

The Importance of Jesus' Ascension

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It's always a privilege for us to study the word of God together, for us as sinful creatures to be able to open and hear the true word of the one true God is a blessing beyond compare and I trust that you don't take that for granted in your life, whether it's to open a Bible in the privacy of your own home or to gather together with the people of God week by week. This is a great blessing. This is a great privilege that we have to be able to look into the Scriptures and to find truth and to have the truth speak to our hearts. So we are always very grateful week by week to be able to open God's word today and this is no exception here this morning.

For those of you that are visiting or perhaps haven't been with us for a while, we have been teaching verse-by-verse through the book of Ephesians in the New Testament, the letter from the Apostle Paul written somewhere around 60 A.D. and last week we looked at a verse in Ephesians 4:8 which spoke about the ascension of Christ. It says that he was raised to the right hand of God and he gave gifts to men. Look at Ephesians 4:8 with me just to kind of help set the context and to remind you of where we were at last week when we gathered together. Ephesians 4:8, it says that, "When Christ ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men." We said that that verse teaches us that our Lord is a generous victor. He has ascended at the right hand of God as a victor over sin and Satan and death and from that position, he has given gifts to his people and we talked about that last time.

The ascension is a wonderful biblical truth. The teaching that after his resurrection from the dead which was a miracle in and of itself, Christ was bodily ascended into heaven after his resurrection. Look over at the book of Acts 1:9. Some of this is by way of review. Acts 1:9, where it gives the historical account of the ascension. Acts 1:9, where it says that, "After Jesus had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Contrary to the established law of gravity, Jesus bodily ascended through the air and went to heaven, having finished his ministry and his work on earth.

This morning I want to linger over the truth of the ascension and take you through a little bit of a, kind of a biblical survey, you might say, of the doctrine of the ascension and what the implications are. What the importance is of the ascension. There is really not a single passage of Scripture that expounds on the importance of the ascension and so you kind of gather together information and truth from different passages to kind of put the

picture together. But what you find when you study the ascension, when you look at it closely, is you start to realize that the doctrine of the ascension is one of the central truths about biblical Christianity. If you are to know the Lord Jesus Christ, it seems obvious and logical that you want to know, "Well, where is he now and how did he get there and what does it mean that he is ascended into heaven?" This has immediate, present implications and application for our lives that our Savior is at the right hand of God where he reigns over all. So we want to see this and think through it and see what Scripture has to say about it. I rather suspect that if you've never really studied the ascension at all, you're going to be astonished at how greatly significant it is to the whole truth of Christianity and to the Christian life and our hope, our confidence, our peace about the future is all intimately woven around and woven through the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is ascended to the right hand of God in heaven and we will see that as we go through our time here this morning. So we're going to linger over the ascension for a week before we probably get back to Ephesians next week.

Now, just by one little word of introduction to kind of define terms a little bit, I want to help you distinguish in your mind between what theologians call the ascension of Christ where he bodily rose into heaven, that's what we saw last week, and what is sometimes called the session of Christ. The session of Christ is simply a word that theologians use to indicate that he has sat down at the right hand of God. That he is now in heaven having completed his earthly work until he rises to return in his glorious second coming. So there is the ascension that took him up to heaven and there is the session that he is doing right now as he intercedes for us in his mediatorial role at the right hand of the Father. This is where he reigns.

Now today, that's all I'm going to say about those terms. We're going to use the word ascension this morning to cover both aspects of his exaltation just for the ease of reference. The main point for you to see here as we start to dive into this is that Christ has ascended to the right hand of God. He reigns over all in power from that position and he is greatly exalted. When we talk about the Lord Jesus Christ, sometimes we have been conditioned to think of him in far too casual of a way. To not fear him. To not revere him for his exalted position of authority. We rightly appreciate the intimacy that we have with Christ but we need to see him in all of his fullness if we are going to rightly relate to him and understand who that he is and the ascension will give us a good corrective for this.

It's interesting, when you read sermons about the ascension, there is a pattern of preachers to say, "Very little is ever said about the ascension," and then they go on and say a lot about the ascension. Whatever the case of that may be, this is what we're going to focus on today. Those of you who know Christ, we are about to see what the ascension of our Lord means for his glory and what its implications are for the certainty and the security of your Christian life. We're going to look at 5 ways that the ascension of Christ bears on your Christian life and, beloved, what you should see, what you should draw out of this is a sense of wonder, of worshipful awe at the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and yet there should also be a developing sense of peace and confidence. The fact that Christ has ascended to the right hand of God means that nothing can overthrow his reign. Nothing about the sinful degeneration of our society does anything to pull Christ off of his throne

or to diminish his authority and his power over everything that happens. There are pockets of rebellion on the earth that Christ allows for a period of time but we should not think that the ascendancy of sinners during our lifetime in any way diminishes the glory and the power of the resurrected and ascended Christ.

