

have a High Priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.' The fact is that we have a Great High Priest and that should give us courage to fulfil the call he has laid upon us and to minister wherever he has placed us for his glory in sharing the gospel and doing the works that he calls us to do. 'Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to find in a time of need.' Robert Murray McCheyne said these words, 'If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room I would not fear a million enemies'. Yet the distance makes no difference. He is praying for me,

he is now praying for us. Let this vision of the ascended Christ praying on our behalf take us from here and may he, himself, equip us for great acts of service on his behalf.

*Dr Jamie Grant is a Glaswegian by birth. After studying law at the University of Dundee, Jamie worked for seven years in Poland with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, where he met his wife, Iwona. He gained an M.A. in Biblical Studies from Reformed Theological Seminary in the States and a PhD on the Book of Psalms from the University of Gloucestershire. He enjoys sports of all kinds (mostly watching, some participating!), cinema, coffee and has a passion for Hebrew poetry. Jamie is our Biblical Studies tutor, teaching some OT, some NT and the biblical languages. Jamie and Iwona have two daughters and a son.*

---

# Christ Ascended for Us – ‘Jesus’ Ascended Humanity and Ours’

*The Rev Dr. Nick Needham*

**KEYWORDS:** Incarnation, God the Son, glorified humanity, love of God, glory of Jesus, reward, our guarantee of heaven, Kingship of Christ, Sovereignty of God, glorification of humanity

The first thing I think we should be clear about is the continuing humanity of the ascended Christ. What do I mean by that? In rising from the dead and ascending to heaven Christ did not cease to be human, he did not discard his humanity like a used garment that was no longer necessary. On the contrary the Bible tells us that he rose again as a human being and he then took that human nature back into heaven. The ascended Christ is still human, he is still both God and man in one person.

Maybe we need to step back for a moment here and just remind ourselves of the doctrine of the incarnation. God became man. By God we mean specifically God the Son, the Second Person of the eternal Trinity. Not God the Father, not God the Holy Spirit but God the Son became man. Without in any way ceasing to be God he united himself with a full and true human nature. This human nature, of course, he took from his mother, the virgin Mary. Jesus Christ is therefore the God/Man fully and truly human, fully and truly divine at one and the same time in the unity of a single person, that person being God the Son. Why do I emphasize that? Well, simply because the incarnation can never be undone. The incarnation isn't some kind of temporary episode in the life of God the Son. No, having become man he remains man forever. He is eternally the God/Man. Having taken human

nature into intimate union with his divine nature, that union is, as it were, an unbreakable marriage and it is never dissolved; it never ends. Therefore, you see, when Christ rises from the dead he rises still as the God/Man, fully divine and fully human and when he ascends into heaven he ascends as the God/Man, fully divine and fully human. In the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ into heaven there is no divesting himself of his humanity. He doesn't now stop being human and go back to being God. He never stopped being God when he was man on earth, and he doesn't stop being man when he returns to heaven. On earth he was both God and man in one person and now ascended into the heights of heaven he continues to be both God and man in one person. So the ascended Christ is indeed gloriously divine but he is equally, truly, authentically, human.

Now this is not to say that his risen, ascended humanity hasn't been glorified. It has. So there are differences between his earthly humanity and his ascended humanity, but that doesn't alter the fact that he is still human. He has a glorified humanity, not a glorified something else. We will be looking at this later. For now, I am simply underlining the point that the ascended Christ is still a human being and that he will remain a human being for all eternity – an exalted and glorified human being, yes, but a human being with a recognizable human body. Now we might ask, 'Where could we go to in Scripture to see that the ascended Christ is still a true human being?' One example might be Acts 5:30,31. 'The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to his right hand to be prince and saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sin.' Now, clearly, the one who has been

exalted to the right hand of God is, 'Jesus, whom you murdered by hanging on a tree'. The Jesus who was killed is the Jesus who has been raised and who has been exalted to the right hand of God. Or again we could go to Acts 7:56, where the proto-martyr Stephen is speaking as he is just about to be stoned to death. He says, 'Look I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God' – the Son of Man. Now I realize the title 'Son of Man' may refer to Christ as an exalted King but it still highlights his humanity. He's the Son of Man, the child of humanity, and it is as the child of humanity that he stands at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. Similarly in Hebrews 4:14-16 we read, 'Seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, (we are talking here about the ascended Jesus who had passed through the heavens and is exalted at the right hand of God) let us hold fast our confession for (here is the interesting bit) we don't have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses but was in all points tempted as we are yet without sin.' You see, this underlines the humanity of this exalted one. He can sympathise with us; he himself has the same nature as we do and he was tested in all points in that nature. 'Therefore', he concludes, 'let us come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and grace to help us in time of need.' We can come boldly because the one seated on the throne of grace is our sympathetic human brother.

