

WHAT IS JESUS DOING NOW?

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Perhaps you have wondered if, after Jesus went back to heaven, He has been doing nothing, just resting or enjoying some kind of holiday leave. We have all been taught to believe that heaven is a delightful place with no pain or suffering of any kind. Has Jesus gone there to His “reward” and left us here to do all the hard work? Have you ever wondered about this?

Jesus’ name is “Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt. 1:23). He calls us “my brethren” because He said, “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father” (Heb. 2:11, 12 and John 20:17). We are therefore members of His family. God has appointed Him to judge the world.¹

Why has He gone to heaven and what is He doing there? How would you feel if you had a brother who left your little town to become a powerful millionaire in the big city leaving you to toil on in suffering and poverty? To understand what Jesus is doing now is an important point of the gospel truth.

Have you ever seen a loving doctor at work? There is a line of sick and wounded people waiting their turn to go to see him. He works hard from early morning until at night to attend to all the suffering people who need him, and after most people go to bed, the poor doctor is working, perhaps all night, on some emergency cases. Jesus is working much harder than that!

His work is much more important than that of an ordinary doctor. The doctor only saves the physical body for temporary health of his patients, soon the patient gets sick again and eventually he will die, in spite of all any doctor can do. But Jesus’ work lasts for eternity. When he saves a man, that man will never taste of the “second death,” but will enjoy everlasting life.

This work that Jesus is doing now is that of High Priest. And it is not easy work, nor are the hours short.

What is the work of a heavenly High Priest? A good President or Prime Minister of a nation is constantly wrestling with many difficult problems. He has to keep his mind on all the departments of his government. He must direct their activities and coordinate them. He must defend his nation from

¹ See John 5:22; Acts 17:31.

enemies who are always ready to attack. It is hard work.

As High Priest, Christ is the Head of State for God's great plan of salvation for a lost world. He must direct and coordinate the activities of millions of angels, because each child of God has an angel assigned to be his guardian. He must defend His people and even the wicked world from the attacks of the enemy who is constantly ready to destroy them. Christ must also personally hear the prayers of millions, yes billions, of needy people and answer every one. He carries the burden on his heart for every one of His people, and feels their pain and suffering.

Above all, He must direct the "war" that is going on between the government of God and the rebellion of Satan. Sin must be conquered and destroyed, or it will ruin the entire universe. It is a mistake to think that because God is infinite, His burdens are not heavy in the "great controversy between Christ and Satan" is a constant emergency.

"What is Jesus Christ doing now? He promised to come back; why doesn't He come?" Yes, He promised, "As the lightning . . . so shall the coming of the Son of man be. . . . But of that day and hour knoweth no man. . . . As the days of Noah were, so

shall also the coming of the Son of man be. . . . They . . . knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:27-39). The angels promised the disciples, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner" (Acts 1:11). That literal, personal return of Christ has not yet taken place.

The only answer as to why He hasn't come back yet that can possibly make sense is that His people are not yet ready for Him to come. The harvest is not yet ripe (see Mark 4:26-29). And what special ministry can make a people to be ready? Only the ministry of Christ as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary (see Hebrews 8-10). There was an earthly high priest in the ancient sanctuary—so there is a divine High Priest in the heavenly; there was an earthly lamb offered in the ancient sanctuary—Christ is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

As there was an annual day of atonement in the earthly sanctuary, so there is a cosmic Day of Atonement in the heavenly when the High Priest ministers in the Most Holy Apartment, the second apartment, of the heavenly sanctuary. The specific purpose of that ministry is to prepare a people for the

second coming of Jesus. Daniel understood there is a heavenly sanctuary—all the Israelites who were true to God understood it; it is natural then that when the angel in Dan. 8:14 answered the question “how long . . .?” by saying “unto 2300 days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed,” it’s natural that Daniel understood it was the heavenly sanctuary. That great Day of Atonement ministry is the most important activity going on today in the heavenly universe. He is doing a work so simple and so obviously necessary, that even a child can grasp it.

Through the Holy Spirit, He does something never accomplished in past ages, much as He may have wanted to do it then. Frustrated all this while, He must find a time when He does it; and that time is *now*.

He is preparing a “remnant” gathered from “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” to be ready for His second coming. If they had been ready sooner, He would have come sooner, for He says, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself” (John 14:3). The “coming again” is contingent on their “preparing” for the “place” He prepares for them. This must involve the removal of all sin from hearts and lives. But this seems to frighten people, for they fear this means the removal of all fun

from life which would be boring without sin, they feel. Or, they think it’s an impossibility—people can’t exist without sin. It’s what makes them “human.”

