

Ascension Day 2015

But That's Not All!

This past Thursday was Ascension day. The church recognizes this as the day Jesus bodily ascended into heaven. The book of Acts tells us after the resurrection Jesus appeared to the disciples and various other people for a period of forty days and then he led them out to the Mount of Olives and as they watched the bible says, **“He was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight.” Acts 1:9** He ascended into heaven. While there is not a lot of detail given about the ascension (he was taken up before their very eyes is about it), it is one of the essential aspects of our faith and an important theme in the New Testament. Yet in my growing up years I didn't hear many sermons preached about the ascension or its importance. Does it matter? Isn't it enough that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead? Would it matter if instead of ascending into heaven he just slipped away and lived a quiet life in the south of France? Would it matter to our salvation? What difference does it make?

The bible indicates it makes a world of difference. We talked about the significance of the ascension during our study of the Apostles' Creed. We believe, **“He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”** What difference does it make that Jesus ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father. What difference does it make for Jesus and what difference does it make for us? I'm glad you asked that question.

First, let me ask you a question. **What Old Testament verse is quoted or referred to in the New Testament more than any other verse?** Give up? I haven't verified this myself, but one bible scholar says it is Psalm 110:1. **“The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” Psalm 110:1.** According to David Hay's book on Psalm 110 this verse is referred to or quoted in the New Testament 23 times.

Why did the New Testament authors keep coming back to this verse in referencing Jesus? They wanted to point out this essential fact about Jesus: that not only had he been resurrected from the dead and ascended back to heaven, but that he had been exalted and seated at God's right hand. He now rules and reigns as King and Sovereign over all. Something had changed. The resurrected Savior is now Sovereign Lord of all. Stephen Seamands wrote in his book *Give Them Christ*, “Jesus is not only risen but reigning, not only alive but sovereign, not only central but supreme.” His earthly appearance and ministry had been completed and now his heavenly ministry had begun.

Think about it. Psalm 110:1 was understood by the Jews of Jesus' time as a reference to the coming Messiah. Just fifty days after his resurrection and ten days after Jesus' ascension into heaven, Peter stands with the other disciples on the Day of Pentecost and preaches to the crowd that gathers. He tells them, "You all know what happened with Jesus of Nazareth. You all saw him work miracles and heard him teach. You know he was handed over to the Romans and put to death on the cross." Then Peter says, **"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, 'The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."** Acts 2:32-36

The New Testament writers kept coming back to Psalm 110 and back to this theme of his ascension and his being seated at the right hand of God because it means he now rules and reigns as both Lord and Christ, King of Kings and Sovereign Lord of all. What difference does that make for us? Plenty!

Jesus has ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God. The image of being seated at the right hand of God is significant. The right hand is the highest place – the place of highest honor. The apostle Paul wrote, **"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name..."** Philippians 2:9. He is at the highest place which is at the Father's right hand. But that's not all!

It is not only the highest place, it is the place of power and authority. Throughout the Scripture God's right hand is synonymous with power and strength and authority. For instance, after God parted the Red Sea for Moses and the Israelites, they sang, **"Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy."** Exodus 15:6 The Psalmist often spoke of being delivered by God's right hand. **"You who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes."** Psalm 17:7 **"Your arm is endued with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted."** Psalm 89:13 You get the idea. Jesus is exalted at the right hand, at the highest place. Jesus is identified with the exalted right hand of God, the power and authority and strength of the Lord God. Jesus ascended to a place and position of power and strength and might at the right hand of the Father! But that's not all!

Look at this: Jesus is at the right hand of the father and it is from that position of strength

and power he comes to stand at our right hand to defend and rescue us! The Psalmist declares, **“For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save his life from those who condemn him.” Psalm 109:31.** He is with us to deliver us. But that’s not all!

In the incarnation Jesus willingly laid aside the prerogatives of heaven, the power and glory and omnipotence, etc. and became a man. Paul said **“Christ Jesus... made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness...he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:7-8**

But at his ascension the fullness of the glory of God, the fullness of unity and communion with the Father was restored. The bible says, **“[God’s power] raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church...” Ephesians 1:20-22**

He is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion! He is the head over all things. If that’s not enough for you, Ephesians 4:10 says **“He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.” Ephesians 4:10.** He fills the whole universe with himself, with his glory and might and power. He rules over all. That means when the bible says “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” – that means he can finish what he started in your life and in redemption’s plan. He can keep what we’ve committed to him. He can see us through every trial and challenge. He is in control and nothing can separate us from his love. Our eternal destiny is in his hands and he rules and reigns over all. That’s good news, but that’s not all!