Then there are a few verses in the book of Revelation which make this point about the continuing humanity of the ascended and exalted Christ. In Revelation 5:6 John says, 'And I looked and behold in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders stood a Lamb as though it had been slain.' John sees seated on the throne of heaven one whom he calls the Lamb, looking as though it had been slain. Now that is a reference to Christ in his human nature, as the one who offered atoning sacrifice on the cross. The Lamb who was slain is the one John sees seated on the throne of heaven. If we go to verses 12, 13 we find the inhabitants of heaven worshipping the Lamb, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing'. So you see the Lamb, the slain Christ now risen, is the object of heaven's worship in a context that again underlines his continuing humanity. There are various other verses in Revelation but they are all basically making the same point, that the one on the throne of heaven is the Lamb, Jesus in his humanity, that humanity that he offered up as an atoning sacrifice as the Lamb of God.

Let us ask ourselves then, what does the continuing humanity of the ascended Christ mean for us? What are the consequences? What are some of the practical applications of this truth? Let me suggest to you two very important practical consequences.

### **God is well disposed toward us**

First of all the continuing humanity of the ascended Christ is a sign that God is well disposed towards human beings. God the Son, the Second Person of the holy and blessed Trinity has not only become human but he remains human forever.

He is now permanently a man as well as God. He now eternally has the human body, the human face, human hands stretched out in welcome and blessing. Now, you know if God hated human nature, he would hardly have done this would he? He would hardly have become a human on earth and continued a human in heaven for all eternity if he despised the nature of human beings and wanted nothing to do with those who bear that nature.

Let me illustrate. Suppose there were a country called Ruritania and imagine that you hated and detested absolutely everything about that country. Would you freely and willingly without constraint become a Ruritanian, accept citizenship in that country, take up its language and its culture and its customs not just temporarily but for the rest of your life? Would you do that? Well, of course you wouldn't. It would be the last thing you would do. Now imagine that you see somebody else doing just that. Freely, willingly and without constraint he becomes a Ruritanian, he adopts a Ruritanian identity, he embraces its language, its culture, its customs; not just temporarily but for the rest of his life. Now what would you conclude from that? Surely you would conclude something like this. He must really love that country. Ruritania must have a special place in his affections. He must be well disposed towards the people of that land. He must have a heart for them, otherwise he wouldn't have done this would he? Well I think, on a far grander and far more awesome scale, God has done something like this. In the person of the eternal Son of the eternal Father has freely, willingly and without constraint become a human. He has adopted a human identity. He has embraced the very nature of humanity, body, blood and bone, heart, soul and mind, not just temporarily but for the rest of his divine life. That is to say for all the endless ages of eternity. We look up to heaven, we gaze on the glorious figure of the ascended Lord and Saviour and what do we see? We see a man, we see a human, one of us, brother of our blood and bone. What does that tell us? Well surely it tells us that God must really love humanity. Humanity must have a special place in his affections. He must be well disposed towards the people of our land. He must have a heart for us. The God who hated humanity and had no time for humans wouldn't have become a human forever would he? So you see the continuing humanity of the ascended Christ becomes to us a sign, a living and an embodied sign of God's gracious disposition towards the human race, God's wondrous goodwill towards the bearers of human nature – that nature which he has made his very own for ever and ever and ever and which he took upon himself in the incarnation and then took it back to heaven in the ascension.

