

Bible Text: Romans 8:34, 38-39
Preached on: Sunday, January 26, 2020

Heritage Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids
540 Crescent St NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Website: www.hnrc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/hnrc

May God bless the reading of our law, his law to our souls. Let's read now from two passages of Scripture, first Acts 1:9-11 and then we'll turn to Romans 8.

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up [Jesus was taken up]; and a cloud received him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

And then Romans 8:28 to the end. Romans 8:28,

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. 31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. 34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other

creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

May God bless these precious words to our souls.

Dear church family, the ascension of Jesus Christ does not stand out as prominently in the Bible as does the resurrection and that's probably because the resurrection is the grand turning point when our Lord moved from the state of humiliation to the state of exultation. He was raised again for our justification and because the fact that he is alive and risen from the dead validates the reality, the vitality of all true Christianity. But the ascension of Jesus is nonetheless a very very important doctrine. I often tell my theological students it's the most underrated doctrine, I believe, in the Reformed faith. The ascension of Jesus is the necessary complement and completion of his resurrection. He resurrected to ascend and to intervene for us in heavenly places and there to live on our behalf if we are true believers.

So Christ's ascension in a way is related to his resurrection the way perhaps adoption is related to justification. We say justification, forgiveness of my sins, that's everything. Well, that is, that is critical. You're saved, you're justified, but to be adopted into the family of God is the apex fruit, it takes you to even a higher mountain. "I am a child of God." Well, similarly, you see, resurrection is foundational but ascension is even higher. By Christ's ascension we live daily, we're saved by his death, we live by his life. So when Christ went to heaven, you see, he went to be crowned with honor and glory and he went to do marvelous things for his people. If you're sitting here as a child of God this morning, I've got very good news for you this morning and I hope you will leave this place profoundly comforted and have a deep, a deeper realization of the beauty and the glory and the criticalness of the ascension and intercession at Christ's right hand for you of the Lord Jesus Christ. So I want to, with God's help, unpack some of the riches of this doctrine for the people of God this morning.

The words of our text are in Romans 8:34 and I want to read that in conjunction with 38 and 39. Romans 8:34, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather," yea what is more, "is risen again," and then what is yet more, "who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." You see, it's like you're climbing a stairway here. It's Christ who died, well, that's wonderful to save us. Yea, rather he is risen again. He is exalted. Yes, even more, he's at the right hand of God. Yes, even more at the right hand of God, he is making intercession for us. He's praying for us, Paul says, moment by moment as Hebrews 7:25 tells us. So let me read that verse again. I want you to get the impact of this, "Who is he that condemns you?" Ah, you say, my sins condemn me. I come too short in everything. No, no, no, Paul says, "Who will take care of all this condemnation for you? Of course you deserve to die. Of course you deserve hell. Of course is everything that condemns you in you, but what's the answer to this question? Who is he that condemns you?" When you're in Christ no one condemns you. It is Christ who died, yea, rather he has risen again. Yea, rather he has ascended into heaven. Yea, rather he intercedes for you moment by moment and when he intercedes for you, dear believer, you will never perish and there will be a way of escape for every trial that

comes your way because he is interceding moment by moment by moment. That's it. This is just a little window into the grandeur and the glory and the beauty of this doctrine.

But then what's the result of it? Well, the result of it is verses 38 and 39, "I am persuaded," Paul uses the strongest possible word there, "I am absolutely 100% convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And the reason, you see, none of these things can separate you, none of the trials in life can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, is because he is risen and he's ascended and he's interceding for you, and he'll keep you, he'll keep you in the most profound need from the Father's right hand.

So that's our text and that's confirmed by the Catechism Lord's Day 18. "How dost thou understand these words," Question 46, "he ascended into heaven? That Christ in sight of his disciples were taken up from earth into heaven and that he continues there for our interest." Don't you love those words? "He continues there for our interest until he comes again to judge the quick," that is a living, "and the dead."

Question 47 "Is not Christ then with us even to the end of the world as he has promised? Christ is very man and very God. With respect to his human nature, he is no more on earth, but with respect to his Godhead, majesty, grace and Spirit, he is at no time absent from us." Now beside Question 1 which is obviously the most famous question in the Catechism, probably the second most famous phrase in the entire Catechism, or certainly second or third most important and most famous is this phrase. This is just beautiful, "With respect to his Godhead, majesty, grace and Spirit, he is at no time, no time, no time absent from us." That's what Hebrews 7:25 is saying. That's what Romans 8:34 is saying.

