

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

He Ascended And Sitteth

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Acts 1:6-11

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you I would love for you to open it now to Acts 1:6-11. We are returning to our series on the Apostles' Creed and we are looking at the line that says:

“He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty”.

We're talking of course about the doctrine of Christ's ascension and session – “session” is an old theological term that refers to the fact that Jesus is SITTING now at the right hand of God Almighty.

As I mentioned a few weeks ago, modern day evangelicals tend to ZOOM IN on the cross and the resurrection and we tend to say almost nothing about the Virgin Birth or Christ's perfect obedience or his descent or his ascension or his session and present intercession on our behalf – but all of those things matter! They are all connected to the FACT of our salvation. So we're going to look at that today. We're going to look at the narrative of Christ's ascension and talk about what it means and how it should AFFECT US as men and women of faith. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

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.” (Acts 1:6–11 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

First of all then, what does this doctrine MEAN? The Bible says that Jesus went up into heaven – that he ascended in a physical body and in that body ENTERED the presence of Almighty God – but why does that matter? What does it mean? Well, I think the first thing it must mean is that:

What Does It Mean?

1. It means that human beings are now welcome in the presence of the Lord

And that’s a rather significant development because ever since the FALL human beings have NOT generally been welcome in the Presence of the Lord. The conclusion to the fall narrative contains some of the most sombre words in Holy Scripture:

“the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Genesis 3:23–24 ESV)

He drove him out and he barred the way back. So after Genesis 3 human beings are explicitly NOT WELCOME in the presence of Almighty God. People are sinful and God is holy and those things simply cannot mix. Like bleach and ammonia – when those things come together – people die. And so for our own safety we were BARRED from the presence of the Lord.

But of course the story of the Old Testament is really the story about how God – very narrowly at first – and very carefully throughout – slowly but surely began to bring people back. He opened a tiny portal through the tabernacle and then he widened it a little bit more in terms of the temple and then through the cross of Jesus Christ – he TORE THE VEIL IN TWO and threw the DOORS WIDE OPEN and now all may return through the GATE and through the PORTAL that is Christ - praise the Lord!

So that's the movement of the Bible – but to NON-BIBLE READERS – that movement came as something of a surprise. The Greek and Roman hearers of the Gospel in particular STRUGGLED with the idea that HUMAN BEINGS – IN HUMAN BODIES - would be WELCOMED into the presence of God. That seemed crazy to them! Ben Myers says here:

“The dualistic sects of the second century had a distaste for some parts of the Gospel tradition, including the stories of Christ’s ascension. Marcion’s edited version of the Gospel of Luke had omitted both the birth narrative and the ascension. This was because Marcion imagined a spiritual, disembodied savior, and he forced the Scriptures to conform to that vision.”¹

We’ve talked about this before. It wasn’t the DIVINITY of Jesus that the Greeks and Romans struggled with – it was his humanity. Human beings stank. Human beings got sick. Human beings were animals. So the Greeks and the Romans STRUGGLED AT THE MARGINS of the Gospel story. They struggled with the incarnation and they struggled with the ascension. That God became a MAN – in a STINKING HUMAN BODY – seemed impossible! That he TOOK THAT BODY back up into heaven seemed like MADNESS!

But he did and so it matters. It means something. It says something. And what it says is that human beings can come home. Through Christ – covered in the blood – entering through the gate – they can come home.

Jesus promised that. He said:

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.² In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to

¹ Ben Myers, *The Apostles’ Creed: A Guide To The Ancient Catechism*, (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018), 87.

prepare a place for you?³ And 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.” (John 14:1–3 ESV)

Hear that again: That where I am you may be also.

Can you say amen to that?

That where I am you may be also!!!

That is the Gospel! And we know it is true because Jesus ascended AS A HUMAN BEING IN A HUMAN BODY UP INTO THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD – thanks be to God!

Secondly, the fact that Jesus ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty MEANS:

2. It means that Jesus has already begun to rule

Turn in your Bibles quickly to Ephesians 1:20. In Ephesians 1:20-23 Paul provides some extended commentary on the doctrine of Christ’s ascension. Listen to what he says in verses 20-21. He says:

“he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.” (Ephesians 1:20–21 ESV)

Ben Myers again is helpful here, he says:

“His ascent “to the right hand of the Father” is his public enthronement over all worldly powers.”²

² Ben Myers, *The Apostles’ Creed: A Guide To The Ancient Catechism*, (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018), 88.