Jesus told the disciples before he ascended, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:18-19.** We now live under that authority, his authority. We now operate under that authority and by his authority. We stood here during worship and prayed that people would be healed and set free. We do it every Sunday, and by what possible authority do we pray and tell the devil to take his hands off of God’s people? By what possible authority do we tell cancer to release its hold? By the authority of the risen, ascended Christ! By the authority of the one who is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given! That’s how we do this. We live under that authority. We minister under that

authority. We overcome by means of his authority. But that's not all!

In his incarnation Jesus was limited by time and space. That means he could only be at one place at one time. But because he ascended and is seated at the right hand of the Father, because he now rules and reigns and fills the whole universe with his presence and glory, then he can say not only "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me", he can also say, **"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** **Matthew 28:20** No longer limited by time and space, he is everywhere with us. Jesus is always, at all times and in all places, available to us. We call upon him because we know he is with us. But that's not all!

Look at this. The bible says, **"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus..."** **Ephesians 2:4-6**

God raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at his right hand and then because of his great love for us, by his mercy and grace, he raised us up when we were dead in our sin and made us alive with Christ and now we are seated with him in heavenly places. We are "in Christ." We are one with him, united with him.

The disciples wanted to drive this point home, that because Christ is ascended and seated at the right hand of God – and because we are in Christ and seated with him in heavenly places – it changes how we live our lives now. Paul wrote, **"Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."** **Colossians 3:1-3** Paul then urges us to get rid of the things in our life that are not consistent with our new life with God. Put off those things that are unbecoming to someone who is seated with Christ. Stop living that old way and live the life to which Christ has called you! Live as one who is seated in God's presence with Christ.

A.B Simpson, the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance wrote, **"Christ ascended to the right hand of God that he might lift us up into an ascension life."** ... **A. B. Simpson** He has lifted us up so we can live with heavenly affection, with our heart and mind set on things above, on things that please and honor him. His ascension changes how we live our lives now. But that's not all!

Jesus told the disciples, **"It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away,**

the Comforter will not come to you: but if I go, I will send him to you.” John 16:7. Jesus was referring to the abiding and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. He said, **“And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Comforter to be with you forever – the Spirit of Truth...you know him for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” John 14:16-18** This is how Jesus is present with us at all times - by means of His Holy Spirit. He ascended so he could send the Holy Spirit to be with us and within us.

But that’s not all. It is not simply his abiding presence, it is also his empowering presence. Jesus told his disciples, **“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit... You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:4-8.**

Jesus ascended and is seated at the right hand of God so he could send to us the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. He gives us power to witness, power to live, power to pray, power to overcome the enemy, power to obey God, to live a life that is pleasing and honoring to Christ and his word, power to forgive our enemies, power to serve others, power to love, power to use our spiritual gifts, power to exercise spiritual authority, power to endure trials and trust in God and the list can go on and on. But that’s not all!

Jesus ascended and is seated at the right hand of God in order to intercede for us. Paul declares Jesus to be the one **“...who died, yes who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us...” Romans 8:34.**

Jesus can intercede for us because he understands our struggles. Hebrews 4 reminds us that Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses because he was tempted in every way like us, yet he was without sin. Jesus understands and **“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” Hebrews 7:25** Jesus ascended and is at the right hand of God interceding for us. But that’s not all!

Jesus ascended into heaven and is preparing a place for us. He told his disciples, **“Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And 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.” John 14:1-3.

Jesus ascended and is seated at the right hand of God, but don't misunderstand. That doesn't mean he is “kicked back in his recliner” like you do when you come home from work. He is seated in the sense that his work on earth is done and he reigns from a position of supreme authority. But he tells us he is preparing a place for us and readying things so he can come again and receive us to Himself. He is coming again. And when he comes.... You see as it is, we know that he is the risen, ascended, exalted Christ, but not everyone does. Most of the world refuses to believe, refuses to acknowledge who he is. But when he comes again. When he comes again in power and glory, Revelation 1 says **“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him...” Revelation 1:7.** Then Isaiah's prophecy will be fulfilled, **“And the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all mankind together will see it.” Isaiah 40:5.** Then **“...at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:10-11.**

We don't have to wait for that day. We see him now, ascended, exalted, ruling and reigning. We don't have to wait for that day. We bow our knee and our heart before him now, to worship and adore the risen, ascended, exalted Christ. He rules and reigns over all, but is he ruling in your life? Have you surrendered to his lordship, his authority in your life? It will make all the difference in your life, your world.

He reigns! Can you see him exalted? Ruling in power, with strength and might and authority. Bring yourself and your burdens and your needs to the one who rules and reigns far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given and yet is willing to come to stand at our right hand to defend and deliver us!

“Christ ascended to the right hand of God that he might lift us up into an ascension life.” I invite you to come experience the ascension life!