

# Ascension Sunday

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(Ephesians 4:8 ESV)*

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always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25 ESV)*

## **To Save To The Uttermost**

**May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016**

**Acts 1:1-11, 2:29-36**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Open your Bibles this morning to Acts 1:1; that's on page 909 in your pew Bibles. We have not finished our 2 Corinthians series – we will come back to that – but Pastor Jody and I had a conversation a while ago about how the doctrine of the Ascension of Christ has kind of fallen out of the minds of modern day Evangelicals and that's not good because the doctrine of the ascension is not secondary or disposable, it is part and parcel of how God saved us in the person of Jesus Christ. And so what I want to do this morning is read to you the narrative of the ascension as it is recorded in Scripture and then quickly forward to the first Apostolic explanation of the ascension as recorded in Peter's sermon in Acts 2. So we will read Acts 1:1-11 and then skip forward and read Acts 2:29-36. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

<sup>1</sup> In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,<sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.<sup>3</sup> He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

<sup>4</sup> And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me;<sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"<sup>7</sup> He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."<sup>9</sup> And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.<sup>10</sup> And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,<sup>11</sup> and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:1-11 ESV)

That is the narrative of the ascension now skip forward one page as we read Peter's explanation

of it in Acts 2. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit begins to preach to his assembled countrymen about the redemption of God in the person of Jesus Christ and he says:

<sup>29</sup> “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. <sup>30</sup> Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, <sup>31</sup> he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. <sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. <sup>33</sup> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. <sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, <sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.”” <sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:29–36 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

I want to help you rediscover this morning the doctrine of the ascension of Jesus Christ both in terms of what happened and in terms of why it matters for us today.

## **The Doctrine Of The Ascension: Facts And Implications**

The first thing I want you to see is that:

### **1. Jesus ascended into heaven in a physical, human body**

Jesus did not rise from the dead SPIRITUALLY he rose from the dead PHYSICALLY. The Gospel writers go to great lengths to establish that fact. When Doubting Thomas finally got into a room with Jesus, John records that Jesus said to him:

“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side.” (John 20:27 ESV)

The disciples needed to understand that Jesus had risen from the dead in a physical body. He was still incarnated and he was still in that body when he walked with them to Bethany and ascended into heaven – that has MASSIVE THEOLOGICAL and PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS. Let me spell a few of those out for you. First of all that means that:

#### **i. Heaven is a place**

If Jesus had a human body then Jesus was subject to spatial limitations. He could only exist in physical places that were characterized by length, width, height and time. Jesus was 4D and he went into a place that would have to facilitate 4D. Heaven therefore is such a place! It is not a state of mind – it is not a dream world. You cannot go in your flesh into a dream world. You can go into a dream world but you can't take your body with you. Jesus went into heaven in a human body therefore heaven HAS TO BE an actual, physical place.

Now, the fact that it is hidden from us doesn't mean that it isn't actually there – the Bible tells us that again and again. In 2 Kings 6 for example Elisha is not worried about the safety of the city because he has been enabled by God to see the heavenly army that is protecting it. His servant cannot see so:

<sup>17</sup> Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:17 ESV)

The mountain WAS full of horses and chariots even though the servant couldn't see them. God has ways of keeping us from seeing what is nevertheless ACTUALLY THERE. But whether we see it or not THERE is THERE and according to the Bible, one day THERE will be HERE.

Revelation 21 says:

<sup>2</sup> I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. (Revelation 21:2–3 ESV)

Are you hearing that? According to the Bible heaven is THERE and one day its coming HERE; Jesus has gone THERE to make sure that when THERE comes HERE you will be THERE. Jesus said that:

<sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (John 14:2–3 ESV)

Heaven is a real PLACE and Jesus went THERE so that when THERE comes HERE you can be THERE with him FOREVER – thanks be to God!

The second implication then is that:

**ii. Jesus is not physically everywhere all the time**

If Jesus is in heaven in a physical body then he is not by definition omni-present with respect to his incarnated state. That's what it means to be incarnated and Jesus is still incarnated. He will never not be incarnated – that is part of the sacrifice that Jesus made on your behalf. That's what Paul was talking about when he said:

Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:6–7 ESV)

Omnipresence is possible only for spirits. God is a spirit and does not have a body like men. Jesus though he remains perfectly God also became actually human and as a human – with respect to his human nature - he is not and cannot be everywhere all the time. Jesus is in one place at this time. In heaven at the right hand of the throne of God. Now before you think that this is somehow worse for you, you need to hear what Jesus says about this. Jesus in John 16 said this:

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. (John 16:7 ESV)

