

The Apostles' Creed

Part 9

He Ascended into Heaven

Daniel 7:13, 14

With Study Questions

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10/24/2010*

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Daniel 7:13, 14

This morning we will discuss the portion in the Apostles' Creed which states that Jesus, **“ascended into heaven And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”**

I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. ¹⁴ Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13, 14).

Introduction

One of the most disbelieved statements made by Jesus (by Christian and non-Christian alike) was in reference to His ascension, when He said, **“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away” (John 16:7).**

Numerous unbelievers have expressed that the mere appearance of Jesus is all that is necessary for their doubts to be overcome. Christians share a similar sentiment when it comes to the travails of their current circumstances. If Jesus were here in the flesh, it is thought, I could bear my burden with greater ease.

Perhaps the doubts people share regarding the advantageous nature of Jesus' ascension are associated with a lack of appreciation of what His ascension entails. As much as Christian cultures have chosen to celebrate Christmas and Easter, they tend to neglect any notable celebration of the ascension. Adding to the confusion is the current eschatological confusion regarding what the ascension actually is.

The most popular *end-time* views of the Christian faith today all but omit the most critical, challenging and comforting notions associated with Christ's ascension. The glorious and victorious nature of what the ascension includes has been relegated to some future event – when Christ will come again. Don't misunderstand; Jesus will most certainly come again. But most Christians I know think that it is when Jesus comes again that He will do that which, according to the doctrine of the ascension, He has already done.

Many years ago I celebrated my fortieth birthday. My wife threw a surprise party for me. She was quite good at keeping it a secret. As we walked into the restaurant I saw many familiar faces – some from my distant past. I was very confused – especially since one of the people we walked in with had a birthday very near to mine. It took a solid minute or two for me to come to the realization that this was a party for me; at which time my wife imbibed the joy of a job well done and I came to appreciate her efforts.

But what if I never figured it out? What if we went well into the evening and I still thought it was just the normal crowd in the restaurant – a grand coincidence that all my friends happened to be there? My wife would have no doubt, in her own gentle way, clued me in – that I might more appreciate what she had done and what the event actually was.

What is the Ascension?

What is the ascension and where do we see it in Scripture? Forty days after the resurrection (Acts 1:3) Jesus was with His apostles in Jerusalem. After having given them instruction we read:

Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight (Acts 1:9).

Jesus Christ, in His physical body, actually went up and a cloud received Him out of their sight. This does not mean that Jesus is in outer space. Apparently the Soviet cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, did not make the

statement (although others have) that he “**looked and looked and didn’t see God.**” No one, in a spaceship or not, could have followed Jesus to heaven. What the Scriptures do teach is what happened on the other side of the ascension.

The Other Side of the Ascension

Interestingly enough, a record of the other side of the ascension is recorded prophetically hundreds of years before the birth of Christ.

I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. ¹⁴ Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13, 14).

When Jesus ascended to the Father (the Ancient of Days) He was given dominion, glory and a kingdom. The purpose of this kingdom is that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. The nature of His dominion (- *šā·l’ tān* His authority or power to rule) is that it is everlasting and the nature of His kingdom is that it the one which shall not be destroyed.

It has only been in the last 150 years or so that, especially in America, that this event has been widely held as yet future. One will hear preacher after preacher use the words, “when Jesus sets up His kingdom” in reference to a future millennial reign of Christ. The party has begun yet they still don’t recognize it for what it is! The consequences of this errant view of the ascension has been crippling if not paralyzing to the church at numerous levels.

It Truly is Better for Jesus to Go Away

A proper understanding of the ascension helps us appreciate the truth of Jesus' statement that it is better for us if for Him to **"go away"** (**John 16:7**). Please don't take this as irreverent; we must understand that for Jesus to go away in one sense, means that He will be present in a superior sense.

For the unbeliever to say that the mere appearance of Jesus is all they need to overcome their doubts is simply not a well thought out statement. And for the believer to think the physical presence of Jesus would be the answers to the travails of their current heartache misses the point as well.

First of all the mere appearance of Jesus (even for those who saw His miracles) was never an effective evangelistic influence. People can offer any number of other explanations regarding supernatural events. And even if they can't offer one now, they can table the issue anticipating some explanation will arise in the future. Those who think the appearance of Jesus is all that is necessary for conversion underestimate the hardness of the human heart.

When Jesus teaches that it is to our advantage that He goes away, the immediate explanation He gives is that He will send the Holy Spirit. And it will be through the Holy Spirit that the world will be convicted...

...of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment⁹ of sin, because they do not believe in Me;¹⁰ of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more;¹¹ of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged (John 16:8-11).

Much can be said of this passage. Suffice it to say for now, the success of the ministry of Christ is dependant, not upon His physical appearance, but upon the power of the Holy Spirit, bringing life to men's spiritually dead hearts.

The Reigning King

Of equal, if not greater, importance is for Christians to know what the ascension means to them. I've heard more than one Christian pine away for the rapture, as if the goal of the Christian faith is to simply endure this wretched world until the escape pods arrive.