Or (and this is a serious misunderstanding) they have the idea that getting ready for Jesus’ second coming is work, work, work too difficult for anyone to do. It’s hopeless anyway, so just give up.

But . . . the same Jesus who “prepares a place” for His people is the One who prepares them for it. That’s His job as High Priest. They stop hindering Him; they *let* Him do it. And the motivation is not their own selfish one, it’s His love for them. It’s the Bridegroom who wants the wedding to come, but the Bride has wanted to delay. But she will repent.

The world doesn’t care. Many Christians don’t seem to. But nothing in heaven or earth is more important! And whatever He is doing requires the (a) understanding and (b) cooperation of those who believe in Him.

The common idea is that He is a Construction Contractor building palaces or “mansions” for those who arrive in heaven (a childish reading of John 14:2). But “preparing a place for you” is a far bigger idea than a celestial construction activity. Hebrews 9 and 10 describe His High Priestly ministry as cleansing the

hearts of His people, “putting away sin,” “purging the conscience,” preparing a people to “receive the promise of eternal inheritance,” “purifying” hearts and minds and lips, to “make the comers thereunto perfect,” to render obsolete any “conscience” or “remembrance of sins,” to “take away sins,” to “perfect forever them that are sanctified,” to write His “laws into their hearts . . . [which are] sprinkled from an evil conscience,” to “provoke [motivate] unto love and good works,” to “believe to the saving of the soul.”

Big job! First, He naturally wants His people to understand why what He is doing is so incomparably important, and second, He would appreciate our cooperation because He can accomplish nothing without it. Not that you in any sense become your co-savior as the Pope wants to elevate Mary to become (cooperation doesn't save you!), but cooperation means you stop interposing a rebellious will to counteract what He is seeking constantly to do for you!

In other words, through His Vicar (the Holy Spirit) Christ as High Priest is constantly pressing upon His people the conviction of sin buried deeper than they had imagined it to be; and when the conviction is welcomed and the sin is gladly surrendered and put away, the heart is more closely reconciled to Him. This

process is called “atonement,” or becoming at-one-with God. In Romans 5:11 it is “receiving the atonement” or “reconciliation.” Thus the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary is a “final atonement.”

Again we ask, “What is Christ doing now?” Before He left this planet, He told us, “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). But why is evil getting worse and worse? Why doesn't Christ exercise that “all power” and do something? Is He on vacation somewhere in the vast universe?

No, that can't be because He promised the disciples the evening before His crucifixion, “I will not leave you orphans; come to you” (John 14:18). The “coming” He was talking about was not His second coming in glory, but His coming through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, for He said, “The Father shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever” (vs. 16). That “Comforter” is Christ working through the Holy Spirit.

His first work is to “convict the world of sin.” The evidence that you have received the true Holy Spirit is not to dance and shout and fall on the floor, but to realize what your sin is. The Holy Spirit shows you who you are, and the picture is not a pretty one to look at. You see your selfishness in contrast with the purity of

Christ's character. That's impossible for any of us to experience except through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Can we tell in simple terms what Jesus is accomplishing now in the final phase of His High Priestly ministry? He "ever liveth to make intercession" (Heb. 7:25).

(1) Through the Holy Spirit He is "convicting" the world of the special Good News of His New Covenant instead of the sad news of the Old Covenant. The distinction is as clear as day versus night: the New Covenant is (a) God's out-and-out promise of salvation "in Christ," for His job description is "the Savior of the world," of "all men" (John 4:42; 1 Tim. 4:10). And the Old Covenant is (b) the promise of the people to do everything right. In the Bible, (a) precedes (b), that is, God's promise comes first. Only by people believing His promise (a) can they perform (b), which is obedience. Get it backwards, and all you have is the tragic history of ancient Israel. The heart of man is by nature alienated from God; we CAN'T obey until we discover (a) "the faith of Jesus."

But the widely popular view of the covenants has the cart before the horse. It has God making a bargain or "contract" with His people in which He requires their obedience first (b) before He will promise them

salvation (a) Thus His promise is contingent on the people's performance. This "contract" or "bargain" understanding is assumed because of the ancient Middle East customs of lord/vassal "covenants," the idea being that God experimented with the Old Covenant method of salvation during the old "dispensation" until the new "dispensation" could arrive with the sacrifice of Christ on His cross.

But our great High Priest has better Good News for us now—(a) *Does* come before (b)! Learn to believe, to appreciate (a), and obedience (b) will surely follow because "*faith* by love (*agape*)." (Gal. 5:6).

His second work is to convict the world of righteousness, that is, to make the character of Christ apparent to our once-blinded eyes.

