

The Ascension of Christ and His Coronation

Acts 1:9-11
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So much is written and preached about the death and resurrection of Christ, but much less (it seems) about the ascension of Christ. However, the ascension of Christ was no less necessary in the ministry of Christ as part of your salvation, than His death and resurrection.

The Apostle's Creed states not only our belief (and the belief of Christians throughout history) in the truth that Christ crucified and was raised from the dead but that He "ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty."

Why did Christ ascend into heaven? Why did He not continue on earth after His resurrection and establish His Church upon earth and continue to work miracles, to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, and to convert the nations to Himself in ushering in the blessed peace of the millennium throughout all nations of the world? Why the ascension into heaven just to return again at His second coming? The answers to these questions are not inconsequential to your faith in the Lord Jesus, but rather are necessary to understand how the ministry of Christ did not end with His resurrection, but continues in heaven for all of His people for whom He died and was raised from the dead. Your salvation would be incomplete apart from the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven. That is how important the ascension of Christ is!

Let us turn our attention then to the following main points from our text in Acts 1:9-11: (1) The Purpose of Christ's Bodily Ascension into Heaven (Acts 1:9); (2) Christ's Bodily Ascension into Heaven Assures You of Christ's Bodily Second Coming from Heaven (Acts 1:10-11).

I. The Purpose of Christ's Bodily Ascension into Heaven (Acts 1:9).

A. In the previous sermon (Acts 1:6), the apostles had asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would be restored to the nation of Israel (i.e. when Israel would be converted to Christ as taught in Zechariah 12:10). The Lord Jesus responded that it was not for them to know the timing of this wondrous event of Israel's salvation that yet awaited fulfillment in the future. Rather the apostles (and all Christians) had a present mission before them to take the gospel of salvation to the Jews, the Samaritans, and to the Gentiles throughout the whole world. Dear ones, we are not to become such prophecy buffs that we live in our prophetic ivory towers while ignoring our present duty to testify of Christ to family, friends, fellow students, co-workers, and neighbors. Prophecy is an important part of God's Word, but there is also a perishing world around us who are bound for everlasting judgment apart from the gospel of Christ. A proper understanding of prophecy should in fact drive us to be faithful witnesses of Christ to all those around us.

B. We must understand that Christ's bodily ascension into heaven was not a hindrance to the ministry of His Church upon the earth, but was rather a benefit to the ministry of His Church upon the earth as we shall see. More will be accomplished in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth because Jesus has ascended into heaven.

1. Jesus taught His disciples that they and His Church would do even greater works than He did during His ministry because of His ascension into heaven (John 14:12: "greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father"). Now how is it possible to do greater works than multiplying a few loaves of bread and several fish to feed thousands of hungry people? How is it possible to do greater works than walking on water and calming the mighty wind and waves? How is it possible to do greater works than healing the blind, the mute, the deaf,

the demon-possessed, and to raise the dead? How is it possible to do greater works than bringing the gospel to people in Jerusalem, Judea, and Galilee and seeing the regenerating work of God in their lives?

2. Clearly, these greater works performed by the disciples of Christ and the Church of Christ could not be greater in nature or kind, but they could be greater in the number of witnesses who would be called and blessed in laying down their lives to bear witness in word and deed of the miraculous power of Christ to save and rescue perishing sinners from everlasting destruction in hell (Acts 1:8). When thousands upon thousands of the spiritually dead were raised to new life in Christ and went forth testifying to many others throughout the world, the greater works of the ascended Christ were and still are being performed by faithful followers of Jesus Christ. And these greater works of His disciples in all ages to come would be wrought because Jesus ascended to His Father in heaven. There is something about the ascension of Christ into heaven that brought forth great power to His Church.

C. When Christ gave to His apostles the mission that is stated in Acts 1:8, He blessed them with uplifted hands, and while He blessed them He was lifted up into heaven (Luke 24:50-51). If you ever wondered what the biblical warrant was for the benediction (blessing) that I extend to you on behalf of Christ with uplifted hands at the conclusion of our worship service, here it is in Luke 24:50-51. God's appointed ministers of the Old Testament were to bless God's people on behalf of the Lord (Numbers 6:22-27; Leviticus 9:22). This was an act of worship that was not ceremonial, but moral and Jesus continues that ministerial act (as our Priest) as a pattern for His ministers to follow. This is a very visible and tangible sign of Christ's presence with you—you are not alone. This is why the Lord lifted up His hands and blessed His disciples as He began to ascend into heaven. That is why you should not close your eyes during the benediction, but should look and see in the extended hands of the

minister the hands of Christ upon each of your heads.

D. Thus, as Jesus blessed his apostles, “he was taken up” (Acts 1:9). The apostles were eye-witnesses to the resurrected Christ after His resurrection (He was no longer in the grave—He was raised bodily from the dead—He was alive), and now they became eye-witnesses to the ascension of Christ (He was no longer bodily on the earth—He was ascended bodily into heaven to be seated at the right hand of God).

