

Christ's Ascension

This Sunday is Pentecost Sunday, but today we are going to focus on the Ascension that took place 10 days prior to Pentecost. How many of you have heard of Ascension Day? Have you ever marked your calendar for Ascension Day? This year Ascension Day was on May 26th while Joyce and I were driving through Montana. As we drove, we discussed the importance of the ascension. The Ascension of Jesus comes on the 40th day following Resurrection Sunday. Have you heard a sermon centered on Jesus' ascension to heaven? Well, you are going to hear about the importance of the ascension this morning. It is impossible to overstate the importance of Good Friday when Jesus died for our sins. Followed by the earth-shattering Resurrection Sunday when Jesus rose from the dead and defeated death and began the ministry of reconciliation with God the Father for His followers. This was followed 40 days later with His return to heaven.

Mission Accomplished!

After He rose from the grave, Jesus' earthly ministry did not stop, He spent the next 40 days appearing to hundreds and teaching and bringing His ministry and God the Father's plan for salvation into focus as we studied in Acts chapter 1. The cross and the empty tomb are at the heart of the gospel message for the followers of Christ to this present day. As Paul stated so clearly, "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand,² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the

Scriptures,⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.¹¹ **Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.**” (1 Corinthians 15:1-11) This is our mission and ministry as well, to live and preach the Word of God and bring glory to Christ.

But, let me ask, what about Jesus’ ascension? For many Christians, they have downplayed Christ’s ascension by jumping from Resurrection right to Pentecost. We will study Pentecost and its importance in chapter 2 of Acts. However, I believe we miss one of the most important events in history by skipping the ascension. So, this morning I want to focus on the Ascension of Christ. I hope to answer questions like, why does Christ’s ascension matter? What does the ascension mean for us today? I would like to share with you from the Scriptures six reasons why the ascension matters to us today.

Christ’s Ascension Means:

Jesus’ Ministry Continues

Let me start by taking us back the beginning of the Book of Acts, please open you Bible to Acts chapter 1, “In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus **began** to do and teach,² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.” I call your attention to a small but important word in verse 1, it is the

word “**began**”, from this word we know that Jesus’ ascension does not mark the *cessation* but the *continuation* of His work as Messiah and Lord. Translating the Greek word “*archo*” as “**began**” does not give the full meaning or impact of the word. *Archo* means to begin by command or to commission by divine order. This is what Luke’s second book, “The Acts of the Apostles” is all about. The acts of the risen Lord Jesus which He works from heaven and began or commissioned or commanded through His people by the indwelling and power of His Holy Spirit to fulfill God’s purposes until the end of history. This is how Luke ended his gospel account after the crucifixion and Christ’s resurrection, ⁴⁴ “**Then Jesus said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’** ⁴⁵ **Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,** ⁴⁶ and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ **And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.’** ⁵⁰ And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.” (Luke 24:44-53) so, the next phase of God’s plan of salvation and Jesus’ ministry begins with His ascension. We, too are God’s people by faith in Jesus filled with His Holy Spirit, so His command to preach the gospel to all nations is a command for us to carry on the ministry of Christ until His return.

The Holy Spirit Comes

After His resurrection Jesus told His followers, at the end of Luke's Gospel account, **"behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."** (24:49) Peter verifies this in the second chapter of Acts, **".... having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."** (2:33) This pouring out of the Holy Spirit was the fulfillment of God's promise to the prophet Joel, ²⁸ **"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹ Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit."** (Joel 2:28-29) The disciples are in Jerusalem waiting as commanded by Jesus just as the prophet Zechariah said it would happen 500 hundred years before Jesus lived, ¹⁰ **"I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him..."** (Zechariah 12:10) The Holy Spirit is a present, not to the whole world, but to the believers in Jesus for the purpose of empowering them to, as Jesus has commanded them and commands us this day, ⁸ **"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."** (Acts 1:8) This resulted in ³¹ **"when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."** (Acts 4:31) My beloved should it not be the same for us? Should not our lives be spent **"speaking the word of God with boldness"** and should not our lives reflect what Paul wrote to the believers in Rome and Corinth, **"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."** (Romans 8:9) If we are living by the

indwelling of God's Spirit then "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. **For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.**" (2 Corinthians 3:18) We are not to squander the gifts God gives to each believer. We each are to boldly preach the gospel of Christ and carry on His ministry to the world.

