

THE ASCENSION AND PRESENT MINISTRY OF CHRIST

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

- Why is the ascension of Christ an often overlooked part of His life and ministry?
- Christ remained on the earth for 40 days following his resurrection

Acts 1:3 ~ To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

- At the end of the 40 days, Christ ascended into heaven, an event recorded in

Mark 16:19 ~ So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

Luke 24:50-51 ~ And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

Acts 1:9-11 ~ And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

- Acts 1 indicates that Christ's resurrection was a literal, bodily ascension
- Notice the use of 4 terms in Acts 1:9-11 that confirms a bodily ascension: vs. 9 ~ he was lifted up; vs. 9 ~ a cloud received Him; vs. 10 ~ while he was going; vs. 11 ~ who has been taken up from you into heaven
- Numerous NT passages confirm the fact that Christ ascended to heaven:

Acts 9:3-7 ~ As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He *said*, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

Ephesians 4:9-10 ~ Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." (Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

Philippians 3:20 ~ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ

1 Thessalonians 1:10 ~ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come

1 Timothy 3:16 ~ By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory

Revelation 1:13-18; 5:5-12

- Christ's ascension is significant event for a number of reasons:

It Demonstrates the Completion of His Earthly Ministry

- Christ came to accomplish the Father's will of redeeming sinners and the ascensions marks the end of that mission

It Marks the Highpoint of His Exaltation Prior to His Return

- Christ went up in a cloud, probably a reference to the Shekinah, the cloud of God's glory
- It was a moment of incredible splendor and majesty and must have been a final, dramatic occasion which provided powerful motivation to the disciples to carrying on His work

Acts 1:9 ~And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight

- There is much more at stake than Jesus just "going up" to heaven after His earthly ministry...it marked the return to His glory which was hidden in His earthly life even after His resurrection

John 17:1, 4-5 ~ Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You...I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was

- Looking beyond the cross, Jesus prayed that He would be returned to the pristine glory that He shared with the Father before the world began
- The ascension was the answer to that prayer!
- Not only does it mark the return of Christ's glory, it also demonstrates the fact that God gave Him privileges He did not have prior to the Incarnation
- This exalted position of authority is described in Philippians 2

Philippians 2:9-10 ~ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth

- The exaltation of Christ is crucial because the Gospel is not complete without an exalted Christ
- Not only has Christ humbled Himself and become the sacrifice for lost sinners, He has also been resurrected and has ascended back to glory
- He is restored to His rightful place of glory and honor...He has been given authority, and power, and exercises His sovereign lordship from heaven
- The exalted sovereign lordship of Christ is a dominant theme in the New Testament because God has exalted Him by seating Him at His right hand and subjecting all things to Him
- He has done this in order that: "He Himself will come to have first place in everything" (Col1:18)
- Christ is the supreme Lord, a truth evidenced in the fact that every knee will bow before Him as sovereign ruler

Christ was Exalted in Position

- Christ was exalted to a position of absolute authority...He was crowned King of Kings and was coronated as the rightful ruler of heaven and earth
- He was exalted to the "right hand of God" - the seat of authority from which He rules, oversees His kingdom, and presides as judge of heaven and earth....a position of universal lordship

Acts 2:33-36 ~ Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: THE LORD SAID TO MYLORD, SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET. Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.

Acts 5:31 ~ He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins

Acts 7:55-56 ~ But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

Romans 8:34 ~ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Colossians 3:1 ~ Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God

Hebrews 12:2 ~ fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God

- The "right hand of God" refers to a place, a position of honor...a place reserved for a person of honor
- It's also a position of power...right hand of God is the place of the most sovereign and supreme power
- The only One worthy of the place of power, authority, and honor is Jesus Christ and it is there that He reigns as sovereign Lord and King!
- Almost every place it refers to Christ being at the right hand of God, it says that he is seated not standing

Hebrews 10:11-12 ~ Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

- He is seated because his work was complete...it was perfect and complete unlike the priests in the OT
- Christ's work was completely satisfying to the Father

And it is as if he had said, "O my Son, what shall be done for thee this day? Thou hast finished a great work, and in all the parts of it acquitted thyself as an able and faithful servant to me; what honours shall I now bestow upon thee? The highest glory in heaven is not too high for thee; come sit at my right hand." O how well is he pleased with Christ, and what he has done!...O what a change is this! Here he sweated, but there he sits. Here he groaned, but there he triumphs. Here he lay upon the ground, there he sits in the throne of glory. When he came to heaven, his Father did as it were thus bespeak him.

John Flavel

- **IMPORTANT:** The throne which Christ occupies in heaven is the Father's throne, not to be confused with the Davidic throne which is earthly and which Christ will occupy in the future in the Millennium

Christ was Exalted to Power

1 Peter 3:22 ~ who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him

Ephesians 1:20-22 ~ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church

- Christ has been exalted far above "all rule and authority and power and dominion" – those terms refers to angels who have a high rank among the other angels....Yet, Christ is "far above" them all!!
- And "all things are in subjection under his feet" - God has exalted Christ over everything!

- God has given His Son power over all of creation and the entire universe
- He is the supreme and sovereign ruler over it all...there is nothing that ultimately is not in subjection to him
- It may at times seem as though Christ is not in control...wicked rulers, wicked nations
- But they are all ultimately under His sovereign purview because God has given Him that power

Hebrews 1:3, 8-9, 13 ~ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...But of the Son *He says*, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS...But to which of the angels has He ever said, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET?"