1. The bodily ascension of Jesus did not happen in the darkness of night so that their view of Christ rising was hindered, but occurred in the full light of day. The bodily ascension of Christ did not occur while they slept, nor did Jesus secretly disappear without notice, but He was lifted from the earth and into the sky in plain view of His disciples (higher, higher, ever higher, until a cloud received Him out of their sight).

2. When the apostles saw the Lord Jesus leave them in such a manner, they knew (or at least came to realize) God had set His approval upon Christ’s work upon earth and that He would carry it forward ever more with Christ seated at His right hand until His bodily second coming.

E. But what was the purpose for Christ’s ascension into heaven? Why didn’t He rather continue His bodily ministry here upon earth so that He might journey eventually throughout the whole world and to every nation? The purpose for Christ’s ascension into heaven was two-fold: (1) His Exaltation; (2) His Outpouring.

1. First, the purpose for Christ’s ascension into heaven was HIS EXALTATION.

a. Christ as Mediator was exalted to heaven due to His fulfilling all righteousness and fulfilling all suffering perfectly on behalf of you who were chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world,

Ephesians 1:4). The Lord Jesus presented Himself before the Father as the One who had accomplished once and for all a complete and full redemption for all His people (Hebrews 9:24-26).

(1) Christ's work of accomplishing redemption is complete, it is paid in full, and He has ascended into heaven, and has presented Himself as the perfect offering before His Father once and for all. In regard to accomplishing redemption for us who trust alone in Christ alone, He is seated at God's right hand because there is no more to be accomplished (Hebrews 10:12).

(2) However, there is yet the ongoing work of Christ as Mediator in heaven in interceding for His people against the charges and accusations brought against us by our enemy and the work of intercession in praying continually for us in the midst of our many weaknesses and sins that our faith would not fail (just as He prayed for Peter), which prayers are always answered (Hebrews 7:23-25).

(3) The teaching of the Church of Rome that Mary is the exalted Mediatrix and that there are many exalted saints in heaven that are intercessors blasphemously usurps the office of Christ as the only Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5) and also blasphemously teaches that the work of Christ as Mediator is imperfect and insufficient in itself. Likewise, the blasphemous teaching of transubstantiation (the heresy that the bread and the wine are essentially changed and transformed into the body and blood of Christ and then worshipped as being Christ, who is offered then again and again as a sacrifice), this contradicts Christ's bodily ascension into heaven. For it supposes that Christ's human body in heaven is omnipresent. However, the idea that the divine attribute of omnipresence overwhelms the human body of Christ is a heresy (Eutychianism) condemned by the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon (451 a.d.). There is no mixture of the natures in Christ. These are all lies from the father of lies—the devil.

(4) Dear ones, the very reason we may have

confidence in coming to the throne of grace is because Christ, our Mediator, a man, sits upon that throne of grace (Hebrews 4:14-16).

b. Christ as Mediator was also exalted due to His coronation as Messianic Lord and King (Acts 2:30-36).

(1) Jesus as the eternal Son of God created all things, and therefore has a divine right to rule sovereignly over all things (John 1:1,3).

(2) But Jesus as Mediator (who added humanity to His divine Person and who came as the Second Adam to secure eternal salvation for His elect) was promised in that eternal Covenant of Redemption by the Father that all the ends of the earth and a universal dominion would be given to Him (as the Mediator, the God-man) as a reward for His obedience in fulfilling all righteousness for His elect (Psalm 2:7-8; Matthew 28:19-20).

(3) That universal dominion of Christ as Mediator is exercised OVER THE CHURCH by way of His Headship in doctrine, worship, government, and discipline (Colossians 1:18—“And he is the head of the body, the church....”).

(4) But the universal dominion of Christ as Mediator is also exercised OVER ALL KINGS, THRONES, DOMINIONS, AND CREATURES to the benefit of the Church (Ephesians 1:20-22). For this reason, Jesus Christ as Mediator is identified as “the prince of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5). Dear ones, our great encouragement and hope is in the truth that Jesus Christ exercises His universal dominion over kings and nations in such a way that it ultimately benefits His special dominion as Head over His Church.

c. By way of clarification and explanation, there are those Christians that err in applying these truths of Christ’s exaltation as “prince of the kings of the earth”.

(1) Some Dispensationalists delay Christ’s coronation as king until the Second Coming of Christ. But as we have seen

Christ ascends into heaven to be crowned as mediatorial King of kings and Lord of lords over all creation with all authority.

