

What Means the Ascension of Christ?

¹⁸*I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

(Eph 1:18-23)

Introduction.

Here, in this church, we do not rigorously observe a church calendar, but neither have we ignored those occasions that are popular in the culture in which we live for which good use can be made. So, although we are not bound to it, we often take the month of December to drink in the depths of the Incarnation of the Son of God, because there is so much in the air around us that even now, through God's kindness, still has echoes of the Divine Birth, and we've taken that opportunity to show forth its glories. Likewise, at Easter-tide we've often hearkened to all we have in the death and Resurrection of Our Lord.

But the culture we live in has at present no such reminders of the Ascension of Christ. Perhaps if we lived in another country, where other church traditions carried weight, it might not be so, but not here. We could easily calculate that this coming Thursday will make 40 days since the Sunday we call Easter, but our culture doesn't mark it. I am not advocating another holiday here! I am advocating that we ignore not the Ascension of Christ – that we don't allow our culture to dictate to us what we mark and don't mark about our Lord. So I want to preach to you this morning on the Ascension of Christ.

The ascension of Christ is important enough to the church that it is remembered in the Apostle's Creed. "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty." We confessed it, therefore, last week together, corporately. The common confession that Paul records in 1 Timothy (whether it is of Paul or was already being formed into a tradition) makes reference to it at least once, perhaps twice:

¹⁶By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness:
He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory.

(1 Tim. 3:16)

As a part of the Apostles' Creed then, and in agreement with Scripture, the Ascension of Christ is of great importance to the Body of Christ, His church.

Let us remember the physical fact of it. After He had "presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3) – these forty days in which they had seen their Risen Savior, and a week later convinced Thomas as well, and then traveled north to Galilee, where some saw Him at the shore of the lake that morning, and many more at the appointed meeting on the mountain, and then returned to Jerusalem in anticipation of Pentecost – after these forty days of opening the Scriptures to them and Commissioning them, what happens? Luke records the physical fact of His Ascension twice:

⁵⁰ And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.

⁵¹ While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

⁵² And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, . . .

(Luke 24:50-52)

⁹ And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

(Acts 1:9)

Mark also records this observed fact together with that received by faith as to where that removal has placed Him:

¹⁹ So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

(Mark 16:19)

That is all well and good, but what do these things mean? How are we to understand the significance, the weight of what has happened here? What means the Ascension of Christ? I want to begin with what it means with regard to Christ Himself, then move to what it means and what comforts it offers to His church.

I. For Christ, What Means His Ascension?

The Ascension is not the first exercise in aeronautics. It is not early human flight. Leave that to the Wright brothers – the path being trail-blazed here is much, much greater. It is first and foremost a return to the Father. In the Gospel of John (from which I will have much more to say later), the message Jesus gives to Mary Magdalene after He has revealed Himself to her in the speaking of her name, and she has stopped confusing Him with gardener, is, oddly, not with regard to His Resurrection, but with regard to coming Ascension:

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and *that* He had said these things to her.

(John 20:17-18)

It is so important to the Apostle John that he doesn't record other messages that the other evangelists so diligently record. What means it?

There are at least two things that it means. First, it is a further vindication of the righteousness of Christ. The Resurrection is certainly a vindication of Christ, because death could not hold Him, because it had no right over Him, as Peter preached. But the Ascension? Well, let us ask ourselves the question invited by this morning's Psalm, and hear its answer:

³ Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?
And who may stand in His holy place?
⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood
And has not sworn deceitfully.

(Ps. 24:3-4)

A heart that understands the Holiness of God, and what is acceptable to be in His Divine Presence, and that unrighteousness will not be withstood in His Presence, will understand quite readily that Christ's return to His Father testifies to His righteousness. John confirms that earlier, in that middle conviction that the Holy Spirit gives:

¹⁰ and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me;
(John 16:10)

The Holy Spirit puts into us a conviction of the righteousness of Christ related to His going to the Father. That, first. Remember this when the unbelieving world reviles our Savior: He has been vindicated by the Father. Who is it that condemns? Let us be emboldened to proclaim His Name because Our righteous Lord has gone to the Father.

