

Romans 8:34b-35a Our Ascension Advantage Falls Church AM 5/9/21

We make a big deal about Christmas, and we send and receive Christmas cards. Why? Because Jesus came from heaven to earth.

But then, when Jesus returns from earth to heaven, no one marks the occasion.

Let me prove it, with your help.

Raise your hand if you have ever received a Christmas card.

Raise your hand if you have ever received an Ascension Day card.

Ascension Day is a public holiday in Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, Denmark, Indonesia, Finland, Austria, and Belgium.

My point is the ascension of Jesus is a neglected teaching.

To study the ascension today, we are in Romans 8: 34. But it starts with a question that is tied to the previous paragraph and the previous topic, and we need to first understand that.

The context of the previous verses, Romans 8:31-33, show that God the Father loves us enough to NOT spare His Son for us. Instead of sparing His Son for us, God the Father gave up Christ for us all. Because God did that, God justified us so that no one can condemn us. (v.31-34a) That is why verse 34 begins with this question, “*Who is to condemn?*” It is a rhetorical question, like asking who can fly? No one can fly. No one can condemn. Since God is the One who justified us, no one can condemn us. God the Father loved us, sent His Son, and now we are uncondemnable.

Now Paul is ready for a new topic, so he moved from the topic of the love of God the Father for us, to the topic of the love of God the Son for us.

Verse 34b, Paul begins that new topic – Jesus loves us by praying for us.

This is the topic for the sermon today – Jesus loves us by praying for us.

Main point of today’s passage: God the Son loves us enough to pray for us now, after His death, resurrection and ascension. (v.34b-35a)

What is our ascension advantage? Jesus prays for us!

1. The One who prays for us now, is the One who loved us enough to die for us. (v.34b)

Verse 34b, “*Christ Jesus is the One who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*”

We remember what Christ has done. He died for us.

Then, we connect that with what Christ is doing. Christ is praying for us now.

Perhaps your mother prays for you.

Perhaps it is your mother who knows better than other people the concerns and burdens you are facing, and she prays for you.

But your mother did not die in order to cleanse you from your sins.

Our mothers love us, but they did not do for us what Jesus did for us.

Jesus knows what it is like to die.

He is the One praying for you.

Jesus knows what it is like to be deserted by close friends.

He is the One praying for you.

Jesus knows what it is like to be falsely accused and treated unjustly.

He is the One praying for us.

When you sin, Jesus does not condemn you.

When you sin, Jesus takes up your cause and advocates for you to be forgiven, and for grace to make you more holy in the next go-around.

Why? Because Jesus Himself paid the price for those sins already.

Jesus silences the accuser. Jesus speaks into the ear of the Father, saying I paid for that sin, and I covered that wrong.

2. The One who prays for us now is the One who is powerful enough to be raised from the dead for us. (v.34b)

There are 4 historical events that show the 4 major actions of Jesus for us. Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension.

Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, and Returning to Heaven.

Now, think about the aspect of Christ praying for us.

Jesus had become a man.

A priest in the Old Testament prayed for the people. But when the priest died, the prayers of the priest stopped.

What about Jesus? He rose again, and so Jesus continues to be our priest – the Great High priest.

In verse 34, the phrase is “*who is at the right hand of God...*”

What does this mean? It means that Jesus possesses dominion over heaven and earth. Jesus has full power and rule over all things.

When the Apostle Paul prayed for believers, Paul included what he wrote that he prayed over in Ephesians 1:20, that believers may “...know the immeasurable greatness of [God’s] power toward us who believe, according to the

working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places...”

Paul prayed that believers would know the greatness of God’s power in the resurrection of Christ. We have been studying that for weeks. It is repeated here.

3. The One who prays for you now is the One who ascended for us, and is well-positioned enough to be at the right hand of God the Father, advocating for us. (v.34b)

After Paul prayed that believers would know the resurrection of Christ and celebrate it, Paul then prayed that believers would know the greatness of Jesus being seated at God’s right hand in the heavenly places.

What does it mean that God the Father seated God the Son at the Father’s right hand in the heavenly places? It means unity of Father and Son. It means closeness of God the Father and God the Son. It means joint rule of Father and Son. It means power of the first and second persons of the Trinity. It means close access of the Son to the Father. It means communication between the Son and the Father. It means Jesus your intercessor is not positioned in some remote place of heaven, having accomplished his work and now is in semi-retirement – no, rather it means that Jesus is placed at the center of power of heaven and earth. Jesus is cooperating with God the Father to operate the universe for the sake of building His church and caring for His people.

