

We Believe Part 12

For many weeks now we have been using the Apostle's Creed as the basis for our message on Sunday morning. This ancient creed is a brief summation and statement of our faith. **"We believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. We believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy, apostolic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen."**

This morning our focus is upon this phrase: **"He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty."** Of what importance is this doctrinal belief to us this morning? What difference does it make that we believe Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated next to God the Father? I'm glad you asked!

I'm not going to take time to share all the Scriptures that speak of Jesus' ascension into heaven or his being at the right hand of the Father. There are numerous passages so I'm going to let you do your own research. Suffice it to say, the bible says Jesus ascended into heaven and is now at the right hand of the Father.

In this series we have talked about Jesus' life – his birth, death, resurrection, but his ascension brings us to something quite different. It is not just about his journey back home to heaven or how he got there, it is about a restoration of the glory that was and is his own. I've been impressed by the stark contrast of the suffering Savior and the Ascended and Exalted Christ. Paul gives us an interesting picture of this in Philippians 2. Turn there and let's look at this for a moment.

Paul writes of Jesus: **"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" Philippians 2:6-8**

Think of this. Jesus, in very nature God, sharing the glory of God before the world was made, but out of love for his lost and broken creation, he lays aside that glory and takes upon

himself the very nature of a servant. We call this the incarnation, God becoming man. Stuart Briscoe, in his book *The Apostles' Creed* writes, "In the Incarnation, Christ empties Himself of all the trappings and prerogatives of deity. He does not cease to be deity, but he applies to himself, he assumes to himself, our humanity. Laying aside his glory, assuming our humanity, he accepts all the limitations of life as man among men."Stuart Briscoe

It's not just that he becomes man in the incarnation, but theologians speak of his condescension. He stooped down to be with us. Paul says he made of himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant. From the glory of heaven, worshiped and adored by angels and seraphim and all creation, even the stars and the planets testifying of his glory and greatness, now he humbles himself and takes upon himself the nature of a servant. A suffering servant at that, as he becomes obedient even to the point of death upon a cross.

Paula and I had the privilege of spending a few days this week with friends in San Miguel, Mexico. We visited a couple of Catholic churches which were built in the 1600's. One in particular had dramatic, life-sized figures of Jesus' suffering, his trial before Pilate, his death on the cross. The expression on his face of such deep anguish and pain, of his helplessness, so weak and vulnerable as he gave his life for us. I was taken by the sense of humiliation involved in all of this. How humiliating, to be beaten and bloodied, helpless, and then forced to parade naked through the streets dragging a cross to the place of your execution. Hanging on that cross, exposed to the world. I was drawn to how pathetic he looked, gaunt and tragic, suffering and dying on the cross, yet at the same time I wanted to look away, embarrassed for him at his humiliation. Can you picture him in your mind, bleeding and dying for you, suffering humiliation, obedient to the point of death on the cross? From the glory and majesty of heaven he condescends to become a man, a servant, a suffering servant at that, giving his life for us.

Now, look at the contrast. After his crucifixion and death Jesus is resurrected and then Paul gives us a picture of Jesus' ascension to heaven and his being seated at the right hand of the Father Almighty when he continues, **"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should 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 2:9-11.**

Do you see the contrast I'm talking about? From the incarnation as he lays aside the glory of heaven and becomes a servant, to the humiliation of the crucifixion, to the resurrection,

to the ascension where he is exalted to the highest place and the glory of heaven is restored to him once again. What a journey! Listen to what Paul says concerning the ascended Christ: **“That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him 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, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” Ephesians 1:19-23**

It's not just that he died or that he rose again from the dead, but he ascended into heaven and the Father has seated him at his right hand and has given him all rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given now and in the age to come and God placed all things under his feet and made him head over everything. Are you starting to see why our belief that he ascended to heaven and is seated at the Father's right hand is so important? It means he rules and reigns with power and authority. He is the King of Kings and Sovereign Lord of Lords. He is in control and that is the best news for us!

Notice Paul said “God placed all things under his feet...” It shows us he is exalted above all, but there is more to it than that. In Hebrews 1:13, the writer quotes from Psalm 110 as he refers to the Father Almighty saying to Jesus, **“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Hebrews 1:13** What does that exactly mean? Bible scholars and historians tell us that ancient kings and conquerors, to demonstrate their complete and total triumph over their enemy, would lay the defeated king or general on the ground before the people and then place their feet upon his neck. There are even ancient depictions of kings walking on or trampling upon the dead bodies of his enemies.