Question 48, "But if his human nature is not present wherever his Godhead is, are not then these two natures in Christ separated from one another? Not at all, for since the Godhead is illimitable and omnipresent, it must necessarily follow that the same is beyond the limits of the human nature he assumed, and yet is nevertheless in this human nature and remains personally united to it."

Then this beautiful beautiful Question, 49, "Of what advantage to us," that is to us who are true believers, "is Christ's ascension into heaven? First, that he is our advocate," our lawyer, "in the presence of his Father in heaven; second, that we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that he, as the head, will also take up to himself, us, his members; and thirdly, that he sends us his Spirit as an earnest," that is a down payment, a guarantee, "by whose power we seek the things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and not things on earth."

Well, I haven't even begun and I think if I were to say amen right now, you'd have a sermon, wouldn't you, from these texts and from the Catechism. It's so beautiful. Your salvation, dear child of God, is entirely safe in the hands of the ascended intercessory mediator. So we want to look at four things, then, Christ's ascension for us: first, he's

taken from us; second, he remains with us; third, he cares for us; and fourth, he's inseparable from us. Taken from us, remaining with us, caring for us, inseparable from us.

Question 46 says, "How dost thou understand these words he ascended into heaven?" Then it says, "That Christ, in sight of his disciples," that's what we just read from Acts 1:9-11, "was taken up from earth into heaven." This was a memorable moment, unforgettable moment in the life of the disciples, another major development in their experiential relationship with Jesus. You know, that relationship really went through four stages. Stage 1 was before Christ died. There were three years of seminary with him as he trained them and they could go to him every day, they knew where he lived and they had this daily fleshly relationship with him. They were present with him. He was teaching them day by day. Secondly was the 40 year period, 40 day period, sorry, after he arose between resurrection and ascension where they didn't know where he lived but he was coming and going and he could appear between closed doors and he would just suddenly appear. And then the third period is this ascension and the 10 days after it while he is taken from them and they are waiting for the Spirit to be poured out. And then a fourth period is post-Pentecost, Pentecost itself and what follows, the Holy Spirit of Christ poured out in a full measure upon Jew and Gentile and the Gospel going to the ends of the world.

So before Christ died, the disciples knew Jesus was the Son of God, remember Peter said that bluntly and Jesus praised him for it, but they had little grasp of how he was mediator and surety of his church. To say it another way, they knew him as prophet somewhat but they didn't know very much about him as priest or as king. Peter even went so far to say that Christ would not have to suffer. And so in the same chapter in which Jesus praised him for saying he's the Son of God, Jesus turned to him and said, "Get behind me, Satan. Don't tempt me. I know I have to suffer. You don't understand, Peter, I have to suffer and die for your sins. Get behind me, Satan."

So clearly when Jesus died, the disciples didn't have, they didn't have much more insight into Christ's substitutionary work as priest, as Savior, than the women did. Everyone was confused. All who loved him were confused when he died, and even as they're walking up the Mount of Olives, Jesus is going to ascend into heaven in Acts 1, one of them, one of the 12 asked him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" They're still after three years of seminary, they're still thinking that he's all about an earthly kingdom.

Now when Christ died, their love remained for him, of course, but they just didn't understand it so they weren't spiritually enlightened, they didn't understand the basics of the Gospels that is so obvious to us today that you hear from this pulpit every Lord's Day, that the justice of God must be satisfied and the only way that can be satisfied is through the double obedience of Jesus dying in his passive obedience, living, obeying the law in his active obedience so that God can be just and the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. That basic Gospel they had not yet fully grasped, but then came the resurrection, you see, and then Jesus shows them his hands and feet, asked them for something to eat, all to

squash their unbelief and to open their understanding. He wants to wean them from his fleshly presence. He wants them to walk by faith and he wants to tell them, he's going to pour out his Spirit and the Spirit on Pentecost will lead them into the truth and they will understand the Gospel as never before, and that's what happened wonderfully.

So throughout these 40 days, they learned a lot from Jesus but they were still in a bit of a fog, and then they walked up the mountain with him together, he and his disciples went from Jerusalem to Olivet. What a walk. What a walk that was. If you've ever been to Israel, you know what I mean. From Jerusalem they walked across the brook Kidron, the very brook he had crossed only a few weeks before as a humiliated captive rather than as an exalted King going to die for his people.