His third work is to convict "the world of judgment." This is not a duplicate of the first work, convicting of sin (16:8-11). Jesus assumes that we have responded to the first and second works of the Holy Spirit so that He gives us the still Good News of the third work of the Holy Spirit: to convince the world that Satan has suffered "judgment" and is therefore "cast out" of our hearts and lives, He is a conquered foe. This imparts to every believer an immense sense of relief and self-respect. "What is Jesus doing now?"

Working night and day, 7 days a week, no holidays, on human hearts in “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” to prepare them for the final crisis of the “great controversy between Christ and Satan.”

If you have sensed a conviction of sin, of your great need, you have received the first work of the Holy Spirit. It’s a miracle that our sinful hearts cannot experience except through His work! Respond to that conviction, and don’t stop Him from doing His second and third works also.

“What is Jesus doing now?” Since He is the Son of God who suffered unspeakable agony on this planet when He was crucified, it seems only fair that He is entitled to a l-o-o-n-g “vacation” after such a terrible ordeal. He did His duty heroically; now He can rest, and enjoy the plaudits of the heavenly hosts, and the praise of at least some of earth’s inhabitants.

But the Book of Hebrews does not reveal Him as on furlough; He is working 24 hours a day, 365 days a year “continually” as our great High Priest—a full time job for the infinite Son of God. And the Holy Spirit is the grand, authentic “vicar of Christ” who is ministering constantly to millions and billions of human beings who long for salvation. If the Queen of England or the President of the U.S. deserves a full-time physician on

duty, Christ as infinite High Priest is the full time Physician of our souls on duty to minister to every one who has faith in Him, giving His full attention as though there were not another “patient.”

Hebrews zeroes in on the two-phase ministry of that heavenly High Priest as symbolized by the two apartments in the earthly sanctuary prototype (Heb 9:1-14). As there was an annual “day of atonement” (Yom Kippur) in the “earthly” Hebrew sanctuary, so there must be a cosmic or antitypical Day of Atonement in the heavenly sanctuary where. The ancient Yom Kippur symbolized the removal of all the sins of Israel from the sanctuary where they had been recorded, and their expulsion as so much garbage. Each earthly day of atonement resulted in a full or complete “atonement” for Israel, all sins blotted out and a total reconciliation with God, the scapegoat symbolizing Satan forever banished from the camp of Israel.

Since the heavenly high priestly ministry is the grand antitype, what is the difference between Christ’s first-apartment ministry and His second-apartment ministry? Hebrews 9 makes it clear: “It is appointed unto men once to die but after this the judgment” (vs. 28); this gives us a glimpse of His first-apartment

ministry—preparing people to die, ready for “the judgment.” This has been His ministry in most of the nearly 2000 years since His sacrifice. But “unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (vs. 29). His cosmic Day of Atonement ministry is concentrated on preparing a people for translation at His second coming.

But what about those who die during this time? In the ancient service, the first-apartment ministry continued through the final day of atonement; so it is today. But we must not forget or frustrate Christ’s primary goal for today!

#191 in the hymnal, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.” John and Charles Wesley sensed the need for something not yet clearly understood in 1747. Look at stanza 4: “Finish, then, Thy new creation; /pure and spotless let us be; /let us see Thy great salvation /perfectly restored in Thee.” There’s how the sanctuary is to be “cleansed”!

The Wesleys were trying to get their fingertips on the special truth that informed our sanctuary message—that message of Christ’s righteousness. It will yet lighten the earth with glory.

The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary makes a difference in practical day-by-day living. If it’s

impossible for the sanctuary in heaven to be “cleansed” or “justified” or “made right” (different meanings of the Hebrew verb translated “cleansed” in Daniel 8:14) until the hearts of God’s people on earth first are cleansed, then that has an important conclusion: Christ as our High Priest is specializing now in convicting His people of previously unknown sin. As each is seen and forsaken for His sake day by day, the special work of cleansing goes on. The High Priest plans for it to become complete. And He wants it to be soon. He’ll do it if His people don’t resist Him.

This is not merely a legal “assumption” on God’s part, something He knows well is not yet reality. When Revelation 14:12 declares, “Here are they that keep the commandments of God”—it has to be true. These people have “overcome, even as [Christ] overcame” (Rev. 3:21). They have not merely been legally accounted so, contrary to reality. The objective gospel has at last become totally subjectively demonstrated. Don’t ridicule this solemn truth as so many do, for if you do you’ll be like “the lord on whose hand the king leaned” who ridiculed Elisha’s prophecy of a miracle “tomorrow about this time.” He got to see it, but never participated in the blessing.^{2,3}

² 2 Kings 6:32-7:20.

