

Jesus Ascended: Who Cares?

Acts 1:9-11

BI: The Ascension of Jesus to the Father's right hand sets in motion all that the cross and resurrection promised to those who believe.

Introduction:

Read Acts 1:1-11

Today is Resurrection Day. The world calls it Easter but we know that the only reason this day is celebrated every year is because something earthshattering happened 2,100 years ago that has left a permanent and undeniable mark on humanity; namely, that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. But why is the resurrection so significant. If you are a Christian you believe that after Jesus died on the cross God raised Him from the dead. But if I were to ask you why that matters, what would you say?

Some might say the resurrection matters because it proves that God can raise us from the dead. Others might answer that the resurrection is important because it shows that Jesus really was God in flesh. Certainly, both of these statements are true. But let's take just a few minutes to think through some theological reasons why the resurrection of Jesus is profoundly significant.

Let's start by asking why Jesus came to earth. Why did He come? He came "to seek and to save" the lost. In John 3:17 He declares that He did not come into the world to condemn the world but that through Him the world might be saved. So Jesus came to save us.

Now let's take the next step: From what did Jesus come to save us? And of course the answer is He came to save us from our sin; or (more precisely), He came to save us from the just and righteous penalty or our sin; or, He came to save us from the holy and necessary wrath of God. And what is the penalty for sin? Death. And how do you know? Because the word of God declares that "The wages of sin is... death" (Rom. 6:23).

The next logical question is, how did Jesus save us from death? Now, if you went to Sunday School for any length of time you would say, "He died on the cross for our sins." And that is correct. But where does the resurrection come in? Was the resurrection essential for our salvation? The answer is, yes. Let me explain one reason why.

As Bruce Ware summarizes, "*Sin presents us with a penalty we cannot pay and a power we cannot overcome.*"¹ (Say that with me). Now, what is the penalty and what is the power? Well, we have already said that the penalty for sin is... (what, class?) "death." But what is the power of sin? Consider this: when you are tempted to sin (greed, lust,

¹ Bruce Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, (2013) Crossway (131).

pride, anger, lying, etc) you have the capacity to fight back. And as a Child of God you have the power to fight back. But there is a facet of sin's power that we cannot conquer; namely, death.² You can take all the dietary supplements in the world; you can work out at the gym every day; you can do everything your Dr. prescribes, but in the end we all succumb to death. Death is both a penalty and a power.

Now let's think about what Jesus did for us. First, He died on the cross to satisfy the penalty of our sin. Paul says, "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus paid the death penalty on our behalf by dying on the cross in our place. That earth-shattering act of grace was so explosive it wiped out half of sin's power. But there was still an aspect of sin's power that needed to be addressed.

Think about it: if Jesus had died on the cross and stayed dead then we should conclude that the penalty of sin is still being paid; that Jesus is suffering forever in our place as a perpetual sacrifice and that sin's power has only been partially broken. But as magnificent as that was, it would not have been enough to save us. The only way to break the power of sin was for Jesus to somehow *NOT* stay dead. And so, early in the morning three days after Jesus had been laid in the tomb, there was a great earthquake, and the rocks split, and angels appeared, and the stone rolled away and Jesus was gone! And then for 40 days he kept appearing and reappearing to his disciples and hundreds of other people. He talked with them. He ate with them. He showed them the scars in his hands and side. And by so doing He demonstrated to the world that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! Hallelujah! The world has never been the same since that day.

Beloved this was the most spectacular moment in human history! Sin's penalty was canceled on the cross and sin's power was broken at the resurrection. So the prophetic saying is true: "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY." And the glorious result is that Sinners can now be fully reconciled to God and eternal life is offered to all who will believe! Beloved: Christ is RISEN! He is risen indeed!

However, as spectacular as the resurrection was, it is not what this sermon is about.

What I want to talk to you about is another event in the story of redemption that is arguably just as significant as the resurrection but one that we Christians rarely, if ever, talk about. How many of you have ever heard a sermon on the Ascension of Jesus Christ? Well, today you're only going to hear half a sermon on the subject, but I think for many of us the prevailing attitude is, "Resurrection! Praise the Lord!" But "Ascension? Who cares?"

² I realize that Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:56 that the "power of sin is the law" but the phrase before that is "the sting of [or stinger of, or the weapon that brings about] death is sin. It seems the progression of Paul's thought here is that the Law empowers sin and sin is the dagger (or stinger) that kills us.

Yesterday I spent the better part of the day working in the yard. I pulled out the remnants of our fall crop. Fertilized and tilled the soil. Chopped out a section of grass in the yard for another box garden. Built the wooden box for it. Shopped for and planted new spring vegetables. And then cleaned up the whole mess (with a lot of help from my gardening partner, miss Maddy). And by early afternoon I was tired, sweaty, hungry, and every joint and muscle in my body hurt. So I went inside, took a couple pain killers, got a glass of ice water, laid down for a nap and though, "I'm sure glad that's over with."

Perhaps many of us have a similar picture in our minds when we think of the ascension. After 33 years of hard work, Jesus gets into the invisible elevator, zooms back up to his house in heaven, asked an angel to get him a glass of water and said, "Boy, am I glad that's over with." And then rewarded Himself with well-deserved nap for the next 2,100 years or so. But this is far, far, far from the truth.

Beloved, the resurrection is magnificent to be sure. But the ascension of Jesus Christ is just as earthshattering as the resurrection ever was. Please turn in your bibles with me to Phil. 2:6-11 (Read).