We may be inclined to think that God has no time for human beings, that God is too great and too remote and too high to have any concern for mere frail human beings like ourselves. Well, look up to heaven and see how wrong we are. The Lord of heaven is a human being and he has a human face. The eternal Son, the second person of the majestic Godhead, the Creator and sustainer of the universe, he is the human being, a son of man, a child of humanity. So, yes, he does have time for human beings – no, he is not too great or too remote or too high to have any concern for a mere frail human being like us – not at all. He has the same nature as us. He is flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. By his incar-

nate and ascended humanity he testifies his love for the human race. He testifies his absolute commitment to have dealings with members of that race and his willingness to enter into friendly relations with human beings like us. You may know how it is when you feel lost and alone in a strange place among unknown people and then suddenly you discover someone from your own country or your own city speaking your own language, maybe your very dialect. An instant bond springs up between you and your compatriot. Well, look up to heaven. You won't just find angels there in all their alien angelic nature; you'll find a man there; you'll find a native of your planet who speaks your language. Who is this man? Well he is God, the Father's only son, the maker and the master of all and so a bond instantly springs up in my heart between me and him – my Lord God, my human brother, my kinsman, my fellow earthling. Christ's ascended humanity is a sign that God is well disposed towards us human beings, people like you and me.

### **Jesus' humanity is a pledge to our future**

Now I said I was going to suggest two practical consequences of the continuing humanity of the ascended Christ. Here is the second. The continuing humanity of the ascended Christ is a pledge that we who believe in him will one day be where he now is. Where is the ascended Christ? Well he is in heaven – in glory. He is in the immediate manifested presence of God his father in all the unveiled splendour of that presence. He is in that place where there is no sin, no suffering and no death. Now one day we know that the whole earth will be like that in the new creation. So when I say that the ascended Christ is in heaven or in glory I'm including in that the new earth of the new creation after the Second Coming. One day this earth itself is going to be filled and transfigured by heavenly glory.

Why is the ascended Christ in heaven? Why is he in Glory? Well partly, we may say, it is his reward, given him by the Father for his obedience unto death. Now a reward is simply something given as a token of delight and approval towards a work performed and certainly God the Father has an infinite delight in and an infinite approval of that work that his Son performed on earth, and the Father expressed his delight and approval by raising and by glorifying his Son. In that sense we could say that the ascended Christ is in heaven as something given to him personally, as the righteous outcome of his earthly labours. We could say that, but it is far, far more than that. Christ is not in heaven on his own account but on our account. In other words, the ascension is not a private event having significance only for Jesus. It is an event that overflows with significance for you and me – a public event if you will. What do I mean by that? Well let us remember that the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ isn't a private individual. He's the second Adam, our representative. He carries our destiny on his shoulders and everything that he does, he does for us on our behalf, in our name as our head and champion and forerunner. The puritan John Flavel puts it like this; 'Christ has ascended to take possession of heaven in your name'. Now I'm sure we're quite accustomed to applying this truth to the resurrection; because Christ has been raised, therefore we who belong to

him will also be raised. If the head rises, then his body, the church will rise as well, because of that intimate and unbreakable union between head and body. Christ's resurrection is the absolute pledge and guarantee of our resurrection. But you see we can apply all of that to the ascension as well. After all, the ascension is simply the outworking of the resurrection. It is Christ rising one step higher and so the ascended Christ's presence in heaven and in glory is the absolute pledge and guarantee of our presence there. How do I know that I will enter heaven – because the ascended Christ is there. My Lord and head and husband is there and I'm so joined and I'm so united to Christ by the Holy Spirit that Christ cannot be in heaven without drawing me after him – as one link in a chain draws the whole chain after it. The only way that a Christian can fail to be in heaven is if Christ is thrown out; and that is not going to happen. Now we find some of these thoughts stated by the Lord Jesus Christ himself in John 14:3 where he says this; 'And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to myself so that where I am there you may be also.' Now that highlights the importance of Christ's continuing humanity as the ascended one. You see, if Christ laid aside his humanity when he entered heaven how could his presence there act as a guarantee that we humans will enter heaven? If Christ is no longer human how could his presence in heaven guarantee that we humans will follow him into heaven?