(2) Some Preterists and Amillennialists begin the prophesied millennium (i.e. the figurative 1,000 year reign of Christ) at this point of Christ's ascension and coronation. Thus, according to this view, the millennium covers the entire period from the ascension of Christ to the second coming of Christ. Whereas, as a historical Postmillennialist, I believe the Scripture teaches that Christ's reign begins with His ascension into heaven, and that Christ's rule from heaven will eventually lead to the destruction of the papal antichrist and the false prophet of Revelation, and the civil beast of Revelation at which time the nations of the world (including Israel) will be brought into the Visible Church (the olive tree in Romans 11). Then at the beginning of the millennium, we are told in Revelation 20:1-3 that Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit for a figurative 1,000 year period "that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled" (Revelation 20:3). Just because the gospel has gone into nations since Christ's ascension and just because Gentiles from those nations have been brought to Christ is not to say that the nations are no longer deceived. Clearly, the nations of the world as political and ecclesiastical entities are deceived by Satan and the papal antichrist. However, when the nations as political and ecclesiastical moral persons covenant to be the Lord's people and are brought into the Visible Church, then will it be evident that Satan is indeed bound so as not to deceive the nations during that millennial period, and not until then (Psalm 72:11—all kings; Romans 11—the fullness of the Gentile nations and all Israel saved).

2. Second, the purpose for Christ's ascension into heaven was not only HIS EXALTATION, but also HIS OUTPOURING (i.e. the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who was given to apply to even a greater degree the gifts and blessings of the New Covenant upon believers). We have considered this point in a previous sermon, and will do so again in

Acts 2, but let me say simply that as Christ was exalted and enthroned on high, he poured forth royal gifts upon His dear children, who were purchased by His sacrifice (Acts 2:33). This is first and foremost the gift of the Holy Spirit given to all believers in Christ in greater blessedness and efficacy than in the Old Testament. It is the gifts of ministers and officers (Ephesians 4:11ff). It is the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all Christians (1 Corinthians 12). It is the Holy Spirit that applies all of the blessings of the New Covenant to believers (every grace, every blessing, every fruit, and every gift). This is the evidence that Christ is crowned King—He has given His royal gifts to us.

F. As we conclude this first main point concerning the glory of Christ's ascension, consider with me that you are united with Christ covenantally in His death and His resurrection (Romans 6:6,11). You are legally dead to sin, but legally alive to righteousness. Sin does not have legal dominion over you. Righteousness has legal dominion over you. That is what you are in Christ, now go forth and practice what you are in Christ. But, dear ones, you are also united with Christ in His ascension and His session at God's right hand (Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:1-3). This is why Paul can say that you are more than conquerors through Christ who loved you in Romans 8:37—you are united to Christ who is King of kings and Lord of lords. What Christ did in His death and resurrection, He did for you, the children of God, and what Christ did in His ascension and session at God's right hand, He likewise did for you as well. You are the royal children of the King of kings—therefore all of those enemies that seem to overwhelm you have already legally been led captive by Christ's ascension and exaltation. You are assured of victory because Christ ascended into heaven and was exalted to the right hand of God.

II. Christ's Bodily Ascension into Heaven Assures You of Christ's Bodily Second Coming from Heaven (Acts 1:10-11).

A. While the disciples stared with fixed eyes upon the ascending Christ even to the point at which they could see Him no more because He was taken out of their view by a cloud, two angels, who appeared as men, were sent by the Lord to comfort the disciples.

1. We are not told that the disciples had any advance notice from Christ that this was the day of His ascension into heaven. As He ascended and as their eyes were fastened upon the ascending Christ, their longing hearts for Christ were manifested by the fact that they could not take their eyes off of Him, even when He could be seen no more due to the cloud that received Him. Was the Lord Jesus gone for good? Was He coming back to visit them as He had done on various occasions since the resurrection?

2. The angels are sent to reassure them that the ascended Christ would come again in like manner as He ascended. He was not gone forever. They were not abandoned.

a. Christ ascended visibly. Christ will return visibly (Revelation 1:7: “every eye shall see him”). Not a secret coming.

b. Christ ascended bodily. Christ will return bodily (Philippians 3:20-21).

Dear ones, I would like to leave two points of application with you.

First, there is a man in a real human body that is your Mediator at the right hand of God—He is fully God and fully man—He is Jesus Christ. You are united to Him in His death, resurrection, and exaltation. Jesus is at God’s right hand to the glory of God, and to His exaltation, but He is there for your benefit. Never forget your Mediator is at God’s right hand.

Second, Jesus is coming again. This world is not your home. Do not cling to this world as if this is your great reward. Do not live as if there will be no coming of Christ to judge the righteous and the wicked. Jesus is

coming for those who love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). Jesus is coming again as certainly as He ascended into heaven. Do you love His appearing because you love Him and can't wait to see Him and be with Him for all eternity? Or could you care less? Our love for the Lord will be manifested by our earnest longing to be with Him (now and for all eternity). Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

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