Then as you go a little bit further up the mountain, you see right on your left the garden of Gethsemane just laying there still today at the foot of the Mount of Olives where Christ was encompassed with sorrow. And as they climbed, they could see Golgotha where he died for them and probably even could see, though it's a little bit of a distance, the garden of Joseph of Arimathea where he sanctified and emptied the grave for them. It was all visible to them and all these places they passed by, don't you think the disciples were looking and thinking and remembering what Jesus had done for them everywhere? Every physical place they saw was a tangible reminder of what he was doing but also of how they failed. They slept in Gethsemane. They forsook him before he crossed the brook Kidron. They denied him in Jerusalem. They were absent at Golgotha. And they stayed behind locked doors instead of waiting for the resurrection. How unworthy they were to receive the privileges an ascended Lord was going to soon bring them. But you see, Jesus is instructing them all the way. He's answering their questions as they walked by these places. What a beautiful time they had with him despite their foolish questions. He's teaching. Till the last moment, he's teaching before he's ascended into heaven. For sleepy, forsaking, unbelieving, wayward disciples, he turns all these places of sorrow into joy because he's there substitute, because there is no reason in them for their salvation, but they're all reasons in him. They had made such a mess of every place but he sanctified every place with his grace.

I wonder if you've ever felt like this. Take this whole picture I'm painting for you, have you ever felt like that? I've just made such a mess of so many things in my life but God through Jesus place by place by place he's turned it around, he's brought good out of evil. He's a God of magnificent salvation. How often we must look at the very places Jesus suffered for us and died and just be humbled in the dust. "He did that? He really did that for a sinner like me?" When you look at the garden of Gethsemane and you think of the drops of blood oozing out of his veins, you think, "My sins," don't you? When you think of the crown of thorns at the Hall of Gabatha, every thorn it's like it's my sin. When you think of the nails going through him as they lay his body on the cross at Golgotha, "My sins." Every place, every place he goes it humbles me but we don't end there, every place we go, he goes. It humbles us but it also moves us to profound appreciation, overwhelming joy that he would do all this for the likes of me. Slight views of sin, said the church father Anselm, will give slight views of the Savior but profound views of sin

will give profound views of the Savior. You see, that is what we experience as we travel up this mount, as it were, together with Jesus.

And then Jesus goes into heaven. Systematic theologians always use these three words because it protects us from all kinds of doctrinal error, he goes up into heaven locally, that is from one place, the Mount of Olives to another, the third heavens, his Father's mansion, the home of angels and the redeemed. He goes to heaven visibly while they beheld. He doesn't leave suddenly like Elijah or secretly like Enoch, but calmly, slowly, majestically in view of all. There's no eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection but the Lord allows his disciples to be eyewitnesses of his ascension. So he ascends locally, he ascends visibly, and then the third word is he ascends actually. This is not a dream. This is not a vision. This is not just an experience in their souls. This is real. In fact, they're watching, watching, watching, watching until a cloud takes him out of their sight and then they're still gazing, and finally some angels have to bring them down to reality and they come and say, "Why? Why are you gazing into heaven that way? As you've seen him go, so he will come again."

Now this is a glorious, heavenly, welcoming homecoming that Christ must have received, don't you think, from his Father? Clouds were symbols in Bible times of chariots, symbols of a king, and a cloud takes him up beyond their sight into the third heavens, wherever that is. It's his homecoming where he's going to represent his people, where joy fills the courts of glory when Jesus returns, returns with human nature, returns with honor and glory, returns as the exalted one satisfied his Father's justice, returns as the King of glory, returns as the one to him all power is given in heaven and on earth, incomprehensible. They gaze into heaven and yet so real. They are filled with joy. They suddenly realize he's going to represent them. They still don't understand everything until 10 days later, Pentecost, but they know he's going alive into glory on their behalf and it overwhelms them. It fills them with joy. They return to Jerusalem with great joy.