Maybe we can see the force of that if I give a slightly bizarre illustration. Let us suppose that God revealed to us that the planet Mars was populated by intelligent but sinful Martians and that the Son of God had become a Martian and he had died for the sins of Martians, risen again as a glorified Martian and ascended into heaven as an ascended Martian. Now what relevance would any of that have to us? We are not Martians! We're humans, we're children of Adam. The fact that there is a glorified Martian in heaven would be of no significance whatever. It could not act as a sign or a pledge that we humans would ever enter heaven. No, if Christ's presence in heaven is to bring real assurance to us that we too will enter heaven, that where he is, we may be also, then Christ must ascend into heaven as a human; a glorified human, but a human – a glorified member of our race. He takes our human nature upon himself in the incarnation and he takes that nature with him up into the heights of heaven. There is a man in the glory. The dust of the earth has entered the highest heaven. Now that is relevant to us. That has the most profound and the most wonderful significance for us. I'm human and in Jesus Christ humanity has ascended into heaven and lives in glory and so that means the way is opened for me as well and if I, in my humanity, am united to Christ, in his humanity, by the Holy Spirit, human on earth united with human in heaven, then the presence of the ascended Jesus in glory becomes the unbreakable pledge and promise that I will follow him there and I will share his glory.

So then, if you're ever tempted to think that humanity and heaven somehow don't go together, that there's something incompatible between human nature and divine glory, if you're tempted to think that a frail, finite, physical human like yourself couldn't really exist and live and thrive in that celestial home of the angels you should instantly cut off all those thoughts with this, there is a man in the glory. Jesus in

his humanity is in heaven. Heaven is the home of the man Christ Jesus in all the truth and reality of his human nature as a resurrected man and as an ascended man. So you see, humanity and heaven do go together and there's nothing incompatible between human nature and divine glory. A frail, finite, physical human like yourself can really exist, live and thrive in the celestial home of the angels. How do you know that? It is because Christ is there. He is ascended into heaven as a human being. He has taken human nature with him up into God's glory and as someone who trusts in him, however feebly, as your saviour, you can know that heaven is not just your saviour's home, it's your home too. You, a human being, belong there because he, a human being, has entered there and taken possession of heaven in your name.

Let us now move on somewhat from these thoughts and try now to think about the significance of the ascension for the humanity of Jesus Christ, or, if you like, the significance of the ascension for the man, Jesus. I am going to be focusing attention here on the ascension as it relates to Christ's office as King – the kingship of Christ. Then I will look at how that sheds light on our own human destiny.

### **The ascension of the Man, Christ Jesus, and his Kingship**

Let us pose a simple question. Who is on the throne of the Universe? Who is King? God we say instinctively, God is the reigning King of the Universe. Our God reigns and that is true, but the New Testament adds a further truth. The man Christ Jesus is on the throne of the universe. Jesus reigns. Now perhaps we accept this without allowing ourselves to drink in its amazing implication. There is a man on the throne of the universe! We have already looked at some of those verses in the book of Revelation that speak about the Lamb sitting on the throne of God, and we've already observed that the Lamb is a title that points us to Christ, not only in his divine nature, but in his human nature. The Lamb shed his blood on Calvary as the atoning sacrifice and that in itself shows us, does it not, that the man Christ Jesus occupies the throne of the Universe.

However, there is a somewhat more extended treatment of this theme in Philippians 2. Let's just remind ourselves of those verses which begin at verse 5, 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus who being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on earth and of those under the earth and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.' Now from verse 9 onwards, 'therefore God also has highly exalted him', Paul is speaking to us about the risen and glorified man Christ Jesus. 'Whom God has exalted' in verse 9 is Jesus, Jesus the Son of God in his capacity as the one who came in the likeness of men and was found in fashion as a man and obeyed to the point of human death on the

cross. To whom has God given the name that is above every name, the name of Lord? It is to Jesus. At whose name does every knee bow in heaven, on earth and under the earth? It is to Jesus. Whose lordship does every tongue confess? It is to the lordship of Jesus, the man Christ Jesus. Having gone down into the darkest depth in his incarnate humanity, Christ is now exalted to the greatest height in that same incarnate humanity. The cosmic throne displays the form of a man. The second Adam is king, not just of planet Earth, but of every planet, every star, every galaxy, heaven itself, angels and devils, principalities and powers. Jesus is Lord. Jesus rules the universe not only as God but now as man.

