

CAN WE UNDERSTAND WHAT JESUS IS DOING NOW?

A Story for Youth

By Robert J. Wieland

Have you ever been lost in a big crowd of people?

When we visited the World's Fair, there were huge crowds there. I told my grandson Ian, "Keep close to us" as we were walking on the sidewalks. But after a time he forgot, and soon found himself away from us.

Ian was a brave boy. He didn't like to be seen crying about anything. But as he began watching the sea of faces of all the adults and kids and not recognizing anyone who knew him, and as he began to realize that he couldn't find us and that he was *l-o-s-t* in a big strange place, his self-control broke down. He started crying out, "Grandpa! Grandpa!"

The worst feeling of being alone anyone can know is not to be separated from family members, bad as that is. It's being alone *from God*, feeling that *He* has gone off and left you in a strange, dark, unfriendly world, that you are "forsaken" by Him. That terrible aloneness is what Jesus felt as He hung on His cross and cried out, "My God, why have *You* forsaken *Me*?"

But He never wants *us* to have to feel that terrible way!

The Bible says that after He was raised from the dead, He was taken back into heaven. His disciples watched Him as He went up. Then those who loved Him felt very much alone in their dark, unfriendly world. Were they also forsaken by God?

Two angels dressed like people stayed behind and told them, "This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back *in the same way* that you saw Him go to heaven" (Acts 1:11).^{*} This made them feel better, and makes us feel better, too. We call that promise "the blessed hope."

But we keep wondering, *What is Jesus doing now?* What can He keep doing in heaven that would make Him happy to stay there while we down in this dark world need Him here? The last verse in the Bible prays, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Is Jesus having a vacation somewhere? Or could He have forgotten about us here?

No, He is still human as well as being God. He cannot forget us for we are all one. We are His brothers and sisters. But He has found something important to do. The Bible calls it being a High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

When the Bible says "priest," it means someone whose job is to bring lost people and God back together again. Long ago in Israel, the high priest was the nation's pastor. So today Christ is the pastor of all His people all over the world. The priest in Israel was

also their physician, counselor, teacher. All that is what Christ is to us, as our great High Priest. (This is something the Lord wants us to tell the world.)

“But He is far away!” someone says. No, He said at the very end before He went back to heaven, “I will be with you always” (Matthew 28:20). When He promised that the Holy Spirit is to be with us forever, that meant that Jesus is closer to us than He was to His disciples 2000 years ago.

What is the special work He is doing today?

What is the “heavenly sanctuary”? It’s a place in heaven that is more real than any place on earth. It’s the place where Jesus works (yes, He *does* work!). We can think of the “heavenly sanctuary” as His office where He is busy hearing people’s prayers, answering them, sending angels on trips here and there (Hebrews 1:14 says “they are ... sent to help those who are to receive salvation”). It’s the command center of the great war that is raging between Satan and Christ. You can’t imagine how complex and big and grand that “place” is! This means that the “heavenly sanctuary” is a very important place.

But is this kind of work to go on and on forever? Will it never come to an end?

Yes, it will come to an end when Christ finishes what He is doing. And when it is done, He will come the second time as He promised, for then His people will be ready. To make it easy to understand—the work Christ is doing as our High Priest is to prepare His people to be ready for His second coming.

“But we have seen good people die and get buried. They will come up in the first resurrection. Is that the same? Will this go on forever?” No, it won’t go on forever, because when Jesus returns people won’t die any more. For nearly 2000 years after He returned to heaven to work as our High Priest, He prepared people who believed in Him to die so they could be ready to come up in the resurrection. Remember, it was the Holy Spirit who directed the thoughts of these people to what the Bible says. They believed, and before they died they became ready to hear the angel voice call them to life again from their sleep in the grave. They will hear the voice when Jesus comes in the clouds of heaven. This wonderful work was what Jesus did in the *first apartment* (or “office”) of the “heavenly sanctuary.”

But the prophet Daniel was shown that after 2300 years since his time (Daniel 8:14, King James Version), Jesus would leave that first apartment (or “office”), close its door, and then open the door to the second apartment in the heavenly sanctuary. Then He would start a grand new work—preparing a people to be ready to be translated without seeing death, at His second coming. Also, of all the people who have died since the days of Abel, who were “worthy” to come up in the first resurrection? This work of Jesus in the Most Holy Apartment would answer that question.

That’s what we read in 1 Thessalonians in words that we have wondered about. Paul says: “We who are alive on the day the Lord comes will not go ahead of those who have

died. There will be the shout of command, the archangel's voice [the highest angel], the sound of God's trumpet, and the Lord Himself will come down from heaven. Those who have died believing in Christ will rise to life first; then we who are living at that time will be gathered up along with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord" (chapter 4, verses 15-17). These special people have permitted the great High Priest to do something special for them! They have expelled all sin from their hearts, including the sin that they had not known was buried there out of sight.

We can understand: for thousands of years people who were sincere and faithful have died living up to all the light they could see, but they didn't know about some things that have come to light only in these last days. For example, Martin Luther, a great man, died while still drinking his beer, breaking the holy Sabbath day (the seventh day of the week, which he didn't understand then). But he died believing in Christ as far as he could understand, but there was still some buried sin out of sight, in his heart. Many sincere people did not know all that was in their hearts.

But now in this time when Jesus is doing His final work as High Priest, He sends the Holy Spirit to each person who believes. The Holy Spirit shows him the sins that were buried out of sight. When he says, "Thank You! I'll let that sin go, too," the time will come when the High Priest through the Holy Spirit will show him the last sin that is there and if he gladly says "Yes!" to the Holy Spirit, then the seal of God can be placed on that person's forehead, and he is ready for the coming of Jesus.

If the Lord should come in the clouds of heaven, and we had some sin still buried that we didn't know about, it would be too bad. Have you ever made a mistake and put something in the microwave oven that was metal, and saw the sparks fly?

Then as this wonderful work goes on for people in all lands around the world, the time will come when Jesus will have a people who are ready for Him to come. Then He will not delay; He will come "quickly." His love will have finished His work. We choose to say, "Thank You, Lord, for saving us. Now please hold us by the hand and keep us faithful. Please finish Your work in our hearts! And please teach us how we can help others to get ready. Amen."

* Bible texts are from the Good News Bible (Today's English Version) unless noted otherwise.