But a biblical understanding of what the ascension of Christ entails produces a loftier view of the exalted Christ, a more confident view of the equipping of saints, a superior jurisdictional view of the current reign of Christ and a more comforting view of His Priestly office.

It Means Christ is Exalted

First, we have a loftier view of His exaltation.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

I was recently chastised at an ecumenical event to which I'd been invited for having the audacity to offer my opinion that Jesus had all authority in heaven and on earth. After being told I shouldn't put God in a box I was told precisely what God wants and doesn't want. "God doesn't want everyone to become Christians" was unequivocally asserted. There are other names equally august at the name of Christ.

It must be believed in our hearts and humbly stated that the name of Christ is the most highly exalted name, to which all knees should bow. To neglect this is to neglect that which is to be most precious to our hearts – it is also negligence to shrink back from this assertion when the opportunity is presented.

When there is a new law, it is critical for citizens to know the law, lest they violate it and be prosecuted. How much more important for the name

of Christ to be exalted that men might know the name to whom they must give account.

It Means Christians Are Equipped

With that exaltation comes the equipping of the saints.

Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear (Acts 2:33).

It is in the context of the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry that the Apostle Paul wrote:

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore He says: "*When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.*" ⁹ (Now this, "*He ascended*" – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) (Ephesians 4:7-10).

It is from His ascended state that Jesus "gave gifts to men." This primarily consists of knowledge of Himself (hence the teaching ministries – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers – that we should no longer be tossed to and fro by false doctrines.

To the extent that Christians know and embrace truth about Jesus, they have access to all the "**hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge**" (**Colossians 2:3**). Sometimes we underestimate what the ascension means to the ministerial effectiveness of Christians. We become paralyzed because we think we need to know everything, while surrounded by a world which knows nothing.

A mere child with a limited, yet accurate grasp of the person and work of Christ is like person with a little bread walking among starving

people. They may pretend they're not hungry but they are. Christians have been given bread in a world of stones.

It Means Jesus is Reigning

Of all the theological errors I've had to repent of over the years, there may not be a bigger error than my misperception of who is in fact the reigning King. That Paul refers to the devil as **"the god of this age"** (2 Corinthians 4:4) has led people to conclude that the devil is actually God. That people get together and vote for someone or something to be god doesn't him or it God.

Peter writes that Jesus is **"at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him"** (1 Peter 3:22). Paul writes that Jesus is **"far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come (Ephesians 1:21).**

Among the purposes that this declaration of the reign of Christ is reported is for Christians to know that during His reign Jesus will overcome His enemies.

For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet (1 Corinthian 15:25.

**But to which of the angels has He ever said: *"Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"* (Hebrews 1:13)?**

And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. ¹⁴ For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified (Hebrews 10:11-14).

The exalted Christ has equipped His saints to advance His kingdom. There are a variety of views among Christians regarding what this looks like and how far this will advance. I am under the impression that the Kingdom of Christ will be redemptive throughout the entire world. Despots come and go; evil kingdoms and philosophies will come and go. These things are by the very nature of the case houses divided that will not stand (Mark 3:25). But the kingdom of God is an eternal kingdom, one which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:14). Whether by judgment or regeneration, the evil hearts of sinful men – those who take rank against the reigning King – will bow.

It Means Jesus is Interceding

Finally, the ascension of Christ means Jesus is interceding. It is in the context of many people's favorite verse (that God works all things for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose – Romans 8:28) that we read of God also freely giving us "all things" that we see Jesus at the right hand of the Father making intercession (Romans 8:32, 34).

What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. ³⁴ Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us (Romans 8:31-34).

It is in the context of the ascension that we can take comfort in knowing we have a heavenly advocate in Christ.

Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ² a Minister of the

sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man (Hebrews 8:1, 2).

In the ascension of Christ we learn that He is a King, but He is also a Priest, interceding for us in our behalf before God. We think we would be more comforted to have Jesus in the flesh with us, but upon deeper reflection it is preferable that He, as our Priest, minister on our behalf before the presence of God.

A felon might be comforted by having an attorney; but it is only when the attorney goes before the judge that anything truly happens. We have an advocate who goes before the Judge – His evidence is His own blood and the sure verdict for those who trust in Him is one of acquittal.

Questions for Study

1. Do you think people have a difficult time believing it was better for Jesus to go away? Why (pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss any knowledge you might have regarding the confusion about what happened at the ascension (pages 2, 3).
3. What was the ascension? Could we find Jesus if we used a spaceship (pages 3, 4)?
4. What took place on the other side of the ascension (page 4)?
5. Why was it better for Jesus to go away (page 5)?
6. What are some important things associated with the ascension of Christ (pages 6-10)?
7. What does it mean that Christ is exalted? What difference does it make (pages 6, 7)?
8. How does the ascension relate to the equipping of the saints (pages 7, 8)?
9. What are the implications of Jesus as the reigning King (pages 8, 9)?
10. How is it comforting to know that Jesus is interceding (pages 9, 10)?