The ascension of Jesus to heaven where he is seated at the right hand of the Father means he has been given all power and dominion, rule and authority. God has put everything under his feet. Now, notice what the writer of Hebrews says, **“In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” Hebrews 2:8-9**

Through his incarnation (becoming a man - “made a little lower than the angels”), his

death, resurrection and ascension (“now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death”) everything has ultimately been subjected to him and every enemy has been placed under his feet. But the writer said we don’t yet see everything subject to him. Isn’t that a contradiction? No. The ultimate victory that places everything under Jesus’ feet was won through his death and resurrection. He ascended to the Father and is seated in glory and now is waiting the final execution of all he accomplished. The fact is, there is still sin and death in the world. The bible tells us that death is the final enemy that will be placed under his feet, but it hasn’t happened yet. But through the cross, the victory, the triumph over death has been assured! “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.” (St. John Chrysostom).

When we confess our belief in the ascension of Christ and that he is sitting at the right hand of God, we are saying we believe he is crowned with glory and honor because of who he is and what he did for us on the cross, and we believe that he has the ultimate authority over all things and that all of his enemies will be under his feet. That is good news because his enemies are our enemies and the day will come, it is assured, guaranteed by his death, resurrection and ascension, that all his enemies will be a footstool under his feet.

Earlier I asked you to picture Jesus, humiliated, bleeding and broken, bearing our sins. Now, can you picture Jesus, clothed in robes and garments of splendor and glory and authority, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, at the right hand of the Father Almighty and with his foot on the neck of his enemies? Can you see him with his foot on the neck of Satan, sin, sickness, disease, wickedness, evil, fear? Can you see him with his foot on the neck of alzheimers, cancer, diabetes, heart disease? Think of all the evil and causes of pain and then realize it is only a matter of time until all these things are placed before him as his footstool and he will rule and reign over all. Right now Satan is still warring against the people of God and trying to defeat us and destroy us, but our victory is certain and sure because Jesus ascended to heaven and God said to him, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Hallelujah! What a day is coming! Church, Jesus ascended in victory, he reigns in victory and he is coming again in victory. Be encouraged. You may be struggling, but the victory is ours thru Christ!

May I quickly show you one more image of the authority of the ascended, exalted Christ? Turn to Colossians 2:15. Paul writes, “**And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he**

made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” Colossians 2:15. By his death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus has disarmed the powers of the enemy and made a public spectacle of them. The forces of evil and hell thought they would publicly humiliate and defeat Jesus that awful day, parading him through the streets and hanging him upon a cross, but instead, Jesus stripped off the powers that hung on him trying to defeat him, broke their power to destroy us as well and made a public spectacle of them, showing how ultimately weak and powerless they were to conquer God’s plan of salvation.

He made a public spectacle of them Paul wrote. The conquerors in the ancient world would parade their defeated enemies through the city streets. The enemy didn’t look so big or powerful or frightening now as they walked through the streets in shame and defeat.

Christ has defeated our enemies by his cross and has made a public spectacle of them. In the light of his glory as the ascended, exalted, ruling, victorious, sovereign Lord, those enemies that are still trying to destroy and defeat us don’t look so big and frightening. Don’t let the devil convince you that you can’t walk in victory. He has been defeated and we are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ!

It’s interesting that the Christians Paul was writing to in Colossae had likely, prior to their conversion, believed in all kinds of spirits and gods. Very superstitious, the first century pagans believed their lives and destiny were controlled and influenced by the gods, by fate, by spirits of some kind. They wore amulets around their neck to ward off evil spirits. Perhaps when Paul said Jesus disarmed the powers and authorities, he was saying to them, “all those things you think control your life, Jesus has conquered them all. You don’t have to fear ghosts or demons or spirits or fates because Jesus has disarmed them. He triumphed over them by the cross!”

The citizens of Colossae believed their lives were controlled by forces outside of themselves. “I can’t help it. The spirits made me. The stars determined my fate. I can’t change.” We citizens of Tulsa are far too advanced and sophisticated for that kind of superstition. Instead, we say, “My dna has determined my behavior. I’m genetically predisposed to sin.” Everything from criminal acts to alcoholism, drug or sexual addiction, sexual orientation, personality traits of anger, jealousy, you name it, we say, “I can’t help it. Something made me. I can’t change.”

But if you believe that Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, then you believe that he rules and reigns in triumph over all. You believe

and I believe he has the ultimate authority. He triumphed over those powers and authorities in your life by the cross and he wants to set you free. He won the victory and he imparts that victory to us. Paul declared, **“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ...” 2 Corinthians 2:14.**

That public spectacle that displays those defeated foes, we get to march in that parade as victors, rejoicing in the triumph won by his death and resurrection. He died, rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven where he sets at the right hand of the Father Almighty. See him seated on that throne, crowned with glory and honor. See him ruling over all. See him with all those enemies under his feet. See him victorious and offering that victory to you.

Are there things that are controlling you and your life today that you know aren't from God? Powers and authorities? Jesus, the ascended and exalted Lord rules and reigns! He is victor! Ask him to set you free. Ask him to break those things that bind you and then stand in the victory he won for you.

Are there things that frighten you and keep you in fear? See the ascended and exalted Lord! There is nothing that can defeat him and he is watching over you. He is the sovereign king that defends and guards and cares for his people. That's us! Rest in him today.