They're rejoicing not just because Jesus is still alive, that of course is part of it, but they are rejoicing because of what Question 46 says, "He is taken up from earth into heaven and continues there for our interest." Wow, that's amazing. That's amazing. These words must have, or something like them, must have become more real than ever before for them. They begin to understand, "He's taken up for us." They are filled with joy. "This is our high priest going up into heaven, not just our prophet who is going to go to intercede for us and remember us and bless us, our sacrificial high priest." Now of course, we have the whole Bible so we know the end from the beginning but experientially there is a time also in our lives if we are true believers that we began to realize that and what a wonder that was, that he's not only died for me but he's going to live for me. He's going into heaven to live for me and to represent me and to prepare a place for me in his Father's house, and to intercede for me, and to care for me, and to do everything for me that I need to have done for me not just to get saved but to stay saved. There are so many things that can challenge my salvation in this world, you see, but the whole point of Romans 8 is he's not only risen, he's not only ascended, he is interceding for us and therefore nothing, nothing, nothing in this world shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He's there for our interest. The gates of the heavenly paradise are open for us in Jesus, for people like us who shut all gates, for people like us who don't deserve anything. So Psalm 24, Psalter 58 we sang it already, comes into play here, doesn't it? "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." That's what happens when Jesus goes into heaven. The Psalmist is painting a picture here and it's a beautiful one. You see, what happened, it's hard for us to realize that until you're actually in Israel and you actually see it like, say, in the city of Dan or something, where you see excavations of archaeology and you see all these elder seats and everything at the gate of a city, everything important in a city happened at the gates of the city. That's where the government would meet. That's where decisions would be made. That's where vows would be taken. So at the gate of a city was a place of high traffic, lots of things happening, lots of things going on, and what happened is mud would pile up over time in the city and if there's a gate and it had, of course, a piece on top of the gate as well to cross over to keep the gate together, and the mud would pile up. If a king, a noble dignitary would come to the city now he'd be riding on a chariot and he'd be sitting on top of the chariot, if he had to stoop to get into the gate of the city, that was considered to be an insult. A king should be able to just go into the city, you know, standing or sitting in his total height. So what sometimes they would do if they had a very very famous person coming they would actually get some carpenters together and they would redo the gate because the mud was all packed down so hard it was hard to get it all after a while to get it all removed, they found it easier to just go to the top of the gate and lift up the gates and build something higher so the king could come in, or the noble visitor could come in without having to stoop, and he'd go over all that mud and enter in.

So David picks up on this picture and he says, "This is the King of glory." He's prophesying in Psalm 24, again in Psalm 47, and again in Psalm 68 of the ascension of Jesus, but here in Psalm 24 is the most beautiful picture of all, when Jesus enters into glory, he goes over all the mud of our sins, if I can speak spiritually here a moment, all the buildup of filth and junk that's so hard to remove. He goes over it all, he triumphs over it all and the Father lifts up the gates and says, "Son, come in. You no longer have to stoop. No more humiliation. Enter in." And you see, Jesus comes, the King of glory comes in in victory over all your sin. He triumphs.

So he triumphs for your interest, he opens the heavenly gates for people who have driven themselves out; for people who have banished themselves from Eden and from salvation with all their sins; for people who by nature are without God and without Christ and without hope; for people who are outcasts and outsiders by nature because of God's justice and their sins. He triumphs over all sin. That's the beauty of the Gospel. Our hope is not that we somehow make ourselves worthy to receive the Gospel, our hope is that Jesus' righteousness exceeds my unrighteousness, his beauty, his glory, his substitutionary work, his Gethsemane, Gabbatha, Golgotha, and now his resurrection and ascension and session and intercession, that's my victory, that's my hope. That is more powerful than all my sin in the Father's eyes because he's also infinite God. His infinite righteousness is greater than my finite unrighteousness.

So he continues there, he goes there, he continues there for our interest but, secondly, he remains with us. Look at Questions 47 and 48, and teaches us how he remains with us. Now I need to tell you these Questions are connected. In Reformation times and still today, to defeat the Lutheran view, you see, Luther taught as you probably know, that when Christ arose from the dead his human nature, his human nature was also ubiquitous, that is to say ubiquity means everywhere present, and Luther taught that doctrine so he could kind of still keep some of the Romish idea even though he said the bread doesn't change into the body of Jesus and the wine doesn't change into the blood of Jesus, because Jesus' body is everywhere, he's saying the bread is like eating his body and drinking the wine is like drinking his blood because his body is everywhere. Now for us to today, we're realists in our culture. It's very hard to imagine that his body is on that table, his body is here, his body is on the pulpit. I mean, it just doesn't make any sense to us. But if you understand medieval philosophy, and many of us don't, and the whole idea of nominalism and William of Ockham and all these people in the Middle Ages, you see, they would say, "Oh, that church pew there, that's not the real church pew, that's just an idea of the real church pew which is somewhere, we don't know where." But the idea that something could be everywhere in a physical way which we find absurd was not absurd in that day, and that's what Luther taught.