God gave him the HIGHEST THRONE. He seated him FAR ABOVE all rule and authority, power and dominion IN THIS AGE AND in THE AGE TO COME. So Jesus IS IN CHARGE NOW and Jesus will be in charge FOREVER! Praise the Lord!

Now sometimes Christians get confused on this point because we talk about – and we sing about – the FUTURE rule of Jesus over all things. For example, in the final verse of “All Creatures Of Our God And King” we sing:

He shall **return** in pow’r to reign
Heaven and earth will join to say
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Then who shall fall on bended knee?
All creatures of our God and King
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!³

So which is it? Is Jesus reigning NOW or will Jesus be reigning THEN?

The answer of course is BOTH! Al Mohler puts it this way, he says:

“The church lives in the “already-but-not-yet” reality of the kingdom. The ministry of Jesus and his ascension to the throne of heaven inaugurated the new eternal reign of Christ’s kingdom and established the new covenant. This new kingdom, however, has not yet fully come into realization.”⁴

Perhaps it would be helpful to visualize this. Imagine a giant, tangible, physical throne with Christ sitting upon it. Imagine it coming toward our atmosphere and actually, pressing through our atmosphere, just a little bit and then stopping. According to the bible, that’s how things currently stand. Christ is on the throne. All enemies of his reign have been defeated. His kingdom has come and is coming. Nevertheless, there is a strange PAUSE that Peter tells us is due ONLY to the patience and mercy of the Lord. God wants to give people the opportunity to SUBMIT to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. So the HERALDS of Christ’s victory have been sent out to make that known – and once that news has been broadly PUBLISHED – then the end will come. And according to the Bible, it will come with a THUD. It will land like a meteor from heaven upon all

³ <https://sovereigngracemusic.org/music/songs/all-creatures-of-our-god-and-king/>

⁴ R. Albert Mohler, *The Apostles’ Creed: Discovering Authentic Christianity In An Age Of Counterfeits*, (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019), 112-113.

human kingdoms and authority and scatter them like dust in the wind. And arising from that cataclysm will be a kingdom that shall fill the earth as waters cover the sea and that shall bring renewal and prosperity to all those who looked for it in faith – world without end.

So Jesus is SEATED – he is ENTHRONED – HE REIGNS and he WILL REIGN over all things to the glory of the Father forever. Thanks be to God!

Thirdly, because Jesus has ascended and because he has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God he may now pour out the Holy Spirit upon the church.

3. It means that Jesus may now pour out the Holy Spirit upon the church

Jesus said that this would be much to our advantage. His disciples wanted him to stay with them on the earth forever, but Jesus said:

“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.” (John 16:7 ESV)

So again – go back to our MASSIVE, DESCENDING THRONE imagery, Jesus is saying that when he ascends his throne he will begin to pour out the Holy Spirit. Like the river of water coming from the threshold of the temple in Ezekiel 47 this steady flow of the Spirit will slowly but surely bring dead things back to life. All over the world POCKETS of revival and renewal will spring up like flowers in the desert after a heavy rain – salt waters will become fresh, dry bones will rise again – the world will come back to life in advance of the coming of her King.

That’s the general idea but look again at Ephesians 1. In verses 22-23 Paul says:

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:22–23 ESV)

The fullness of him who FILLS ALL in ALL.

What an interesting phrase.

So Paul seems to be saying that Jesus is now the GO BETWEEN or the CONDUIT through which the BLESSINGS OF HEAVEN may now be released upon the earth. But he doesn't SPRAY THE BLESSINGS out generally he releases them through his BODY – that is, the CHURCH.

Are you seeing that?

Every local church that is truly connected to Christ is like a little sprinkler head releasing life giving grace and Spirit into their surrounding communities. We are spreading the WORD and SHINING THE LIGHT – in the power of the Holy Spirit – so as to PREPARE PEOPLE FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD!

That's the idea – can you picture that?

