

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Ascension Is No Small Deal!
Pastor Dave Scherrer - April 23, 2017

Anniversaries are cool. Wedding Anniversaries? We just had Earth Day.
Any Birthday's today? [2 Pics of Donni's office] Susan's anniversary

As anniversaries go, it is impossible to overstate the importance of Good Friday, when Jesus died for our sins, and Easter Sunday, when he was raised from the dead — but Jesus's earthly ministry did not stop there. The cross and empty tomb are at the very heart of the gospel message proclaimed by Jesus' followers throughout history. We are going to study that again in 1 Corinthians 15 when we finish that series in a few weeks. However, for many evangelical Christians and churches, Jesus' ascension is simply an afterthought to Easter and Good Friday. After the resurrection we are told that Jesus taught his disciples about God's kingdom for forty days and then on the 40th day, now known as Ascension Day, he was "taken up" to heaven. Have you marked your calendar for Ascension Day? In the church calendar that falls this year on May 25, traditionally celebrated on a Thursday 40 days after Easter. How many have never even heard of Ascension Day?



Giotto di Bondone 1305, Padua, Italy

I kinda see Easter as an "End of the Beginning" story. The "beginning of the beginning of the saving of the world story" begins with Jesus' birth and then celebrates his life and work and teachings. That would make the ascension "the end" of the "End of the Beginning" . . . If that makes sense. My point is, I think, that we shouldn't skip over the ascension. The Ascension is no small deal.

Let's refresh our memory of the story and we can read all the passages on the ascension in about two minutes. Let's try . . .

Mark 16:19-20 ¹⁹ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. ²⁰ And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

Luke 24:50-52 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.

Acts 1:6-11 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ 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." ⁹ 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. 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."

Let's get to the punchline.

The Ascension means . . .

The work of Christ did not end on the Cross

In Acts 1:1–2 we read, “**In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up...**” The author of Acts is also the author of Luke, one of the most complete accounts of Christ's gospel.

The small but important word *began* signals that Jesus' ascension does not mark the *cessation* but the *continuation* of his work as Lord and Messiah. That's what Luke's second book is all about, the “Acts of the risen Lord Jesus,” which he works from heaven, through his people, by the Holy Spirit, for the accomplishment of God's purposes. And the Acts of the apostles and disciples through the ages was of course dependent on the presence of Christ's Holy Spirit. And for some mysterious reason, that could not happen unless Christ returned to the Father . . . **and Christ was intent on sending the Holy Spirit;**

That Christ was intent on sending the Holy Spirit

John 16:5-8 But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, 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. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

The verse just before the Luke 24 account of the ascension we just read, Jesus told his followers, “**I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high**”. Then after the Spirit came, in his Pentecost sermon Peter explains of Jesus to the Jewish officials that had put him on trial, “**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**”.

God promised in Joel 2:28, “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,” and this promise is fulfilled by the sending of the Spirit by the now heaven seated Lord Jesus. The ascended Lord sent the Spirit to be present with his people to empower them for worldwide mission, and to transform believers to live new lives reflecting their king. And that brings us to our next thought.

That Christ returned to the Father to be enthroned as King and we are His Kingdom.

There has been no sweeter reunion in the history of the world than Jesus's return to his Father! In human terms, perhaps the closest analogy is a courageous, wounded soldier returning to his loved ones after a hard-fought victory. Jesus fully accomplished his mission and glorified the Father on earth, and at Jesus's ascension the Father glorifies the Son in heaven. We take heart that Jesus's homecoming to his Father prepares the way for *our* homecoming to be with Jesus forever. This return to the Father is just as predicted as the resurrection . . .

John 16:28 I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.

Jesus said to Mary, “**Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’**” At Jesus's ascension he is installed as the true King of Creation.

Jesus's ascension fulfills the important prophecy of Daniel 7:13–14:

Daniel 7:13–14 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. 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.

Here is the impact on us - Jesus's kingdom cannot be destroyed and will not pass away! That means we, who are the Kingdom of God cannot be destroyed and we will never pass away. Our mortal bodies stop and then we simply put on immortality. According to Revelation 3:21 Jesus conquered and sat down with his Father on his throne, where he receives unending praise. Jesus will reign at God's right hand until all enemies are subdued under his feet. Thus God's kingdom has been *inaugurated* through the enthronement of Jesus, who now sits on heaven's throne and will return to *consummate* his kingdom on earth as in Heaven.

"Ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and he shall come again with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end." *Nicene Creed*

That Christ is our mediator and High Priest.

High priest

Jesus is the unique mediator between God and man. His death and resurrection secure our forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation with God. Note also that the exalted Lord Jesus is now in heaven interceding for his people as our true high priest and advocate. During his earthly ministry Jesus's work was geographically limited — he didn't teach in Ethiopia while healing in China. But now he is at work everywhere and able to hear and respond to his people's prayers no matter the time or place. He sympathizes with our struggles and promises to do whatever we ask in his name.

High King

In Acts 1:11 two angels explain to the disciples, "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Jesus' heavenly reign will one day be fully realized on earth and we read about that in Revelation. This is the very thing we ask for when we pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." At his return, the Lord Jesus will execute divine judgment, vindicating his downtrodden people and judging his enemies.

Four things that this means for us . . .

1. *Remember* that Jesus is presently reigning as king and remains active and engaged in our world and our lives.
2. Therefore *live* boldly, confidently, and strategically as servants of the exalted king of heaven. Know that your labors in the Lord Jesus are not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).
3. Sufferers, *take heart* that Jesus is not indifferent to your struggle. He has endured great suffering and is thus the most merciful and sympathetic counselor and mediator. Take your cares to your ascended Lord who hears your prayers and can respond with all heaven's authority.
4. Finally *hope* in a glorious future. The ascended Lord will return as judge and king. He will abolish injustice, end suffering, and destroy death and set up his kingdom of truth, righteousness and love. Best of all, we will be *with* our king.

Jesus completed his mission to redeem his fallen creation by bringing glorified humanity into heaven at his ascension—in his own person. This is but the foretaste of things to come, for we will follow him there. In fact Ephesians says that we are already seated in the heavenlies, because we are in him. Our future is certain. All creation is his; but his new creation is precious to him. He will not relinquish it.

The significance of the Ascension as explained by Scripture is that heaven is our home and not this world. The entire ministry of our Lord has been and continues to be to fit us for glory. So the lesson should be clear: **We must live above the world and not like the world (world meaning the present world system that has no place for the Lord).**

The Scripture again and again tells us not to love the world, neither the things that are in the world, for it is passing away; we are not to lay up treasures here on earth where there is corruption, but in heaven; and we are not to be conformed to this world. I think these warnings go beyond material things to attitudes. We get so caught up in worldly living--the petty competitions, the little power plays, the desire for worldly fame, and the sometimes dishonest and selfish ways of gaining such. But the Word of God reminds us that our faith in Christ is the means of victory over the world. So we must not get so attached to this world, or this world's way of thinking, that we become worldly.

Rather, we must measure everything by heavenly standards, by spiritual, eternal things. We do not belong here. Our rightful place is with Jesus in glory. The more that we grow spiritually, the more that we become like Jesus Christ, the more we will realize that we do not belong here, and that our stay here is an earthly ministry in our eternal life.

Prayer