Now several things, I think, emerge from this. We can see here the fulfilment of humanity's destiny that was lost in Adam. You remember God gave Adam dominion over the earth and that dominion is all bound up with Adam's creation in the image and likeness of God. Just as God is king so Adam was created to reflect the divine kingship by being ruler of the earth – an image of God's monarchy over the universe. But we know that Adam threw that destiny away when he rebelled against the heavenly king. Now, although fallen human beings exercise some degree of dominion over the earth, it's a very imperfect dominion. Earth has become hostile, earth has become resistant to humanity's authority and the destructive forces that have been unleashed by sin conspire to frustrate all humanity's efforts to be master of earth. Of course, those destructive forces find their ultimate embodiment in death and no fallen human has ever been able to master death. Now what do we see? We see Jesus Christ, the second Adam, assuming mastery not just over us but over all creation. The destiny that Adam lost has been restored and has been more than restored in the second Adam victorious over death. Humanity in Christ has been exalted to be the lord of the entire cosmos, with heaven as well as earth bowing beneath his feet. Christ exercises a dominion that is far, far more powerful than sinless Adam ever exercised. Adam may have been lord of the earth, but he never controlled everything that happened in a sovereign way did he? That's what the exalted Christ does. The first Adam in the earthly paradise was never the lord of providence. The second Adam in the heavenly paradise is. All our personal circumstances are subject to the providential will of King Jesus – the man who reigns over all.

I think the practical consequences here are both comforting and inspiring. Benjamin Morgan Palmer in his masterpiece 'Theology of Prayer' points out that if we put Christ aside, God's providence can often appear dark and cold and crushing. We can seem to be caught up in a sort of an uncaring system of cause and effect where things just happen without any apparent regard for us, for our souls, for our welfare, for our happiness. Life can seem to be governed by a blind and heartless fate and we feel like nothing. We feel totally insignificant and totally unloved. But, says Palmer, how different everything looks when we grasp that providence is actually being controlled and administered by Jesus Christ – that our elder brother, Jesus in all his true humanity, is the one seated on the throne of life and the universe and providence. How different it suddenly looks. If I may so express it, this humanises providence. My situations and my experiences are under the sovereign control of the one who died for me on the cross, the one who himself under-

went a life of suffering and an agonising death for my sake, out of sheer love for me. It is this same one, Jesus, who in his risen, ascended and exalted humanity is now 'making all things work together for my good'. The same love that I see on the cross, that majestic suffering love that so rebuked all my shrivelled up selfishness, that's the same love that in heaven is now guiding all my steps and governing all my circumstances. Providence looks very different when you see that. If I trusted Christ for my final destiny I can trust him too for all the events and all the details of my life on earth. God's sovereignty is not an inhuman thing when we see that God incarnate, the human God, our brother and our redeemer, is the one who rules our life and all life and he rules for us on our behalf, his brothers and sisters.

Now let us also ask the question – how does Christ's own ascended humanity relate to his kingship over the universe? How can a man exercise cosmic power and sovereignty? Well, a man, as we normally understand the word, a weak, earthly, vulnerable man, subject to a thousand limitations, exposed to suffering and mortality that is utterly beyond his knowledge and control, such a man could not exercise cosmic power and sovereignty, could he? Such a man would be quite incapable of sitting on the throne of the universe. If he tried he'd fall off. But the man, Christ Jesus, ascended into heaven does occupy that exalted position. The implication must surely be that the ascended Jesus while still human has, if I may so put it, had his humanity enlarged and enriched with gifts and powers and capacities far beyond anything we find in our earthly, mortal humanity. He is still a true man, but he's an exalted man, a glorified man. You know this is no new idea. We find this clearly taught in the great reformed theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries. Heinrich Hepp, great historian of theology, sums up the teaching of the earliest theologians like this – they taught that in his human nature the exalted Jesus not only became free of all infirmities which belonged to it previously but also gained the highest glorification in body and soul of which the creature is capable. Hepp is referring there to Christ's humanity as a creature, a created thing, because, of course, while Christ's divine nature is eternal and uncreated, his human nature is just as created as yours and mine. Then Hepp continues; 'Christ's body became immortal, free from suffering and equipped with divine glory and Christ's soul, his human soul, received gifts of knowledge and will which are quite incapable of higher perfecting'. You see what Hepp is saying here, is really breathtaking. The ascended man, Christ Jesus, has been glorified in his humanity with the highest glorification that is possible to a created nature – a pitch of perfection so high that it is incapable of higher perfecting. Now we have to say that this is not humanity as we know it in our experience with all our limitations. But it is humanity as Jesus now knows it and experiences it in his ascended and exalted condition.