So Calvin and the Reformers felt that was wrong and felt Luther was catering too much to the Roman Catholic idea of transubstantiation, that the substance changes. Luther's idea actually is consubstantiation, "co" which means "together with," which means the bread remains bread but together with it, the body of Jesus is in and with and under the bread. So Calvin said, "No, no, no. This is only spiritual. When Jesus said this is my bread, this is only spiritual. We eat him spiritually by faith, not physically. We don't actually eat the body of Jesus in any way other than spiritually. We receive him by faith, spiritually."

So our forefathers wrote these two Questions, "Is not then Christ with us to the end of the world as he hath promised? Christ is very man and very God but with respect to his human nature, he is no more on earth," you could add behind it, Luther, hear us, Luther, he is no more on earth, his body, they saw it go up into heaven. In fact, then, what is the relationship of this body in his divine nature? That's Question 48 and it says "since the Godhead is illimitable," the Godhead is omnipresent everywhere, "it must necessarily follow that the Godhead is beyond the limits of the human nature he assumed and yet is nevertheless in this human nature, it remains personally united to it." Now that may seem difficult to you to grasp but what our forefathers are simply saying is this: Jesus' physical nature right now is in heaven, that's inseparable from his divine person. He's the God-man, so his divinity is not separated from that humanity but the divinity goes everywhere, whereas the humanity of Jesus is confined to one place.

So one day in heaven every believer will see him in his humanity as well as his divinity. Divinity with the eyes of faith, humanity with the eyes of sight. But you see, that raises the question then, "Oh, if that's the case, if Jesus is not physically present here with us because we are such physical people, doesn't that mean that Jesus is just far away? How can he help us all the way from the third heavens?" And of course, that's what liberals say

today and people that don't put much credence in the Bible. I actually had a college professor when I was in the religion department at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo way back in the 1970s, who already said to us in class, I'll never forget, it was shocking to me at the time because I grew up in a very sheltered environment, and he said to us in class, "The ascension and intercession of Jesus makes absolutely no sense. It's the most discomfiting doctrine imaginable that Jesus would leave. What kind of help can you get from a Savior who is far away?" That's what he said to us but, you see, that's exactly what our instructors answer here. Even though, even though with respect to his human nature he is no more on earth, with respect to his Godhead, he is present; with respect to his majesty, he is present; with respect to his grace, he is present; with respect to his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, he is at no time absent from us.

You know, Anthony Burgess one of the Puritans and Thomas Goodwin, another Puritan, they both argue in their writings that because Jesus is now, his infinite capacities, of course, in heaven, is no longer restrained by his sufferings on earth and weighted down by them, and is no longer confined as he was when he was on earth to just one place, but now in his infinite deity is ministering to people everywhere by his Spirit, that his ministry from heaven is richer than it could ever have been when he was just in one locality here on earth. In fact, Thomas Goodwin has this wonderful book called "His Beautiful Heart in Heaven toward His People on earth," and you see, that is what our instructor is aiming to grasp. He just in a nutshell in this one expression, this famous expression, his Godhead, majesty, grace and Spirit are at no time absent from us.

So if Hebrews 7:25 is true, and of course it is true, that he ever lives to make intercession for us as God of Gods and Lord of lords whom all power is given in heaven and earth, and he can say, "My Father always hears my prayers and my prayers never fall to the ground unanswered," that means his Godhead which fills all things and is everywhere present, is especially present for his people whom he loves, he being the head, they being the body, and he cannot sever his own body from his own head at any time because he loves his body, that means in his Godhead we are never separated from him for one second. He is remembering us every single moment as infinite God of Gods at the right hand of the Father if we are the children of God. His Godhead is always there with all of its riches, with all of its constancy, with all of its steadfastness, with all of its comfort, with all of its power.