Here we see a snap shot of the entirety of Jesus' work of redemption. Theologians typically divide all of this into two categories: Jesus Humiliation and His Exaltation. Jesus humbled Himself to become a real man. He humbled Himself further as a servant of men. He humbled himself further by allowing Himself to be rejected. And then He humbled Himself ultimately by letting men put Him to death. That's His humiliation. But immediately after his death, God began exalting Him.

In fulfillment of Isa. 53, He was laid in the tomb of a rich man. Here his exaltation begins. Then He rises from the dead and His people worship Him. His exaltation continues when He ascends and takes His seat on the eternal throne at the right hand of His father. He is given the name of highest authority. Finally, He will be ultimately exalted when every knee bows in heaven and earth and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord! This is Jesus' exaltation. And that final day, beloved, will be magnificent beyond description. And by God's grace we will be there among those who willingly bow. But what about today? Do you realize what Jesus' exaltation provides for us today?

If I were to ask you, "What does the ascension and exaltation of Jesus Christ mean for us today?" what would you say? Here's what we should say: Jesus' exaltation means *everything* to us today! Why? Because all the benefits we enjoy as a result of Jesus' death and resurrection, and all the resources we need for life and godliness come to us through the active ministry of the exalted Christ. When Jesus finally got home after His 33 years of hard labor on earth, He sat down, but He didn't take a nap! He has been actively working on our behalf ever since!

(Jesus as King):

Think about it: When Jesus arrived in heaven He arrived as the great and long-expected King. Let me read for you what Charles Spurgeon preached about Jesus returning home as King from Psalm 24:

Can you imagine the mighty Christ coming to the doors of heaven—the man Christ Jesus? As he approached the doors where no man had ever walked, the angels peer over the walls and He cries out as the Psalmist says, “Lift up your heads O ancient gates that the King of Glory may come in.” And the angels respond back with shocked voices, “Who is this King of Glory?” And I would say that they said, “Who is this man who yells at these doors? Who dares lay his hands to the latch of these gates?” And the mighty Christ yells back, “It is I, the King of Glory! Open up ye ancient gates!” And they open up, and He is standing before the Father. He walks up to the throne and takes His seat. He doesn’t even have to ask for permission. It’s rightfully His. The Father looks over at the Son and says, “It is finished.” And the Son looks at the Father: “It is finished indeed.” According to the book of Daniel, Christ, the mighty Messiah, is presented before the Ancient of Days, and basically the same thing is told to Him: “Except at your word, Son, not one finger will be lifted or put down in all the universe, except at your word.”³

You see, beloved, Jesus Christ is not just the risen Lord. Jesus Christ is King of the universe! Speaking of Jesus, the author of Hebrews writes (1:3), “And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...” In other words, He took His rightful place of ultimate authority as King.

Remember what He said to His disciples when He gave them their great commission to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations? He began His commission by saying ““All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...” (Matt. 28:19). And when Peter talks about this He says (1 Pet. 3:22) Jesus “is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.”

You see beloved, because Jesus ascended back into heaven He now sits on His glorious throne sovereignly ruling over everything that transpires in the universe. That’s why Paul can say, “God *causes* all things to work together for those who love God, those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). How can He say such a thing? Because Jesus Christ the King has ascended to His throne and is actively governing the universe in such a way that will bring God the greatest glory and you the greatest good.

(Jesus as Prophet):

Not only did Jesus ascend to be King, but when He returned heaven he assumed the role of the eternal Prophet. As Louis Berkhof explains:⁴ In heaven Jesus also assumed a

³ Adapted from Spurgeon’s *Treasury of David*, <http://www.spurgeon.org/treasury/ps024.htm>

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: A Combined Edition*, (1996) Wm. B. Eerdmans, (353).

prophetic work through the Holy Spirit. You will remember in John 16:7 Jesus said, *“But 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.”*

Do you realize all the benefits that you receive from the Holy Spirit now that you belong to Christ? The only reason you have any it is because Jesus ascended into heaven. As the Prophet-King He sent the HS to guide us into all truth; to remind the apostles of all that He had taught them. The inspiration of Scripture came as a direct ministry of the Spirit. And He has made the church “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). More than that, Jesus illuminates our hearts and minds with the truth by the ministry of God’s spirit.

Do you benefit from the word of God when you read it each morning? Does the HS teach you and change you through the ministry of the word of God? My friend, that is not natural. It comes to you by Jesus’ active Prophetic ministry through the HS. Having ascended into heaven, Jesus is the eternal King, and He is also the heavenly prophet actively working to lead, guide, protect, convict, and change you by His holy word. But there is more.

(Jesus is Priest)

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He not only assumed the role of eternal King and Prophet, He also actively serves us as our heavenly High Priest. The author of Hebrews writes (Heb. 6:19-20), *“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, ²⁰ where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

When on the cross Jesus said, “It is finished,” He did not mean to say that His high-priestly work was at an end, but only that His active suffering on our behalf has reached its intended conclusion. Today Christ is constantly presenting his completed sacrifice to the Father as the basis of the pardoning grace of God.⁵ Because of this active work of Jesus our high priest, no one can successfully accuse us before the Father.

Satan may be the accuser, but none of his accusations have any merit before God because Jesus Christ “always lives to make intercession for us” (Heb. 7:25). So Paul is able to write (Rom. 8:33-34), *“Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.”*

You see, beloved, all of the benefits we receive from God today come to us as a direct result of Jesus’ active ministry in heaven on our behalf. Praise God that He didn’t go home and take a nap! Today He is busy ruling and serving as our great Prophet, Priest, and King.

And all God’s people said: AMEN!

⁵ Berkhof, (353)