Hepp gives us various quotations from the great 17th century reformed theologians and I'm going to give one very helpful quote from one of them. The theologian's name, a wonderful name, Amandus Polanus, is not well known today, but he is one of the giants of the 17th century. So listen to Polanus for a moment. 'As regards his human nature Christ's exaltation has two parts – the first is the laying aside of all infirmities, all of which Christ assumed with the human

nature. Such infirmities are, hunger and thirst, weariness, pain, disgrace, ignorance of the last day and of other matters, passibility, that means a capacity for suffering, mortality etc. All these he simply set aside so that now he is no longer liable to them.' I think we should just pause there for a moment, in that quotation. What Polanus is describing is the ascended man, Jesus, shedding all the weaknesses, shedding all the vulnerabilities that we associate with human nature, weaknesses and vulnerabilities that Jesus himself experienced prior to his exaltation that whole period up and including the cross. As a man on earth, prior to his glorification Jesus was subject to the infirmities, the limitations, the frustrations and the frailties of a human body and a human soul and so we read in the Gospels that Jesus became weary and exhausted. He needed sleep. He suffered the distressing pangs of hunger and thirst. He could be overwhelmed in his mind by fear and sorrow. If you cut him, he bled. If you scourged him, he cried out in pain. If you crucified him, he died – the infirmities of Christ in his humanity. 'But now', says Polanus, 'now as the exalted man, has ascended into heaven to take his place on the throne in heaven Christ has now cast off these limiting weaknesses. He will never be subject to such frailties again.'

Having spoken of Christ shedding and discarding his human infirmities Polanus then speaks positively of the huge expansion, the huge enrichment of his human powers and capacities that came with his glorification: 'The second part is the glorification of the human nature in both body and soul. Christ's body is rendered glorious so that it is, and remains, eternally incorruptible, impassible, that is incapable of suffering, immortal, increased in strength and agility.' He continues, 'Glowing with brightness and glory heavenly and divine', of which we may consider the transfiguration a foretaste, 'but the endowments of his human soul . . . have increased and perfected to the utmost perfection which can befall a created nature. Whether we regard reason or will, he now knows the moment of the last judgement. There is nothing so difficult, so minute in all the works of God, past, present or future which is not to hand any moment he wishes and as often as he wishes to know and think with his human reason, his glorified human reason.' What Polanus is offering us here is an amazing, a staggering picture of the glorified man Christ Jesus whose human body and human soul have been exalted to heights of power and knowledge and transfigured radiance. If that has truly happened, as the New Testament says, then what Amandus Polanus said way back in the 17th century about the exalted Jesus must be true. The Saviour's human nature has received an immeasurable enrichment of gifts and powers and capacities, which make him fit and able to reign over the Universe as the victorious second Adam, the Son of man seated at the right hand of God the Father.

Now, if the ascended Christ in his humanity has been so exalted and so glorified, if his human nature has as it were been so augmented to these heights of power and splendour, then can we realistically think of him as being human any more? Has he not passed quite beyond our definition of humanity? Has he not become superman? Well I would suggest to you this is where we need to step back from our own ideas about human nature and allow ourselves to be taught afresh by God.