And he's present with us with his majesty. Don't you love that word, his majesty? You see, when you worship Christ, you do so with adoration, with fear, with childlike fear and trembling, with holy reverent fear of the Lord. His majesty casts us at his feet, it gives us victory over all our enemies, it makes all our enemies flee. This majesty prevents us from treating Christ as if he were only a mere man. It keeps us worshipful. He's at the right hand of the Father in all his glorious, divine majesty. Not to be far away from me but so I can worship him and show him reverence. It keeps me from demeaning thoughts of God and it enables me to bring him all my petitions with confidence because he is Almighty; both great things and small things I can bring to him to his great majesty, the majestic King of glory.

And he is still present with me in his grace. His grace is still real. The favor that I have dismerited, he gives to me. It's his grace from heaven that does everything for me. From his grace, through his Spirit he calls me to salvation. He regenerates me. He justifies me. He sanctifies me. He preserves me. He brings me to glory to sing to all internally of free sovereign grace. And grace gives everything to me. "My God shall supply all your need," Philippians 4:19, "according to the riches of his grace," the riches of his grace, "in Christ Jesus." And what are those needs? Well, pardoning grace to forgive me, of course. Restoring grace to bring me back when I wander. Consoling grace to heal my broken heart. Preventing grace to keep me from sin. Accompanying grace to keep me every moment. Following grace to go with me all the way to the grave. I'm so weak, I'm so needy, I'm so dependent, I'm so sinful still with indwelling sin. I need this grace every moment from the right hand of the Father. Do you see how beautiful this doctrine is? He abides with me with his Godhead, mighty, powerful, his majesty, reverence, his grace coming so low, so close. "My grace is sufficient for you. My strength," he says, "is perfected in your weakness." Every moment, dear child of God, every moment we live by grace. Every blink of the eye we live by grace.

Then the instructor says, not only with respect to his Godhead, majesty, grace, is he at no time absent from me but with his Spirit. The Spirit he's going to pour out 10 days later on Pentecost, that Spirit by which he ministers to his church today also through ministers that are ordained by the Spirit to bring you the word of God, through his word, through other means of grace like good books, through spiritual fellowship, prayer, all kinds of spiritual disciplines, through the Holy Spirit blessing those spiritual disciplines to us, he's at no time absent from us. In fact, he puts that Spirit in you, dear child of God, to indwell you, to comfort you, to seal you, to assure you, to be your earnest, to be your down payment that is surely as the Spirit is in you working in you step by step, day by day, grace by grace, that he will never let you go. And so his grace is at no time absent from us. His Spirit is at no time absent from us. His majesty is at no time absent from us. His Godhead is at no time absent from us.

So Professor at Western Michigan University, you are entirely wrong. Actually just the opposite is the truth. We've got something far more than if we could just see Jesus once in a while walking here on this earth, we have a Savior who ministers to us from heaven in a more fulsome way, true in a way that we need to walk by faith here and not by sight, the sight will come one day, but in a richer more fuller away, the beautiful heart of Christ in heaven comes to us here on earth because he's at no time absent from us. He remains with us to help us, to comfort us, to strengthen us, to sustain us, to guide us, to protect us, to care for us, to deliver us from all our trials that seem too heavy to bear so that we may walk in liberty in him, through him, by him, for him, to him.

You know, Francis Schaeffer called his famous book, "The God Who is Always There." What a beautiful title, the God who is always there. Isn't that exactly the kind of God you need, dear people of God? And that's what Jesus is. Through his session, his sitting down at the right hand of his Father and interceding for you moment by moment, he is the God who is always there. Always there. And so too often we forget about the intercession of Christ, the session of Christ. You know, we have seven weeks normally to commemorate

his passion, his suffering, his death, and rightly so. This is cardinal. This is foundational to our salvation. But why? Why do we just have one weeknight for ascension? I can't answer that question. And then in the minds and hearts of people that ascension is so minimized that on ascension night the church doesn't look like this. Half of you stay home, more than half I think on ascension night because you don't understand, so many of you, the value, the incredible value of the ascension of Jesus Christ; that he is at no time absent from us with his Godhead, majesty, grace and Spirit.