Secondly, though, the Ascension of Christ must be remembered to have a specific end-point. He ascended to go to a particular place, and that place, as Mark has already told us, is a seat at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. The significance of this place the Apostle Paul tells us in this morning's passage:

These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

(Eph 1:19b-23)

Being at the right hand of the Father indicates a place of rule and authority. Paul certainly underlines that sufficiently for us, does He not? Far above all *rule* and *authority* and *power* and *dominion* – four words we would often take to be largely synonymous, but Paul lists them all, to leave us with no doubt as to the significance of Christ's seat at the right hand. He rules. He reigns. That Paul write this is sufficient for us, but Paul is hearkening back to the Old Testament, and I think particularly to Psalm 110, in which David foresaw His greater Son:

¹The LORD says to my Lord:
“Sit at My right hand
Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”
²The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, *saying*,

“Rule in the midst of Your enemies.”

(Ps. 110:1-2)

This pictures Christ in His Ascension. Paul’s words agree: “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church. . .” All things are under His feet, and this is the one given as Head of the church.

You may look around, and see things not yet in submission to Him, and the Kingdom, though already, is also not yet. We certainly look forward to Divine rule being made complete, for as Paul says in Phillipians:

⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(Phil. 2:9-11)

Lord is the Name that is above every name, speaking of His rule and authority. It will be confessed by all, either in loving devotion by those who confessed it here, or in grudging assent by those who hate it - but it will be acknowledged, and that should encourage our hearts, that He is coming again, coming as He went, to establish complete, perfect rule by the Righteous King.

But it is not as though there is not a present rule that we can enjoy now. For Peter confesses:

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

(1 Peter 3:21-22)

It is a rule that we enjoy, and it is also a rule that we live under. Although the Gospel of Matthew does not include an account of the Ascension, his record strongly implies it, because it closes in a statement with regard to Christ’s authority and an implication of His physical absence since He gives the disciples His work to do:

¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

(Matt. 28:18-19)

Jesus reigns. I put together His physical removal with His seating at the right hand of the Father, and refer to both together as the Ascension, because that is how we talk of coming into possession of a throne, assuming authority: He ascended to the throne of David, as He ascended through the air. We’ve certainly confessed that sufficiently in hymn this morning, have we not? That great Hallelujah chorus, from Handel’s Messiah, people often sing at Christmas but it belongs to Resurrection Sunday, and it belongs to the Ascension. ‘King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. For He shall reign for ever and ever!’ Children of God, sheep of the Fold of Christ, behold your God, reigning not only with all Might, but also reigning with all righteous authority, as it has been granted Him by the Father to which He has returned. Let us see His righteousness proclaimed in His ascending the hill of the Lord, and His rule in His seat at God’s right hand.

II. For us, what means His Ascension?

Now, if something is of great importance for Christ, it is of great importance for His people. What is significant for the Head is also significant for the Body, His body, the Church. This comes necessarily from the union we have with Him. We see that very clearly in the passage before us this day. For all that we have considered so far – *Christ's vindication*, and *His ascending to the throne for rule and authority* -, is related to the prayer that Paul prays for the church at Ephesus, and (by extension) all Christians throughout time – in other words, this prayer *for the children of God*.

He is praying for them, Paul is, petitioning the Father for true enlightenment on their part, that they would know 'what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.' These are *with regard to us*, every one: His calling is *upon His people*, His glorious inheritance is *in the saints*, and the surpassing power is *toward us believers*. And then Paul says that these three are in accordance with God's power demonstrated in the Resurrection of Christ, and in His royal seat. Now, I grant that virtually every translation I've seen, apart from the NASB, is ambiguous on what the antecedent is – *what* is in accordance with all that follows; both the NIV (the most interpretative of our popular translations) and J. B. Phillips' paraphrase, in seeing the resemblance between the surpassing greatness of His power with 'the working of the strength of His might', relate all that follows only to that surpassing power. But each of these three other Scriptures show to be related to all that follows – hence to the Resurrection and (important for this morning) to the Ascension. So, we must say that His calling upon His people, His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His all-surpassing power toward us believers are all related to His Resurrection, yes, but also to His Ascension.