From his throne in heaven – parked as it is on the outer fringes of the atmosphere – ready to descend the final 10000 km at any second – Jesus is pouring out his Spirit, empowering and enabling his ambassadors and agents to spread the news of his coming and to prepare people to welcome him with open arms. Because Jesus has ascended and because Jesus is SEATED at the right hand of the throne of God he CAN DO THAT and he IS DOING THAT – praise the Lord!

Alright, fourthly, the fact that Jesus has ascended and has taken his seat at the right hand of Almighty God:

4. It means that believers have an advocate before the Father

This doctrine is taught in several places in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul in Romans 8 says:

Who is to condemn? 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. (Romans 8:34 ESV)

Isn't that a marvellous passage? The Apostle Paul pictures a court room. God the Father is on the bench and the ascended Christ is our appointed advocate. He holds our case file in his nail pierced hands. The devil comes in – the accuser of the brethren – and he sees that our case has been handed to Jesus Christ and he turns on his heel and RUNS!

Who is there to condemn?

Who will bring a charge against Christ's elect?

It is GOD in CHRIST who justifies! Praise the Lord!

So our standing is sure – we have an ADVOCATE before the Father.

The Apostle to the Hebrews brings out another dimension of this wonderful ministry. He makes use of the Old Testament High Priestly imagery, saying:

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:23–25 ESV)

Of course in Leviticus we remember that the High Priest had 12 gemstones sewn into his tunic representing the 12 tribes of Israel so every time he went into the presence of God – he carried the concerns of God's people. But how well did he really know those people? He would learn; he would get to know them but then he would die and some new high priest would have to begin that process all over again – and the Apostle to the Hebrews says – our High Priest doesn't go through all of that – our High Priest EVER LIVES to make intercession for his people. There is continuity there – there is intimacy there – there is stability there. Jesus knows us. He knows us and he loves us and he continually represents us as we lift up our prayers and petitions to the Lord – hallelujah!

Lastly then, the fact that Jesus has ascended into heaven and taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God means:

5. It means that your eternal life has already begun

Turn in your Bibles now to Ephesians 2:4-6. The ascension of Christ features prominently in the first two chapters of Ephesians, here Paul says:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him **and seated us with him** in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4–6 ESV)

Are you hearing that?

According to the Bible, if we are united with Christ in his death, then we are united with him in his resurrection AND we are united with him in his ascension and enthronement. God has SEATED US WITH HIM in the heavenly places.

So – let's go back to our imagery of the THRONE. Imagine the throne of Jesus PARKED as it were on the upper atmosphere of this planet. It is READY TO DESCEND but it does not yet fully DESCEND because of the patience and mercy of Almighty God. But Jesus is on that throne and Jesus has already begun to REIGN – will you say amen to that? Amen!

Now zoom in on that picture. Zoom right in on the person of Jesus sitting on that throne on the atmospheric boundary between space and planet earth. What do you see? According to Ephesians 2:4-6 what you SHOULD SEE is a bunch of tiny little people sitting BESIDE JESUS. If you zoom in real tight you should see YOUR OWN FACE because according to this passage YOU HAVE BEEN SEATED with HIM in the heavenly places.

Am I reading that wrong?

I don't think so. Paul says in Colossians 3:3-4 says:

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:3–4 ESV)

So according to the Apostle Paul – if you have been united with Jesus in his death – then your life is now PART OF HIS LIFE. You go where he goes. You sit where he sits. And when he comes in GLORY – you TOO will appear with him in GLORY – hallelujah!

You did know that you were going to reign with Christ – didn't you?

Revelation 3:21 says:

“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.” (Revelation 3:21 ESV)

Are you hearing that church?

That's Jesus saying that all true believers will share his throne and rule over all things to the glory of their heavenly Father forever. In fact, in some sense, you are there already. You are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places – thanks be to God!

Now, in the time that we have left I want to talk about how this doctrine should AFFECT US. It should affect us. Everything that is TRUE should be integrated into our thoughts, feelings, plans and intentions as believers – should it not?

So because this is a new doctrine for many of us – I want to spend a few minutes making sure that we wedge it into all the places that it needs to go.

How Should This Doctrine Affect Us?

First of all, and most immediately in terms of our primary text, our understanding of the doctrine of the ascension should serve to redirect our FOCUS.