When Ellen White speaks of the “eighteen hundred years” of Christ’s ministry in the First Apartment, at no time did He have a *corporate body* of believers on earth whose faith had thus matured. No one was translated during those long centuries. But now comes a change in His ministry; He’s in the *Second Apartment*. It’s the cosmic Day of Atonement. The heavenly sanctuary is at last “cleansed” in that now He has a body of people whose hearts have been healed of every root of alienation from God. The “atonement” becomes a reconciliation with Himself, complete on the antitypical Day of Atonement.

When John and Charles Wesley were trying to get a grip on this, they were bitterly opposed, even by Augustus Toplady, author of our lovely hymn, “Rock of Ages.” The very idea of overcoming fully “even as [Christ] overcame” was considered fanatical, and labeled “perfectionism.” Even today there are devout people (even as Toplady) who see the 1888 idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary as an impossible “perfectionism,” discouraging to think of. The reason is that there’s a missing link in their understanding.

The idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary is not that God’s people do the work. The High Priest does it;

³ See Luke 20:35.

and His people stop resisting Him “in His office work” (to borrow Ellen White’s expression). They *let* Him do it. They take away the roadblocks in His way. Never does the Bible say that the ancient Israelites had to cleanse the sanctuary. Their high priest always did it.

Prominent in the message is this idea of ceasing to resist our Lord. Ellen White stated it clearly: “The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus . . . in repentance for his sins.”⁴ To stop resisting Jesus—that’s the essence of this cleansing of the sanctuary idea.

It’s Good News better than most Adventists have ever thought it is.

The difference between Christ’s ministry in the First Apartment and in the Second is what He *does* in His believers. Up until 1844, it was totally in preparing believers to die, so they could be “accounted worthy” to come up in the first resurrection. And that is a great work for our High Priest to do. If any of us are called to die, may we be prepared!

But when looked at in context, His ministry in the *Second Apartment* is intended especially to prepare a people to be translated without tasting death. While

⁴ *Steps to Christ*, p. 27 (1892)

they are still in the flesh, they must see Jesus, must meet Him face to face, which only “the pure in heart” can endure. These must be “alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord. . . . and shall be caught up together with [the resurrected saints of all ages] to meet the Lord in the air.”⁵

The Seventh-day Adventist Sanctuary message makes special sense in the light of Christ’s Matthew 24 sermon. It was Heaven’s purpose that the second coming be within the “generation” of those who saw the last of the celestial “signs” of His near return—the falling of the stars. That’s how the pioneers understood it, and that’s what the words of Jesus actually say. The otherwise inexplicable delay is the result of “resisting our Lord in His office work.” The gospel commission in the light of Revelation 18:1-4 could have been accomplished within a few years of 1888.⁶ The delay in finishing the work of cleansing the heavenly sanctuary is not due to computer backlogs in the heavenly offices, or to any angelic inefficiency. The problem lies with “us.”

⁵ 1 Thess. 4:15-18.

⁶ *General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, p. 419; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1130.

The sanctuary idea also relieves minds of perplexity about what Christ is doing now. Is He vacationing? Or absorbed in some other corner of His great universe? What He does is obviously “work,” for the great controversy with Satan is still going on, and the great enemy is working very hard. There is no time for Jesus to take a vacation. Battles more real than any fought

With weapons are going on. It’s only right that God’s people sympathize with Christ in these contests. That’s what Ellen White means about following Christ into the Most Holy Apartment.⁷

The idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary also imparts to those who understand it a new motivation for following Christ. Fear of the Investigative Judgment is “cast out.” This again is part of the cosmic Day of Atonement—a time for at-last-realized oneness with Christ. It delivers from fear as much as He Himself was delivered from fear in His life on earth. Our natural self-centered concerns for salvation are sublimated in a higher concern for the triumph of Christ. This again is a result of the Day of Atonement oneness with Him.

The Sanctuary truth leads directly to the Bride of Christ making herself ready. That “oneness” is

⁷ See *Review and Herald*, Feb. 25, 1890.

something that has never happened in all past history—“the marriage of the Lamb is come, for His wife hath made herself ready.” Something special is ready for those who are invited to “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:6-9). As individuals, all (including those of the last days) are “guests at the wedding.” But as a corporate body, the church of the great Day of Atonement becomes the Bride of Christ.

Our first natural reaction is, “it’s too good to be true.” Anticipating our temptation to doubt, the angel told John, “Write: for these words are true and faithful” (Rev. 21:5).

The message of the True Witness to the “angel of the church of the Laodiceans” turns out to be the Sanctuary truth itself. This message has not become a museum piece in our denominational attic; it grips hearts worldwide today wherever it is presented. The Holy Spirit impresses souls who seek to follow Christ of His much more abounding grace for overcoming.

The Sanctuary message that “the Lord in His great mercy sent” to us must yet lighten the earth with glory. Thank God, it will. And that, soon.