My purpose here is not to exegete these three points, but to go to other Scripture and see what things relate to Christ's Ascension and to see that these so naturally fall into the categories of hope, inheritance and power. Should you care? Is this a mere exercise for the mind? I pray it is not! Oh, I pray it not be so, for it shouldn't be so! See in these words of Paul, his love for the saints in Ephesus, and see what the heart of the apostle beats so fervently for, for these brethren! He wants these Ephesian fellow Christians, and indeed all after them, to grow in their knowledge of the God they worship – that they would *what is* the hope of His calling, *what are* the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and *what is* the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *Indeed, what are those things?* What is the content, the substance, of those phrases? Paul does not tell them the answers in summarizing his prayer – not that it is a secret, and in fact much else that he says elsewhere to them in this letter tells them what these things are, but he is telling them that finding out the depths of these things is the substance of his Spirit-inspired prayers for them. Should *we* consider them trivial, then? Should *we* not desire to know what these things are? Do we not think there will therefore be great blessing in them? Or from another angle, think of the strangeness of the disciples' reaction to Christ's Ascension: they return to Jerusalem with joy. What would have, but a few weeks before, been a crushing sadness now leaves them returning to Jerusalem full of praise and worship. How? And do you not wish to face your life's apparent biggest disappointments with joy, as the disciples did when their Master left them?

The Gospel of John, like that of Matthew, does not contain describe the Ascension of Christ, yet I would say there is hardly a Gospel that tells us more about that Ascension than John's – particularly with regard to the narrative of the night in which He was betrayed. The entire passage is prefaced with these words:

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. ² During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, to betray Him, ³ *Jesus*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, . . .

(John 13:1-3)

He then takes the basin and the towel, to wash His disciples' feet. All that He does by example and teach in his words that evening is a loving them to the end, in light of His imminent – no, not Crucifixion, but His departure to return to the Father. Just like John sees fit to record the message given to Mary not of His Rising, but of His anticipated Ascension, so too here Christ's ministering to His disciples on the night He was betrayed is related to the Ascension. He is going back to God the Father, who has given all things into his hands (see His rule and authority there) – Jesus knows this and so does these things, teaches these things.

There is great drama in what happens that night! He shortly tells His disciples:

³Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'

(John 13:33)

He has said these words before, to the Jews, back in Chapter 7:33-34, and then again in Chapter 8, but there in words full of condemnation:

²¹Then He said again to them, "I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come."

(John 8:21)

When Jesus repeats those words, does Peter remember them, and therefore is troubled in mind when the same words are given to them? For he asks:

³⁶Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later."

(John 13:36)

Here is a comfort for the disciples, then. To the unbelieving Jews He had said they could not come to where He was, but to His disciples He says *they will follow later*. And he says more on that:

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. ²In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also.

(John 14:1-3)

So the first comfort Jesus gives, not in light of His coming crucifixion but of His coming Ascension, is that He is leaving to prepare a place for them, and will return to bring us there. Mark that. The carpenter's son goes to His heavenly carpentry work of preparing a place for us.

Second, His absence implies that there is work for them to do (just like the work of the Great Commission implies His absence) – for He says:

¹² Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father.

(John 14:12)

This work will be, in large measure, the apostolic work of testifying about Jesus, because they have been with Him from the beginning. It is to be Spirit-empowered, and that Spirit from the Father Jesus will send (John 15:26-27), but only upon His Ascension:

⁵“But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ ⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷But 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 16:5-7)

So, secondly, His Ascension, His return to the Father, is related to the gift of the heaven-descended Dove upon the Church in flaming tongues. The Spirit is a gift Himself and will impart gifts upon His church.