1. It should redirect out focus

At the start of this story the disciples were focused entirely in the wrong direction. Acts 1:6-8 says:

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.” (Acts 1:6–9 ESV)

The Kingdom of Israel doesn't matter anymore – no earthly kingdom matters anymore – don't you understand what is happening, Jesus says? I am about to take my seat on the Throne of Heaven! That throne will descend to this earth like a stone cut by no human hand and at its coming all the kingdoms of this earth will be SHATTERED, so stop talking about earthly kingdoms! You are a herald now of the heavenly kingdom.

That's quite a re-direct isn't it? And it's one that the disciples of Jesus seem to require in every generation. Bradford Littlejohn says here:

“Perhaps the greatest error of evangelicalism in the past generation has been the temptation to think that more could be achieved through politics than was realistic, and sometimes that more must be achieved through politics than was appropriate.”⁵

The disciples of Jesus have a tendency to lose the plot. We were sent out as HERALDS of a coming kingdom – and therefore we are not to get over involved in the affairs of the current kingdom. Jesus said to give Caesar his due – but we are not to put our hope in Caesar nor are we to waste our time overthrowing Caesar. Caesar will be crushed by the coming of the CHRIST – so you should evangelize Caesar and all his subjects too. That is the job that we were given and the doctrine of Christ's ascension and session ought to remind us of its primacy.

Secondly the doctrine of the ascension and session of Jesus Christ should increase our urgency.

⁵ Littlejohn, 86.

2. It should increase our urgency

One certainly gets the impression that the only thing holding up the return of Christ is our DELAY in proclaiming the victory of Christ to all the nations. Jesus seemed to say that very thing in Matthew 24:14:

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14 ESV)

Well then, I say – LET’S GET TO IT – because I am about DONE with the kingdoms of this world – will you say amen to that?

So let’s get to it!

Let’s stop trying to win political wars on Facebook and let’s start using every weapon in our arsenal - INCLUDING FACEBOOK - to reach our friends and loved ones with the GOSPEL!

I have been amazed at how many Christians have been undermining their own Gospel witness over the last 13 months in order to win petty arguments over vaccines, or masks or lockdown policies – listen friends – all of that will be reduced to dust at the coming of Jesus Christ - so let’s get our focus off of temporal matters and onto matters of ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE – does that make sense? You are a herald of the coming kingdom - so you can’t afford to get caught up in every bar room brawl that you pass by down here on earth. You’re on a mission! You have a message! So speak your piece, publish your news – and move on! We’ve got a world to reach and a victory to announce to the nations.

Thirdly, and lastly the doctrine of the ascension and session of Christ:

3. It should embolden our prayers

In John 16 Jesus is talking about how he will go away and then he’ll come back – and he’s talking about how his disciples will be sad and then very happy! He is talking about how his

death, resurrection and ascension will change EVERYTHING for his disciples, particularly when it comes to their experience of prayer. He says in verses 23-24:

In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. (John 16:23–24 ESV)

Now that first part is a bit tricky. He says that in that day you will ask nothing OF ME but will rather ask the Father for things IN MY NAME. Are you seeing that shift? When Jesus was with the disciples PHYSICALLY, if they had a question, they asked him. If they had a need, they asked him. But after Christ's ascension and session – they will ask things of the Father THROUGH HIM – and Jesus says, that's going to change everything!

Think of it this way – imagine that every time you pray your prayer is like a letter that Jesus HAND DELIVERS to Almighty God. He slides it onto the Father's desk and he says: "This one is from a dear friend of mine. I'd love for you to give it your full attention."

That's what it means to pray in Jesus' name!

That's what it means to have Jesus as your intercessor in heaven! So if it MEANS that then we should USE THAT. Jesus tells us to do that! He says:

"Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." (John 16:24 ESV)

God wants to give you the Kingdom. He wants to see your kids converted. He wants to see your friends converted – he wants to see your enemies converted! And he wants to see you looking like Christ, following Christ and proclaiming Christ to all the nations – so PRAY ABOUT THAT! Ask and you will receive – that your joy may be full – and that the earth may be full of the knowledge and the worship of the Lord.

That's where this is going and that is how the Lord has ordained to fill all things - thanks be to God. Let's pray together.