This is huge, my friend, huge, the magnanimous Christ is coming to us in his intercession to tell us that he will keep in perfect peace those whose mind are stayed on him because we trust in him for the totality of our salvation. Unending praise be thine. Amen. Oh why? Well, Question 49, "What advantage to us is Christ's ascension into heaven?" And we get a first, second and third which summarizes what the Bible says, which summarizes what we've been saying. 1. He is our advocate, our lawyer in the presence of his Father in heaven. He's the best lawyer there is. You know, we've got a case going on in Washington right now with a whole bunch of lawyers on both sides and I think our President has 10 lawyers or maybe more now, to argue his case. Who is going to win? Who's got the best case? The whole nation is on edge. But you see, this lawyer, he can handle it all by himself and he never loses his case because he's merited himself the victory for every believer because his righteousness is greater than your unrighteousness. He cannot fail.

The Reverend says in his catechism book, "Your case cannot be too critical, child of God. However holy and strictly righteous the judge is," the Father that is, "however guilty you are, however long, however stubbornly you may have sinned even against light and better judgment, Jesus the advocate always frees you. He frees you because he's mightier than you and he has merited your salvation and he invites sinners to come to him just as he is, just as you are." So in salvation you come just as you are to a Savior who is just as he is, and because his pleadings is a holy demanding of that which he himself has merited, you cannot be condemned when you cast yourself as a poor needy sinner upon Jesus.

That's what Romans 8:34 says, "Who is he that condemneth?" Who's going to condemn you? And your answer is going to be, of course, "Well, it's me. It's my conscience. It's the law of God. It's my sin. It's my shortcomings. I don't have enough of this. I don't pray enough. I don't do this enough. I don't do that." You've got a whole litany of reasons why you'll be condemned but Paul's answer is just this, "It is Christ who died, yea rather, is risen again. Yea rather, who has ascended into heaven. Yea rather, who is interceding for you moment by moment on the basis of his own merits so he will get the victory and he will free you from all the tyranny of all the enemies: the world, self, Satan, flesh, indwelling sin." The answer is Christ. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who delivers you. He's your lawyer but he's more than your lawyer, he's the one who has merited your freedom. He does everything. There's nothing more for you to do but to receive what he's done.

So what he does is he shows you also in a sermon like this, that salvation is completely in him so that he binds you to his throne of grace so you'll come to the throne of grace with

your intercessory petitions, to an intercessory high priest who prays for you and you find all your relief and all your strength and all your comfort in him. Then when you feel burdened, when you feel prayerless, when you feel you can hardly pray, well, you see, then you just go to him and say, "Lord Jesus, I'm so overwhelmed, I cannot even pray. Do thou pray for me." And he will never refuse that cry either. I know there have been times in my life, maybe yours as well, where I couldn't get beyond the word Lord. I was so needy I just couldn't even, all I could do is say, "Lord, Lord, help. Pray for me. I can't even pray. Pray for me." He lives to do that. You see, that's the beauty, that's the beauty of his intercession. He is our advocate. He's our lawyer in heaven. He will keep us. He will keep the feet of his saints always.

Secondly, he is the sure pledge in heaven of our blessed resurrection, the instructor says. You see, what Paul is saying in Romans 8, what the instructor is saying here in between the lines is saying, even though our feet are still walking on earth, really by faith it's almost as if we're in heaven sitting in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, Paul puts it, because our heart is there, our home is there, our future is there and Christ is there. So we are just renters here. We're just going through Vanity Fair here. We have our eye on it eternally and on glory and the fact that our Savior is there in heaven in our flesh, that flesh has made it into heaven, perfect flesh, and that he's merited everything to sanctify us so that when we arise from the grave one day, we will have perfect flesh, we'll be the perfect man, perfect soul, perfect body, we will be able to enter into heaven to be with him forever where he is.

So his resurrection and ascension into heaven is a pledge, more than a pledge, a guarantee of our blessed resurrection and our ascension into heaven. Does that amaze you? It amazes me. My flesh in heaven? Yes. How is it possible? Who is he that condemneth? All my flesh can do, just condemns me. No, no, it is Christ, it is Christ who died, yea rather has risen, yea rather, has ascended into heaven, yea rather, is interceding for me, and he's there in my flesh, and when the Father sees his blood, that blood is more powerful than anything I could ever do against God or against Christ. His real human nature which he took into the highest of heavens is a tremendous encouragement for me. It's an incentive. It's a source of strength and joy. And so I believe him when he says, "Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." What a wonder to be in the company of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and the souls and bodies of the redeemed and the righteous made perfect, and the holy angels, and I too among them in soul and body perfected all because of a Savior who not only died for me but who lived for me and kept me safe all my lifetime. No wonder Peter begins his epistle after the introductory remarks, "We are kept. We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

Then thirdly, our instructor concludes the sender of the Spirit. The sender of the Spirit. He sends us his Spirit as an earnest, with his power we seek the things which are to come, things that are above. You see, the Holy Spirit is the gift of Christ, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, that is, he is inseparable from Jesus. And so this is our encouragement,

this is our strength, this is our hope. Jesus says, "I will pray the Father and he shall give you another Comforter that he may abide with you forever."