Then we have, in Chapter 17, the high-priestly prayer of Jesus. Among the petitions Jesus offers for His disciples are these two, related to His return to the Father:

¹¹ I am no longer in the world; and *yet* they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, *the name* which You have given Me, that they may be one even as *We are*.

(John 17:11)

And then:

²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

(John 17:24)

So He prays for their protection, which we should think would come in large measure through the Holy Spirit who will remind them of the words of Christ, revealing the Father -, and for their following of Jesus to where He is – the two points I've already mentioned. But the thing I want you to notice is that *Jesus is praying for His disciples*. He is interceding on their behalf, owing to his impending absence, which prayer prefigures a work He does even now, before the Father: that of interceding for us.

So, these three things - (a) He will take us to where He is, (b) He has gifted us with and by the Holy Spirit, and (c) He intercedes for us – these three things the apostle John links with Christ's Ascension. And these three things, we can see, show forth before us the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of

His power toward believers! Let us see these things, each one in turn, and in each one gain great comfort, for so He has intended for His church.

a. He will take us to where He is.

That He will take us to where He is, is most naturally connected with the hope of His calling, and the rich inheritance. Hope is so often in the New Testament linked with the anticipation of being in God's Divine Presence. This is a hope fixed on Christ, the hope of His appearing, that we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:1-3). We have been born again to a living, a vital hope, through His Resurrection, to obtain an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, unfading, reserved in heaven for those protected by the power of God. The fullness of our salvation will be seen at the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5). In the letter to Titus, Paul writes of the hope of eternal life – and where will that be but in His presence, and what is that, but to know the Father and the Son whom He has sent? And likewise we are to live godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. (Titus 1:3, 2:13) All who have this hope fixed on Christ so purify themselves (1 John 3:3). Our hope is laid up in heaven (Col. 1:5) Christ's abiding in us, through His Spirit, speaks of a hope of glory, our glorification but also beholding eternally the beauty of the glory of Christ (Col. 1:27). This indeed is a hope common to all Christians, for just as there is one body, one Spirit, our Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all – so too there is "one hope of your calling." (Eph 4:3-6)

So, the hope of our calling, and also a most glorious inheritance – and a witness to power, surpassing power, by which we are reserved for such. But it is not as though it is all future. There is an already as well as a not yet:

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

(Eph. 2:4-7)

Is it not abundant mercy that we have promise of this position, and enjoy it in some measure now? This hope is not a vain wish; Scripture describes Biblical hope as sure and steadfast, for it is not based on our wishes but on the promise of a Faithful God.

b. He has gifted us with and by His Holy Spirit.

The giving of the Holy Spirit to the Church, that she might be aptly and amply supplied for her work, we would most naturally connect with the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. The descent of the flaming tongues, the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, enables the Church to go forth to the nations most wondrously in that supernatural reversal of the curse of Babel, in the speaking in tongues. Peter connects this to Christ's Ascension:

³³ Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

(Acts 2:33)

We could preach at length regard to all the Holy Spirit gives to us, how He helps in prayer in groans unutterable, how the fear of grieving Him can be a hedge to us, how He reminds us of the words of Christ, that He inspired Holy men to record. The Scriptures themselves are a gift to us, for prophecy does not come by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. Is this itself not ample provision, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work? But more, He dwells in us as an abiding anointing, keeping us in His name, restraining us from running ahead, so that we need not (nor want!) heretics to teach us the latest new thing, but abide in the teaching of Christ. Time constrains me from continuing.

The church has a work to do, and the Spirit provides all the particulars for that work. When Paul speaks to the Ephesian church of all the different roles given to the different members of the body, He writes, quoting from Ps. 68, which also speaks of Christ's Ascension:

⁸ Therefore it says,
"WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,
HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,
AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

⁹(Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

(Eph. 4:8-10)

Paul here reveals in part that surpassing power toward the Church, in the Spirit's provision of pastors, teachers, evangelists, for the work of building up of the body, until we all attain to the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God. The list is not exhaustive; *he could have included deacons*. Does the task ahead, whether it be our immediate issues, or the worldwide proclamation of the Gospel, seem too much for your meager resources, for the meager resources of the Church local and universal? Remember the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, shown in the Holy Spirit given to the Church – that power so greatly demonstrated in the Rising of Christ from the dead, and His Rising from the earth to the right hand of the Father.