Who is the one who is a true and perfect human being? It is the Lord Jesus Christ. So how do I define human nature and its capacities? Well, surely from what I find in Christ. Jesus Christ is the true definition of humanity. And at what point in Christ's life do we set our marker and say there is the final perfect definition of what humanity is – the new born baby Jesus, the teenager Jesus, the full grown man. No, we have to go on through Christ's public ministry, his passion, his death, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven. In other words, it is the man Jesus in his final condition, ascended, glorified, exalted who finally stands before us as the perfect definition of humanity. It is only in the exalted Christ that human nature comes to its full bloom, its full flowering, its final development of powers and capacities. If I want to see what human nature is ultimately capable of I do not look at my own stunted twisted deformed, diseased, shattered and pathetic shell of humanity. No, I look at the man Christ Jesus, risen from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father. That is real humanity, human nature according to God's final definition and purpose. That is human nature brought to its ultimate maturity of grace and glory and I think I almost have to say something like this, 'Lord Jesus Christ compared with you I'm only on the way to becoming human. You've arrived, you're the true perfect glorious man, Oh to be like you because only then will God's definition of humanity be fulfilled in me.' If we consider everything that Polanus said about the glorified humanity of Christ instead of being tempted to think that's superman we should rather think this. That is humanity in its full bloom and blossom. Humanity in me at its best is only in its early springtime. Humanity in the exalted Jesus is in its glorious and eternal summer. And that's the pattern according to which God the Father intends to mould you and me. Our final destiny is what? It is to be conformed to the exalted humanity of Christ. The apostle Paul says this in Romans 8:17, 'We are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.' Here on earth we are conformed to the suffering humanity of Christ in order that in heaven we might be conformed to the glorified humanity of Christ. Or again we find this in 2 Timothy 2:11, 12, 'If we died with him we will also live with him. If we endure we will also reign with him'. So we die and endure here, we will share his kingly reign hereafter. Further, this is Paul again contrasting this time the first Adam with the resurrected and glorified second Adam and Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 15: 'The first man is from the earth made of dust. The second man is from heaven. As is the man of earth so are those who are of the earth, and as is the man of heaven so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the man of earth we will also bear the image of the heavenly man.'

Perhaps the last word should go to the apostle John. He says this in 1 John 3:2; 'Beloved now we are children of God and it has not yet appeared what we will be, but we know that when he, Christ, appears we will be like him because we will see him as he is.' It has not yet appeared what we will be. There is this aura of mystery surrounding our future state as glorified human beings but, says John, 'we know we will be like him', we will be like the exalted man Christ Jesus.

What Polanus says about the glorified Christ will, in its measure, become true of you and me as well, as we are finally conformed to his wonderful likeness. Our human nature is going to be lifted up and augmented to heights of perfection that currently, frankly, we can only dream about. Our powers and capacities will be wondrously enriched and expanded in ways that are utterly beyond our present understanding when we are glorified. I've sometimes thought that God mercifully withholds from us a vision of the glorified saints in heaven because if we, in our frailty, saw them in all their exalted glory we would be overwhelmingly tempted to worship them, to fall at their feet, feeling that we were in the presence of immortal gods and that would be idolatry.

Maybe we can do no more than hang on to the word the Bible uses to foreshadow our final destiny as human beings in Christ, the word 'glory'. This is a word that suggests weight, substance, splendour, praiseworthiness. Listen to the apostle Paul again, 'Our momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison' (2 Cor 4:17); an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. Now I don't know what problems and trials and sufferings you're going through at the moment but Christian brothers and sisters, lift up your eyes, see what God proposes to make of you, see the eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, see your exalted Saviour in all his radiant kingly power as the Lord of the cosmos and then realize, if you can, I'm going to be like him. I'm just in my infancy here. There my nature will unfold and blossom in all the unimaginable richness of glorified humanity. 'Oh God my father! What you are going to make of me is so wonderful and so awesome and so beautiful that it staggers my mind.' I have to join with Martin Luther and I have to say, 'God has freely given me everything in Christ and the only thing I lack is the faith to believe that it is truly so.'

Now if all of this is the case, how can you and I be satisfied with earthly pleasures? How can you and I settle down contentedly here, our horizons limited by the activities and ambitions of life on earth; how can we do that? I say this with reverence. We've hardly been born yet. For the Christian life on earth is like being in the womb. The real life is yet to come and the ascended exalted Christ is the measure and the pledge of that glorious life. So let's be more than willing to suffer with him here briefly on earth so that we may also be glorified with him forever hereafter when we will be clothed with that eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

*Rev Dr Nick Needham is a Baptist minister from London. He holds the degrees of BD and PhD from the University of Edinburgh. He has published several books, the first two of which were in the area of Scottish Church History. More recently he has published 2000 Years of Christ's Power. Part One, 'The Age of the Early Church Fathers', Part Two: 'The Middle Ages' and Part Three, 'Renaissance and Reformation'. These are the first three of a projected series of five volumes covering the history of the Christian Church. He has also published an introduction to Augustine's theology of salvation, entitled The Triumph of Grace. Dr Needham has taught in Scotland and also in Africa. He was also the first librarian of Rutherford House in Edinburgh. Dr Needham is lecturer in church history at HTC.*