So what's the role of the Holy Spirit in us? The major role is to take the things of Jesus, the Christ who died, has risen, ascended, interceding, and to reveal him to us which is exactly what I'm trying to do with you this morning, and I pray that you take this sermon seriously. This is how you live the Christian life, out of Jesus by the Spirit. And so you have an advocate in your own soul, the Holy Spirit, and you have another advocate in heaven, one that one old Puritan said, God's people are so rich they've got two lawyers representing them, they've got one in their own conscience which when their conscience acts up and says, "Yeah, but I can't be saved or I'm too much this or I'm too much that, or I'm not enough this or I'm not enough that," the Holy Spirit assures you that you're a child of God because he has put in you a hunger and thirst after righteousness. He's put in you a spirit of mourning over sin and knowing your sin, and a spirit of hungering after Christ and you can't deny that. So he co-witnesses with your conscience that you are a child of God. He wins the case in you even as Christ wins the case for you in heaven's courts. So you've got two great lawyers who will protect you on both ends, this is Thomas Goodwin. So you can't lose your case because you're in Christ and Christ sends you his Spirit to comfort you with that fact and to show him the things of himself by the Spirit.

So what should we learn from this? Well, we should learn three things. We should learn as I close, number one, that our flesh shall die and we shall all meet the ascended Christ on that great day, and if we are in him, all is well, but if we are not in him, if we try to go to heaven some other way than Jesus, we will perish forever. You must know Jesus Christ savingly and put all your trust in him and repent at his feet. There is no other way to salvation than Jesus. Who is he that condemneth? It's Christ who died, is risen again, ascended into heaven, interceding for you. It's all Christ.

And secondly, if this is all true as the Bible says it is, "Seek things which are above where Christ sits on the right hand of the Father." Stop living for this world. Stop loving this world. Live for your eternal home. Let your life be a life of preparation to meet your Maker and your Creator in the righteousness and peace of Christ.

And finally, thirdly, the third conclusion, last conclusion, if this is all true, nothing, nothing will separate you from Jesus Christ ever. Ever. That's the conclusion of Romans 8. Because you won't be condemned because of Jesus, therefore I'm persuaded, and then Paul gives you four couplets here, they're beautiful, "neither death, nor life," oh, death is separating, it's going to separate. No, no, says Paul. Death will just roll you into the presence of the King of kings like a wheelchair, where wheelchairs are needed no more and you will be with him forever. Oh, but life will separate, all the trials of life. I've got troubles in my marriage. I've got troubles in my family. I've got troubles. I've got so many troubles at work. No, no, no, what did those troubles do? They drive you to Christ.

Neither death nor life shall separate me, nor shall angels, principalities or powers. He means to say the angels even if they would try to separate you, of course they won't, they couldn't even do it because Christ is Almighty. And the devils can't do it, the

principalities and powers, the devils can't do it because Christ is mightier than the devils. Nor things present. All the burdens you have right now. Or things to come. All the things you fear. The cancer you fear. The heart attack you fear. Nothing can separate you. Neither height nor depth. Not the greatest joys of life so that you become self-centered. No, no, God will humble you. Not the greatest depths. Martin Luther said no matter how deep we are in the pit of affliction and sorrow and depression, he said, our Lord can come underneath us and will come underneath us because he went below our lowest. Nor any other creature. Nothing shall be able, the word "able" there means "equipped" in Greek, nothing's equipped, nothing's mighty enough to take on Christ. He's equipped so that nothing shall separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, that overflowing love, that ever-flowing love, that out-gushing love, that eternal love. Nothing shall separate you from that love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Treasure the ascension of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious God, please, please bless this sermon and give thy people just tremendous comfort from thinking of how all comprehensive Christ's ascension and intercession are. But also, Lord, arrest those who are trying to rest on any other foundations than Jesus, help them to flee from it all as dung and to fly to Christ for hope and for help and for salvation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.