And so we see surpassing power here - but the Holy Spirit is also a seal and a guarantee, and gives internal witness that we are His, so not only does the giving of the Holy Spirit speak of surpassing power, but also of the glorious inheritance, and the hope of our calling.

c. He has gone to intercede for us.

Look at the prayer Jesus prays for His disciples in John 17, and see what He prays for all who will believe through them, which includes you and me. He prayed for Peter, and Peter was restored. Do you need an intercessor? Need an Advocate? We can see even more clearly than Job our need for an Advocate, and more clearly than he what sort of an Advocate is needed.

This, for at least two reasons. Having seen Christ by faith, we more clearly see our sins, and so more clearly see our need of an Advocate, not to proclaim our righteousness, but to plead His own on our behalf. Second, we are in the cross-hairs of Satan, the accuser if Job was, and hence will be oppressed, sooner or later. To those in such straits these are words of comfort indeed:

³⁴who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

(Rom. 8:34)

Paul to the church at Rome connects the Ascension and Christ's intercession. Do you need a priest? Do not think as a Protestant that you need no priest – you do, you simply need the one Priest that has been provided, and He intercedes for You as priests of old did imperfectly and in part. You have a High Priest in Christ.

I can minister to you no better than simply to give you the words of the Scriptures here, first from the writer of Hebrews, who encourages his audience and us by writing of this permanent priesthood of Christ, connecting it with His everlasting life which has been raised to God:

²⁵Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

(Heb. 7:25)

And later:

²⁴For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

(Heb. 9:24)

The apostle John, too, writes in his first epistle of what we have in the one who is in the Father's presence:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.

(1 John 2:1-2)

Is that not a comfort indeed to any who have denied Him as Peter did? And was not the vision of Christ standing, not sitting, but standing, interceding, at the Father's right hand, a comfort to that first martyr of the church, the man Stephen, and a cause of madness for those who persecuted him? Think of it, and be astounded and eternally grateful: the righteous King of all creation, who rules all nations with a rod of iron . . . *intercedes on your behalf*. Is that not surpassing power enough for you?

III. Closing: Christ's Surpassing Excellence.

Saints of God, you are called and encouraged to be steadfast.

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

(Heb. 4:14-16)

Words, and time, fail me to put before you sufficiently the greatness of this Great High Priest, the all-surpassing excellence of Christ. A thousand tongues would fail me. But in closing we need to remind ourselves of Christ first and foremost, to be even more amazed at the multitude of comforts He grants to the Church in His Ascension, and to be as joyful as the disciples as they returned to Jerusalem to do battle with unbelief. Peter did not on this mount suggest they build tabernacles – they went back joyfully to the work before them. They had beheld a clear sign of the surpassing excellence of Christ, their rabbi, and they knew His leaving was for their benefit, and spoke of His excellence. We must always begin and end with Christ.

Paul testifies to the surpassing excellence of Christ as relating to His Ascension. For what does Paul write to the Ephesian church?

seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

(Eph 1:20b-21)

He is given a name that is above every name, in this age, also in the one to come. To the Philippians Paul wrote (as we have already heard):

⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(Phil. 2:9-11)

And we need remind ourselves of what the writer of Hebrews wrote:

³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

(Heb. 1:3-4)

Just as many nowadays believe not in angels, so others have an unhealthy interest in them. What are they? Ministering spirits, sent to render service to those who will inherit salvation. But He, Christ, has a more excellent name than they, a name above all names. Let us drink from the well of His comforts, and let us render Him service.

¹ Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

(Col. 1:3)

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