote: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal.4:5). The prophet Elijah was taken up into heaven without seeing death. It is written, "And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal" (2Kin.2:1). Verse eleven (11) reads: And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven".

Elijah was a progeny of Adam but he did not die a natural death where all are said to do so. To fulfill the scriptures, it was needful for Elijah to return to earth, a second time. Take note that there was nothing natural regarding Elijah's ascension into heaven. Both chariot and horses were said to be "of fire". Elijah's ascension was a type of the ascension of Jesus as the men stood gazing in Acts 1: 11. As there was nothing natural regarding Elijah's ascension, there would be nothing natural regarding Jesus' ascension. Both Elijah and Jesus were prophesized to return. Elijah's return was made necessary that he might taste death in Adam while Jesus' return was to empower believers to overcome death through the resurrection. When Elijah did return, it was not in the manner the Jews expected so they did not receive him. The Jews were looking for a bodily presence of Elijah that agreed with their image of him from their fathers. But God's plan called for Elijah to come in the Spirit as he had been taken up to heaven.

Rather than the man Elijah returning, John Baptist was chosen to fulfill prophesy that Elijah would return in the body (Mat.17:10-13). How could such a thing be? A natural example will aid your understanding. Normally, an egg fertilized by a sperm brings forth a single child but when the egg is divided, twins are produced. Identical twins, unlike more common fraternal twins, share the same placenta, an organ in the uterus of the pregnant mother to supply food and oxygen to the fetus through the umbilical cord. The

food and oxygen is a type of the spirit which brings forth life. Recall how God breathed on Adam and he became a living soul (Gen.2:7). Without the food and oxygen, the pregnancy would abort. It is the oxygen and food that nourishes the twins and allow them to develop identically. In other words, the twins come from a single seed. John Baptist and Elijah were of the same spiritual seed. Elijah came forth first but his coming did not stop John Baptist's coming. The seed in Elijah's mother was given spirit or life in the timing of the Lord that Elijah might began the work God had established for him to do before the foundation of the world. John Baptist was in the room of Elijah or the same ministry as they were identical in the spirit. One can see how this played out with Elijah and Elisha. Elijah was told to anoint Elisha to be prophet in his room (1Kin.19:16). Elisha was blessed to receive a double portion of the spirit of Elijah to continue the ministry. John Baptist did not receive a double portion of Elijah's spirit. To the contrary, he was of the same seed or spirit of Elijah. God reserved John Baptist to be Christ's forerunner and to allow Elijah to die manifested by John Baptist's death fulfilling the scripture that in Adam all die.

The Twin Christ of the Second Coming is as much a mystery as the twin spirits of Elijah and John Baptist. Recall the scripture in Acts 1:11 where the two men told the men of Galilee that "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". I discussed above how the ascension of Jesus into heaven was a spiritual work and that there was nothing natural about it because Jesus was very Christ, the eternal Spirit of God. I have also discussed how the second coming of Christ occurred to bring everlasting life unto all who believe on the Son of God. The twin Christ aspect of the second coming has to do with Christ returning at the end time to undue the works of the devil.

God knew that the church would give up her overcoming power delivered unto to her by Christ after the ascension (Mat.16:19 & 28:18-20). A look at the seven churches of Asia Minor in the book of Revelations reveals that the church had lost its holy ways before John discussed the apostate condition of the church of the Laodicea. The church of the Laodicea thought that it was on fire for God only to find out that it was "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" a church in need of repentance (Rev.3:17-18). The church leaders allowed Constantine to deceive them in rendering up the wisdom and power of God for a false peace. By submitting unto the rule of Constantine, the church sinned as did Adam and was found without strength to overcome the works of the flesh that followed. To undue the devil's work God prepared for the twin Christ of the second coming in the resurrection work. God reserved Him a servant, who like Jesus, submitted to the will of the Father unto the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph.4:13). Having overcome the world, the flesh and the devil and through the resurrection power, even death, God has restored the overcoming power back unto His church that the third coming of Christ, His body overcoming the world, flesh and the devil as well as death is occurring.