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Jesus in the midst

*As we see Him in John 8, 19 and 20,
and in Revelation 4 and 5*

John 8:2-12; 19:17-18; 20:19-29; Rev. 4:4; 5:6f

I would like to say something about the idea, the expression: Jesus in the center. We are talking about a few places in the Gospel of John and in the book of Revelation (John 8:2-12; 19:17-18; 20:19-29; Rev. 4:4; 5:6f).

The Center of heaven

First we read a few verses from Revelation 5: *"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, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him Who sat on the throne. Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth"* (Rev. 5:6-10).

And then another verse from Revelation 4: *"Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads"* (Rev. 4:4).

We see the Lord Jesus here as the glorified and exalted Lord in the midst of the throne in heaven and in the midst of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. These elders are the representatives of the glorified church, who will soon be seated on twenty-four (smaller) thrones around the throne of God. The elders are clothed in white robes. This is the result of the redemptive work of our Lord: they have been cleansed and are sanctified (cf. Rev. 19:8).

They are also crowned with crowns of gold; this speaks of the heavenly glory that Christ has acquired for us. All of this will soon be seen in heaven; and we can already see it with the eye of faith. And John saw it with his own eyes when he was lifted up into heaven and had a view of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 4:1-3); and also these twenty-four smaller thrones around the throne of God. It is so wonderful that the Lamb also stands in the midst of the throne of God (Rev. 5:6). The Lord Jesus is always at the center of God's ways and of His reign.

In the midst of sinners

It was already true here on earth that the Lord was in the center. We find some examples of this in John's Gospel. But in John 8 you could say: Here we find Christ in the midst of sinners, and He is there as the Light of the world in the midst of lost sinners. He reveals what is in the heart of man, even of pious people, namely that they are sinners.

In John 8 we have the story of the adulteress, who was brought to the Lord. The Scribes and Pharisees then contrasted the Lord Jesus with Moses: "Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" And they placed her in the midst (John 8:4-5). But then the Lord, as the Light of the world, reveals their hearts and shows that they are all sinners: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (v. 7).

His word had a mighty effect, for then all the elders and the scribes disappeared. We read this remarkable effect in verse 9: "Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last". And Jesus was left alone, "and the woman standing in the midst". This is miraculous. While there was no one left except the Lord and that sinful woman, it still says: the woman standing in the midst. In these verses you see the Lord in the midst of sinners.

But the Lord is showing His mercy, and to that end He had come. He showed her God's grace: "Neither do I condemn you" (v. 11). In the Person of the Lord Jesus, the grace and truth of God was made manifest. You see both in this story in John 8. He reveals the truth of the fact that they were all sinners. And the light of the Lord, that shines so brightly and clearly on all these people, brings about that they all wander off – aware that in God's light they were all reprobate. When the light of the Lord illuminates us, when it shines on us, we realize who we are in ourselves.

John 1:17 puts it this way, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ". We see that grace is of paramount importance, and it is evident in the story about this sinner. The Lord showed her His mercy: "Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord". And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you". That is pure grace. But then it follows, "Go and sin no more" (v. 11). That is really the truth of God, and Christ fully revealed it. He does so not only towards the scribes and the Pharisees, who condemned this woman. But also to herself He revealed the truth of God: "Go and sin no more".

If we are saved by grace, there is no excuse for continuing to live in sin. There is no way to do so. So if we are sure that the Lord does not condemn us and has shown us infinite grace by His sufferings and death, then we may and must also start a new life in His strength and in the power of His resurrection.

At the cross

The Lord in the midst of sinners: at the cross we can see this in a special way. In John 19 the Lord is crucified between two criminals. It then says: "Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center" (v. 18).

He was hanging here in the midst of sinners, but also with the purpose to suffer and die for sinners, to pay the price for us all. And those two people to the left and right of the Lord actually represent all of humanity. Because there are still people who come to faith and repentance. This is illustrated by the criminal who became aware of the glory of the Lord. And he also realized that he himself was a sinner and worthy of dying, but Jesus was not. He had done no wrong. But the other man who continued to mock, did not believe.

But the first one is a picture of all who are forgiven; for he believed on the Lord. "Remember me", he asked the Lord. When You will come into Your kingdom, please

look down on me in grace. The Lord gave him the glorious promise: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise". So he is a picture of all the redeemed, all those who are saved by grace and will have a precious portion with the Lord in heaven.

In the midst of the redeemed

After the work was accomplished, we see in the next chapter how Christ appeared in the midst of His own and proclaimed peace to them (John 20:19). This happened on the first day of the week, the resurrection day. While the disciples were gathered and had closed the doors for fear of the Jews, Jesus came, stood in the midst and said, "Peace be with you". The risen Lord brought His own that wonderful message of peace, peace with God and peace with one another. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Here He is the center of joy for His own, one could say. He is no longer the center of sinners, but the center of His redeemed, all those for whom He has accomplished this great work of redemption. He now calls out to all who know Him and belong to Him, Peace to you, peace through the blood of His cross. And practical peace as well, for the Lord in our midst wants to teach us from His Word. He wants us to grow in the faith, in the knowledge of God and the peace that has been made. And with the peace of God in our hearts we can continue our journey (Phil. 4:7).

And also further on in John 20 we find the Lord in the midst of His own, when Thomas is also there again, who first did not believe in Him. This is a picture of the near future and the restoration of the believing remnant of Israel. Then the Lord also stands again in the midst and speaks the same words: Peace be unto you.

In the midst of the throne

But then in Revelation 5 Jesus is again in the midst. But now in the midst of the throne, which is also something special. Here we see the throne of God in heaven, which must be so big that there is also room for the Lamb in the midst of the throne. Here the living Lord is the center of the glorified saints, you might say. For those elders, they are the redeemed, who will be crowned with glory. And Jesus is in the midst of the throne.

I think this indicates that He is in the center of all God's counsels, of God's ways, and of His government. He is at the center of God's thoughts in both the Old and New Testaments. It is always Jesus in the midst. He is in the midst of the angels and of those four mighty angelic beings, the living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, when praise will be given to Him in perfection. The Lamb is central to all God's ways and counsels, as is evident when He begins to open the scroll in Revelation 5.

This scroll speaks of God's plans and thoughts for the earth and for Israel. Christ has all things in His hands, the Father has given all things into His hands (John 13:3). He is at the center, and we will be allowed to see this very literally; for as glorified saints we will be allowed to see Him with our own eyes in heaven. And even though we ourselves will then be crowned with glory and freed from all constraint, as we sing in a song, we will not be able to remain seated on those thrones as soon as we see the Lamb with our own eyes. We will then fall down before Him and cast our crowns at His feet. We will say, You are worthy, You alone! It is all about Jesus at the center, Jesus alone!

So what wonderful thoughts we find in the Word of God. On earth He was in humiliation in the midst of sinners, and the ultimate proof of that was the cross. Jesus in the midst of those two sinners, the one was forgiven, the other rejected God's salvation. But Jesus is now in the midst of His own, His redeemed, after His resurrection from the dead. How lovely if Jesus can find His own! This is already true today and we may experience each Lord's day what it implies to have Him in the midst. He teaches us and He instructs us. He lets us share in His peace and in His joy, and in all the results of His accomplished work. The end result is: Jesus in the midst, the Lamb in the midst of the throne, in the midst of the angels, in the midst of His glorified church.
