

Ascension Day 2017

He Ascended Into Heaven

We've talked about the miracles of Calvary and about the mystery of the 40 days between Jesus resurrection and his ascension into heaven. Last week we talked about some of the essential teaching that Jesus no doubt shared with his disciples during those 40 days. This morning we are looking at the importance of his bodily ascension into heaven.

The bible tells us forty days after His resurrection Jesus led them out to the Mount of Olives and as they watched, **“He was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight.” Acts 1:9** While there is not much 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. This past Thursday was Ascension day marking forty days after the resurrection so this is often referred to as Ascension Sunday. For the past few years I've tried to remind us about the importance of Christ's Ascension. This was part of the preaching of the New Testament church and I fear its importance has been lost in the church today. It's part of the Apostle's Creed and at the core of Christian belief. “He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.” This is part of our Christology, our understanding of the nature of Jesus. Does it matter? I mean, they watched him go back to heaven and that wraps it up right? He's finished. So what difference does it make that Jesus ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father? The bible indicates it makes a world of difference. He ascended into heaven, but that's not the end.

Do you know what Old Testament verse is quoted or referred to in the New Testament more than any other? Bible scholars say 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.** One source says 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: not only had he been resurrected from the dead and ascended back to heaven, but he had been exalted and seated at God's right hand. He ascended to heaven and to the throne where He now rules and reigns as King and Sovereign over all. Something had changed. The crucified and 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 ministry was

completed and now his heavenly ministry had begun. He rules and reigns!

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

Peter wants the people of Jerusalem and us to know that Jesus is the one prophetically to whom David was referring. David didn't ascend to heaven, but he was looking forward by the Holy Spirit to one often called the Son of David to whom the Father said, "Sit at my right hand until all things are complete and your enemies are a footstool for your feet." Jesus is the one to whom the Father was speaking, "Come sit at my right hand and rule with power and authority."

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 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. "Come sit at my right hand. Come to this place of honor and reign triumphantly." 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's not only the highest place, it is the resident place of power and authority. Throughout the Scripture God's right hand is synonymous with power, 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 image is of God's mighty strength revealed in his right hand. No one can oppose him and win. 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**

It's interesting we use the term "right hand" to refer to someone who is like a close assistant to a person. "Oh, he's the president's right hand man." "She's his right hand." Power and influence and authority has been delegated to that person and they carry out the wishes of the President or whomever it might be. Jesus is more than just a person of influence or an assistant to God, he is God in flesh. It's always a bit dangerous when you start trying to separate out the persons of the Trinity but you see the analogy I hope. In one sense He is not only at the Father's right hand, He is the Father's right hand. He has equal power and honor and authority. So let me ask you, in light of what Psalm 17 says, do you have enemies that are trying to defeat you, discourage you, destroy you or your family? Jesus, the Father's right hand, is able to save you and deliver you from your foes, from every force that opposes you. Jesus ascended to heaven, is seated at the Father's right hand, and is ready to save and deliver everyone who takes refuge in him!

The Psalmist declared, **"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, endued with power, strong, triumphant, exalted. Jesus is identified with the exalted right hand of God, with the power, authority and strength of the Lord God. He is the Father's right hand and is able to deliver you from every trick and weapon of the devil.

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. With his mighty Right Hand he saves us from sin and condemnation and death. But that's not all!

In the incarnation Jesus willingly laid aside the prerogatives of heaven, the power, 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 not just above all rule and authority, power and dominion, he is FAR above them all. There is no comparison. There is no competition. He has no rivals, no equals. There is no danger of him losing the battle or being dethroned. He can't be outsmarted, tricked or manipulated because he is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion. He is way out ahead. He knows what the devil is up to, what every enemy scheme will lead to because Jesus is far above them all. He can't be wearied or worn down. He doesn't slumber or sleep. He won't be matched. He is incomparable in every way. He is far above every title that can be given. You name it, prince, president, CEO, king, lord, He is far above them all. He is the head over all things in this present age and also in the one to come. God has placed all things under his feet. Enemies like death that are still struggling to fight against him, it's only because they know the verdict has already been determined, the sentence has been pronounced, they're just waiting the carrying out of the execution. God has already declared that every enemy will be under the feet of Jesus. Every last enemy, every last trick of the devil, every last sin and addiction and disease, every last source of sorrow and pain, every tear and heartache will finally and ultimately be under his feet. Jesus rules far above all!

God declares Jesus to be Lord over all. That just about covers it but, 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 ascended higher than all the heavens. The Jews taught there were seven heavens, but Jesus is higher than them all. It places him above and beyond. And Paul says He fills the whole universe with himself, with his glory and might and power. He fills the whole universe with the blessings of his grace, with the benefits of his triumph on Calvary. He died and rose again and ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father and from there the whole earth is filled with the fragrance of his victory, his triumph, his grace. From there 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. He is head over everything and all authority belongs to him. It's going to be all right!

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. We are seated with Christ, in Christ, seated in his victory, in his heavenly blessings.

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 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 with Christ in His victory that was won at Calvary!

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. We are seated in Christ so we can live in that victory, overcoming temptation, sin and the devil.

We see him now, ascended, exalted, ruling and reigning. We bow our knee and our heart before him 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! Can you see him, exalted in power over all of your troubles and sickness and struggles? He is risen and ascended, he rules and reigns!

“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!