It means that Jesus is our perpetual advocate and intercessor regarding the securing of our salvation, and all of the other many blessings that come with knowing Christ.

Further, it means that God the Father is favorably inclined toward us, with a power shared with God the Son.

This is a power unequalled, which grants us triumph over the devil, death, sin, and the gates of hell itself.

Should we be concerned about what this means for the divine majesty of Christ? Should we be scared of the raw power of Jesus?

The Resurrected Jesus Himself said in Matthew 28:18, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me...*” And that was before He ascended and was exalted and glorified!

Should we be terrified of Jesus, the Son of God. No, not us. We are His beloved people! We are not intimidated by Christ. We are not terrified of Christ Jesus.

Of course we honor Him appropriately, but perfect love drives out fear.

From the elevated throne of Christ, He holds all things under His power, yet the presence of Christ is not something that we fear or dread.

Jesus kindly invites us to approach Him in prayer.

Jesus presents Himself as an intercessor pressing our case before the Father.

Jesus is equal with the Father in power and glory. The position of Jesus at the right hand of God the Father is not a position as One who must kneel before the Father and extend His hands as if to beg. Rather, Jesus appears before the Father as One who died and rose again, so that the Person of Christ, by virtue of the work of Christ, makes intercession for us. We have an advocate.

Let me illustrate - when it comes to health insurance for my family, I have a health insurance broker. It is a very confusing field of companies and policies, and I don't know what is best. I am so thankful that I have an advocate who is taking on the insurance world for us. The company is well-positioned to understand, and to even make the applications for us. I have a health insurance agent working for me. We have this in Jesus Christ! Jesus is our agent, working on our behalf. He is praying for us. He is working for us.

That brings us to our last point.

4. No one and nothing can separate us from the love of Christ = no one and nothing can stop Christ from praying for us. (v.35a)

God prepared us in Scripture for this moment. God showed us in the Bible that at this time in redemptive history, Jesus would continue to pray for us.

The role of a priest in the Old Testament showed how God prepared us for Jesus continuing now as our great High priest.

Psalm 110:5, *“The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’”*

Zechariah 6:12-13, *“Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.’”*

In Luke 24, just before Jesus ascended, Jesus explained that He has taken the role of Priest, and how all of the Scriptures pointed to Jesus and awaited Jesus.

We have the truth repeated in Hebrews 7:25, *“he always lives to make intercession for [His people].”*

Jesus will never stop praying for us.

Hebrews 13:8, *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

Jesus is in heaven surrounded by angels without number, but He has not forgotten about us. Jesus prays for us.

CONCLUSION: Be comforted that Christ Jesus knows what is in your future, and He is the One praying for you. Jesus knew that covid was coming. He prayed for us in 2019 and into 2020. Jesus knows what this year holds, and next year.

Let me show you how this works. Christ knew what was ahead for Peter, when Peter faced the temptation. There would be a great temptation for Peter.

What did Jesus say? Luke 22:31, *“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to*

have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail....”

He did not pray for Satan to leave Peter alone, but for Peter to stand up under the temptation.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT YOU IS THAT YOU ARE TRUSTING IN THE LIVING SAVIOR FOR YOUR SALVATION.

Jesus prays for your faith!

Jesus prayed for Peter before the testing. Jesus prayed for Peter during the testing. Jesus prayed for Peter after the testing.

What if you did something wretched? Do you think Jesus would cease praying for you? No. Think of the loving pastoral care that Jesus gave to Peter for years, and yet Peter had a great failure. Did that stop Jesus from loving and caring for Peter?

Jesus will never give up on you.

Don't you think Jesus would answer your prayers? For a job interview, for a friendship, for courage to go to a dentist appointment, for the funds to pay the bills.

God prepared us in the Bible to think of our tomorrows this way - we don't have to worry about tomorrow because we have this precious gift of an ascended, highly-exalted, intercessing Great High Priest as an advantage for us throughout our lifetimes as the people of God.

Because we are convinced of the kindness of God toward us, we are able to withstand the heavy afflictions of this world.

Christ never ceases to care for us.

On a cloudy day, the light of the sun is not fully hidden. In the same way, when we face difficulties, God's favor is not fully hidden. God's favor is revealed in the fact that through all of our difficulties, Jesus is praying for us.

It is a fulfillment of Psalm 23 *The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not lack anything... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*