Jesus said that it will be better for us if he ascends into heaven and sends the Holy Spirit. How could anything be better than the physical, intimate presence of the Lord Jesus Christ? I admit that it is hard to think of anything better than that. But think about that for just a second. How many people were enjoying the physical presence of the Lord Jesus on the night when Jesus said what he said in John 16? Do you remember? 11 people. 11 people were enjoying Jesus as he was in that particular place. 11 people were being helped to understand and were being strengthened for the task ahead. 11 people. But the Scriptures say that when Jesus ascended to God's right hand – when Jesus sat down in glory he GAVE the Holy Spirit among men. Now, by his Spirit he is with us and in us without any limitations with respect to space and time. Jesus, by his Spirit can be with 1 billion people in 1 billion places all at the same time. That is better for us. Jesus in his flesh could not do that but Jesus by His Spirit does do that and it is better.

So we have to be careful how we talk. We probably should not ask Jesus into our hearts. Jesus is God and Jesus is a Jewish man. He is probably around 5 foot 10 and 190 pounds so if he came into your heart you would almost certainly die; horribly and grotesquely. It would be better to say that His Spirit lives in our hearts. The Bible says that and so we should say that.

We should also be careful not to say that Jesus is physically present in the communion elements. That was one of the key issues in the Protestant Reformation. The Roman Catholics in the Middle Ages had begun to speak about Christ as being PHYSICALLY PRESENT in the bread and wine after the prayer of priestly consecration. That is a denial of the doctrine of the physical ascension of Jesus Christ. That makes it a Gospel issue! Do you know that in the English Reformation people were burned at the stake precisely because they would not affirm the physical presence of Jesus in the communion elements? They agreed that he was REALLY there and SPIRITUALLY there but he could not be PHYSICALLY there because physically you can only be in one place at a time and it is really important that we understand that Jesus is physically with God FOR US in heaven. If that isn't true then we are not saved so let's be careful what we say.

The second fact that we need to see in this story is that:

## **2. Jesus ascended into heaven in order to receive glory, power and authority**

Peter says that in his sermon in Acts 2. He says that Jesus has been EXALTED at the right hand of God in verse 33; he says that Jesus is SEATED at God's right hand in verses 34-35 and then in verse 36 he says:

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:36 ESV)

Jesus is KING, Jesus is GOD, Jesus is SEATED and Jesus REIGNS! He does not say that Jesus is waiting to reign or will reign, he says JESUS REIGNS! Right now, a human being REIGNS over all things for the glory of God and the good of God's people; that has massive theological and practical implications; let me spell them out for you. Number 1 it means that:

**i. A human being is right now ruling over all the cosmos according to the original design of God**

In the beginning God said:

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion (Genesis 1:26 ESV)

God created the physical realm – God created the cosmos – for man. For human beings to cultivate and have dominion over. The physical realm – the cosmos is a canvas for the display of God’s glory by men and women under the authority of God’s word. Human beings spread the glory of God across the canvas of all creation – that is the original design.

Now, Bible readers, we know about the fall; how we rebelled against God and wanted to be like God deciding right and wrong for ourselves. We know about the curse; how God said that now because of our rebellion “by the sweat of our brow we would bring forth bread”. God doesn’t curse us! He says that the earth is cursed BECAUSE OF US! The world no longer recognizes our voice because we have so marred and distorted the image of God. We cannot rule as we should because we have lost WHO WE ARE.

But thanks be to God in Christ a man now rules over all the cosmos. God has already won. He is in clean up mode only. The victory is complete, the news of it needs only to be published to all the people of the earth. That’s why our job is not to BUILD THE KINGDOM it is only to ANNOUNCE THE GOOD NEWS. We just speak about what God has DONE. We invite people to embrace it before it lands with a thud of finality that excludes all those who foolishly oppose it. God HAS ALREADY WON. Its over. God already has what he wanted from the start. A man who submits to God’s Word perfectly and who rules over all creation GLORIOUSLY. Check. God has that. Its over. Spread the news.

The second implication of this wonderful truth is that:

**ii. We will rule with Christ over all the cosmos because where the Head goes the Body will follow**

Notice that everything the Apostles say about the present REIGN of Christ is also said to be our

future inheritance. Hebrews for example talks about the REIGN of Jesus right now over all the angels – you read about that last week in your RMM Readings. He became for a while a little lower than the angels but now he has been exalted over them and he reigns over them and has been given glory that far exceeds them and the Father has left nothing outside his control. Jesus is BETTER than the angels – that’s Hebrews 1-2. And Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:3 says.

Do you not know that we are to judge angels? (1 Corinthians 6:3 ESV)

Angels are going to be under our authority also because where the Head goes the body will follow.