- Christ is sovereign over all things and because God has exalted Him to a place of power, He has all authority to reign as sovereign King
- One day when Christ returns, all creation will acknowledge His lordship and bow at his feet

It Secures the Giving of the Holy Spirit

- The ascension of Christ provided the opportunity for the Son and the Father to send the Holy Spirit

John 16:7-8 ~ But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment

- It was not until Christ was seated at the right hand of God, in that position of authority, that He poured out the Holy Spirit
- So in this sense, the departure of Jesus was necessary – though painful and difficult – for the disciples
- In fact, His leaving was profitable and beneficial for without it, there would have been no glorified Lord to send the Holy Spirit to apply the atonement
- In this sense, there would have been no gospel if Christ had not ascended

It Anticipates His Second Coming

- The ascension of Christ gives hope that He is also returning in the same way He departed

Acts 1:11 ~ They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.

- Christ will come back in a cloud, bodily, in view of people, to the Mount of Olives (the same way the people saw Him go) in order to set up His kingdom

Matthew 24:30 ~ And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

Revelation 1:7 ~ BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be.

Zechariah 14:4 ~ In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.

Daniel 7:13-14 ~ I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed

It Inaugurates His Present Priestly Ministry

- The ascension of Christ ushered in his present ministry of interceding for the saints

THE PRESENT MINISTRY OF CHRIST

- In His position at the right hand of the Father, Christ fulfills numerous ministries as a result of His exalted power and position

He is Directing the Church

- Christ is head over the church and therefore sovereignly directs and rules over it, accomplishing His purposes through His body

Colossians 1:18 ~ He is also head of the body, the church

- Just as a human head give direction to the physical body, so Christ, as head of the church, gives direction to the church through the teaching and preaching of the Word of God (Eph 5:26)
- This is a great reminder that we are not in charge of the church but are merely the agents by which He directs His body

He is Nurturing and Sanctifying the Church

- Christ is the source of nourishment to the church and is the One who is bringing it to maturity and greater levels of holiness

Ephesians 5:25-27 ~ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless

Ephesians 5:29 ~ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church

- This is a great reminder that we are not responsible for producing fruit in the church or making the church grow in Christ-likeness
- This is something He is doing currently so, while we plant and water (1 Cor 3), it is Christ who brings the harvest

He is Giving Spiritual Gifts to the Church

- While the Holy Spirit administers the gifts, Christ is the source of them and is the One who provides them for the growth and maturity of the body

Ephesians 4:8, 11-13 ~ Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HELED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN”...And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

- Christ is the bestower of spiritual gifts (described further in Romans 12:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11)

He is Producing Fruit in the Lives of Believers

- Christ is bearing fruit and accomplishing His purposes through believers who are walking with Him and receiving spiritual nourishment from Him

John 15:4-5 ~ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

He is Preparing a Heavenly Home for Believers

John 14:1-3 ~ Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

- To help soothe the disciples troubled hearts, He tells them that his departure means that he is going to get a place ready for them
- He is preparing for believers room in “My Father’s house”
- The KJV says “mansions” but that is not the best translation since it gives the impression that there are many different houses we’ll be living in and you need a map to get around heaven
- There is one house in heaven and that house, the place where God dwells, has many rooms or dwelling places
- This is something the disciples would have clearly understood...in that culture, a man and a woman would be betrothed to be married
- A betrothal was a legally binding arrangement of the couple to enter into marriage
- During that betrothal period and before the bride was actually presented to the bridegroom, the bridegroom would actually prepare a place on his father’s house for the bride
- He would put an addition on his father’s house where he and his future bride would live
- When the addition was completed and the betrothal period was over, the bridegroom would send for his bride when everything was ready
- And so over time the father’s house would have additions on it as sons were married and they built “dwelling places” for he and his bride
- So Jesus says that His going away meant that he would be preparing for their arrival...it would be a place with many “dwelling places”
- Christ is preparing a heavenly home for believers that is wonderful beyond words
- When Christ made the material universe at the beginning of time, He did it in 6 days...but now He has been working on this holy city of the new heavens and earth for over 2000 years (imagine what it will be like)
- The completed place is described in Revelation 21

- Our heavenly home is 1500 miles cubed....That's 2.25 million square miles
- To put it into comparison, the city of Grand Rapids is about 45 square miles and has about 200,000 people
- Kent County is about 856 square miles and has about 500,000 people
- The city of Grand Rapids has a population density of about 4333 people per square mile
- That means if the heavenly city was populated with the same population density as Grand Rapids, it could house 9.7 billion people (population of the world is about 6 billion)
- That's just square miles....Including the 1500 miles in height, it comes out to 3.375 billion cubic miles
- If you include the height and calculate the same population density as GR, heaven will be able to accommodate 14.6 trillion people
- Imagine an area 1500 miles cubed with multiple levels and millions of intersecting golden avenues

- This is meant to serve as an antidote against fear, anxiety, and being troubled

He is Interceding for Believers

- Christ functions as a high priest on behalf of the needs of the saints

Romans 8:34 ~ Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Hebrews 2:18 ~ For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Hebrews 7:25 ~ Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

- Christ's work of intercession has to do with the weakness, the helplessness, and the immaturity of saints on the earth...He knows the limitations of His own
- His work of intercession also restores believers to fellowship with the Father when that fellowship is broken through sin

1 John 2:1-2 ~ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world

- Christ functions as the believer's advocate, a defense attorney, when they sin
- He pleads their case, as it were, with the Father and thus secures their safety and security on the basis of His own righteousness
- He pleads His own efficacious blood and the Father is free to preserve His child against every accusation from Satan or men and from the very judgments which sin would otherwise impose, since Christ through His death became the propitiation for sin