Jesus Is Enthroned As King In Heaven

As Jesus ascended, He takes His rightful place as King of the world ruling from heaven. According to the Apostles' Creed that was developed in the second to third century as a form of confession for people to memorize, as most people at the time were illiterate, the Creed says, "he (*Jesus*) ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead." We know this is true by what Acts 1:9 to 11 tells us, ⁹"when *Jesus* had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ 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.**' " The first to be martyred for their faith in Jesus as the Christ was Stephen and as he was being stoned and prepared to die, he says, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:56) Jesus' ascension verifies He is King of kings and is the fulfillment of the prophecy, including god's revelation to Daniel, ¹³"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And 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 one that

shall not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14) Jesus’ ascension began His reign as King of kings for eternity. Jesus said to John in His revelation, ²⁰ “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 3:20-22) Jesus is the rightful King and all people will recognize His kingship and Him as God the Son, whether they bow before Him as their King here on earth or bend their knee to His kingship from hell. As Paul made clear, ⁹ “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus should bow, in heaven and on earth and *under the earth*, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11) All mankind will hail Jesus as Lord and King, but while we live here on earth, we can choose to be with Him forever or to be separated from Him forever – so choose wisely.

Jesus Returned To The Father

Before and after Jesus’ death and resurrection He declared that He was sent by God the Father to do His will. Jesus said, “I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” (John 16:28) Later John recorded, “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ... ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God ... *Jesus said*, ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. ... ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to

you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.” (John 13:1, 3, 16-17 & 20) The sweetest reunion to ever take place was when Jesus returned to the Father. Jesus accomplished His mission and gloried the Father on earth and His ascension now glorifies Himself as God the Son and He rules as King from heaven. Jesus fulfilled God the Father’s mission, saying, ⁴“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” (John 17:4-5) We too have a mission here on earth; to glorify Christ and share His gospel and this brings about the second greatest reunion that takes place - it is every time a saint enters heaven. Jesus’ return to the Father prepares our homecoming, as Jesus taught, ²“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? ³And 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. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going.” (John 14:2-4) By faith in Jesus we know this to be true, ¹⁵“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15-16) Only God knows the date of my arrival in heaven, but it is a day I look forward to and do not fear.

Jesus Is Our Mediator and High Priest

Jesus is unique in that He is the one and only mediator between God and mankind. ⁵“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all ...” (1 Timothy 2:5-6a)

Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension secures our forgiveness by God, our justification before God and our reconciliation with God. Jesus is now exalted

and in heaven interceding for His people as our true high priest and advocate as we read in Romans, “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.”³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” (Romans 8:34-35) During Jesus’ earthly ministry His work was limited geographically to a small area, but now that He is in heaven His work is everywhere on planet earth and He hears the prayers of all saints throughout the world and intercedes for them. By coming to the earth, He is able to sympathize with our struggles because He also experienced them and yet did not sin. As Jesus prepared to leave, He said,¹² “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” (John 14:12-14) As our faith deepens and we grow closer to Christ and pray for the will of God and pray in the will of God we know God will answer and fulfill His will and our prayers.

So, God the Father knew exactly what He was doing when He sent Jesus to earth to experience human life and its challenges and hopes without sin to pay for the sins of mankind and be the Mediator between God the Father and mankind. Jesus then returned to heaven as our king and high Priest – amazing – all that Jesus did must have been by divine plan.

Jesus Will Return As King and Judge

The final point I will make this morning is what Jesus’ ascension means about His return. In Acts 1:11, we read, the two angels tell the men witnessing Jesus’ ascension, “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.**” When we pray, the words given by Christ, ¹⁰ **“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ...¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”** (Matthew 6:10 & 13) here is what we are praying for, Jesus’ mission and reign from heaven will climax with His return. As John saw, ¹⁵ **“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.’ ”** (Revelation 11:15) How will Jesus’ return begin? The apostle John tells us, ¹¹ **“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. ¹² 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. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From Christ’s mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. *John observed,* ¹⁷ Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, ‘Come, gather for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.’ ¹⁹ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.”** (Revelation 19:15-19) Praise God, as believers, we will not experience this terrible day of God’s wrath being poured out and divine judgment being executed.

For Us

What does Jesus' ascension mean for us? It is the completion of Jesus' earthly ministry and signifies His enthronement in heaven as King. Jesus has finished the Father's mission and now rules with all authority and intercedes with sympathy as the Mediator and high Priest for all believers.

Here are four things to take away with you this morning.

- Remember that Jesus is presently reigning as King and remains active engaged in our world and your life.
- **Live boldly as a child of God, live as His servants and exalted Him as King of king and as your Lord and Savior.** Know that your labors as servants of Christ are not in vain and fulfill God's promises and plan. As Paul instructed, ["Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."](#) (1 Corinthians 15:58)
- **As believers, if we suffer for the cause of Christ, take heart that Jesus is not indifferent in our struggles.** He, Himself endured great sufferings and by this He is the most merciful and sympathetic mediator. Take your praises and your cares and your heartbreaks to your ascended Lord and Savior who hears your prayers and responses with heaven's full authority.
- Finally, **live in hope of the glorious future God has promised and that will come to fruition.**

The ascension means Jesus will return as Judge and King. When He returns, He will abolish injustice, end suffering, destroy death forever, conquer evil and set up His eternal kingdom of truth, righteousness and love. He will cast the devil into

the eternal lake of fire. But the very best part is as God's children and believers in Jesus as Savior we will live forever with God in heaven. Amen and amen!