Alongside our older brother we will rule over all things. Jesus said that. He says in Revelation 2:26-27:

<sup>26</sup>The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, <sup>27</sup>and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. (Revelation 2:26–27 ESV)

I have received authority from my Father and if you remain in me then I will share that authority with you – you will rule over the nations, in Revelation 5 the Bible says we will rule over all the world because where the Head goes the Body will follow. We are joint heirs with Jesus and even HEIRS of God the Scripture say<sup>1</sup>.

The third thing I want you to see in our main passage this morning is that:

### **3. Jesus ascended into heaven in order to give the gift of the Holy Spirit**

Jesus was explicit about that, he said in Acts 1:5 and 8 that his going to heaven was so that he could give the gift of the Holy Spirit. The implications of this wonderful truth for the church are too marvellous to describe. We could spend all day talking about this and not exhaust the topic. Instead we’ll look at just one passage where the Apostle Paul explores some of these implications. In Ephesians 4:8 Paul says:

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:17.

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

<sup>9</sup>(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup>And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:8–13 ESV)

Jesus came down to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He defeated our enemy, he set us free and he gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit. That has MASSIVE theological implications for the church. Among those implications Paul emphasized the following. Because of what Jesus did:

**i. The church now enjoys spiritually empowered ministry**

The first spiritual gifts that Paul mentions are actually spirit-filled people. Spirit filled people are a gift to the church. The Apostles and prophets gave us the New Testament, the Spirit gives us evangelists by whose message we are saved. The Spirit gives us pastors and teachers by whom we come to hear the whole counsel of God and under whose ministry we grow. The Spirit equips the saints for the work of the ministry. The Spirit builds us up until we achieve maturity and attain to the stature of the fullness of Christ – by one degree of glory to the next. These are wonderful gifts – this is the work of the Spirit in us! Because of the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the church has power to change, power to proclaim and power to conform to the image and likeness of Christ – thanks be to God!

There is much more we could say about that but we need to move on. The fourth thing I want you to see in this passage is that:

**4. Jesus ascended into heaven to make intercession for us**

Peter said that Jesus sat down at the Father’s right hand. The other Apostles tell us what he’s doing there. Hebrews 7:25 says:

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25 ESV)

According to the Bible Jesus is in heaven as a man WITH GOD FOR US. The implications of

that are staggering, let me spell out two of them.

**i. We may be confident in prayer because Jesus has the ear of God**

The Father is well pleased with the Son and all our requests come to God through him, therefore Jesus says:

<sup>23</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. (John 16:23 ESV)

If we are in Christ then God is for us! And if God is for us then who can stand against us? Our mediator has the ear of God, therefore PRAY BOLDLY.

And secondly because Jesus has taken his seat at God's right hand and is for us then:

**ii. We need no other mediator**

Our Roman Catholic friends recommend that we send our prayers to God through Mary. They call her a "Co-Mediatrix" and yet the Scriptures say:

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5 ESV)

There is no Co-Mediatrix, Mary or otherwise. There is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. The devil would rob you of effective prayer by causing to mislabel your mail. Send it via Jesus or send it not at all.

Lastly, I want you to see that:

**5. Jesus ascended into heaven in order to return with the armies of God**

In Acts 1:11 the angel says that Jesus will return just as you saw him ascend. He went up to heaven as a man and he will come back to the earth as a man. But when he comes, the Bible says, he will come with the army of God. Revelation 19 says:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in

righteousness he judges and makes war.<sup>12</sup> His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.<sup>13</sup> He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.<sup>14</sup> And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.<sup>15</sup> From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. (Revelation 19:11–15 ESV)

The Scriptures are very clear that Jesus will return to the earth in power to rule over it as a man and as God forever. The scripture are also clear about the implications of this truth. Jesus said in Matthew 13:41-43:

so will it be at the end of the age.<sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,<sup>42</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.<sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Matthew 13:40–43 ESV)

The implications of the return of Christ to reign on the earth are very clear.

- i. Those who have longed for his appearing will shine like the stars in the heavens**
- ii. Those who have rejected Christ as Lord will be cast out into everlasting darkness**

That has been and will be the message of the church until our Lord returns. When Peter first preached that message in Acts 2 the people who heard it were cut to the heart and they asked Peter what they needed to do and he said to them:

<sup>38</sup> “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”<sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” (Acts 2:38–40 ESV)

Repent. Be baptized. Receive the Holy Spirit and thou shalt be saved. This is the correct response – this is the saving and WISE response to all of who Christ is and all of what he has done to secure our salvation and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Pastor Jody, will you come and lead us?