Sinners will not have the final word. They could not possibly have the final word in what happens in the outworking of world history and the culmination of the ages. That couldn't possibly be the case because to change the trajectory of the rule of Christ, they themselves would have to ascend into heaven and pull their Lord off the throne and they cannot do that. Their breath is in their nostrils. The grave is their human destination. Scripture tells us that sinners flourish for a time like the grass of the field. It flourishes for a day or 2, maybe 3 and then it shrivels and is gone. A vapor that dissipates with the rising of the morning sun. Beloved, whatever else you think about the turmoil that you may be going through personally or the disintegration of order in the world around us, let us as Christians be mindful that our Lord has ascended, our Lord reigns. He reigns in exalted glory and that guarantees the final outcome in a way that is indisputable and undeniable. Here is our confidence. Here is our joy. Here is our peace. Here is our future. Christ has ascended to the right hand of God. That's what we're going to see.

So what does the ascension teach us about Christ and about our salvation? Well, let's start with point number 1: the ascension teaches us the authority of Christ. The authority of Christ. It teaches us his supremacy in the order of the universe as we know it today and though it is invisible to our eyes, it is revealed to us in Scripture and we know it for a certainty and therefore this utterly changes the way that we interpret reality about us. Let's look at the passage that we glanced at last time, Ephesians 1. We're going to bounce around to a few different passages this morning and just kind of draw together 5 different aspects of what the ascension says to us. Ephesians 1 teaches us that Christ has ascended to his throne where he reigns over all in perfect undiminished, unparalleled authority. Ephesians 1:20 says, starting in the middle of the verse, that God "raised Christ from the dead." There is his resurrection. "And seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." There he is in his session. There he is in exalted glory, seated at the right hand, seated at the position of the power of God. There is our Christ.

Verse 21, "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." There he is, glorified. Not just slightly above men. Not just slightly above angels. Not just barely hanging on over the powers of evil. No, no, he has ascended to a realm that we cannot even see, reigning in glory far above every other aspect of the created order. That's where Christ is at, seated at the right hand of God. His work completed. His reign secure. Listen, if we could see things from God's perspective in the throne room of the universe and we could see the majestic glory of Christ on display as it is currently ongoing in the realm of heaven, there would be no sense of fear or alarm that anything that happens on this earth could ever pull him down because his place of majesty and his place of authority is so eternally established that he is in a prime place, an exclusive place of glory that will never be diminished.

Look over at 1 Peter 3:22 and you see the same thing being said. As these things start to settle in on your mind and you realize the majesty and the implications of what's being said, beloved, let me tell you, there should be a sense, there is a sense in which even as a Christian, you tremble at the majesty of it. The glory of this shakes you because it is so different than the realm in which we live. It's so different than what we see and we realize that the Scripture is bringing us, as it were, face-to-face with the absolute authority of Christ and we respond as Scripture says and as Scripture commands us with a sense of trembling before the majesty of it. 1 Peter 3:22, "Christ is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him." Beloved, listen: the foot of Jesus, metaphorically speaking, is on the neck of evil and it is merely a question of his will and his timing when he applies the pressure and stops it. For now, he allows it to carry out in furtherance of God's eternal decree, he allows evil to abide for a time but don't ever let the fact that you see evil seemingly flourishing, that you see headlines of wickedness seeming to have success, don't let that ever shake you from your confidence in the power and the authority of the ascended Christ. He is over it all. He is far above it all and the fact that evil flourishes or wicked men abide for a time can only be interpreted in one way: it's that Christ is pleased to allow that for a time so that ultimately his final vanquishing of wicked men will only be displayed in even greater glory. It's when a foe seems to be great that the victory seems to be even greater in comparison. As wicked men flourish, when Christ ultimately comes and turns it all over for the sake of righteousness and establishes his rule on the earth, the victory will be all the sweeter, all the greater to those of us who love him and the glory ascribed to him by what he has overcome will be on display for all to see.

We're in a great position of confidence because we belong to Christ and Christ is ascended over all. The ascension displays his rule over spiritual powers. He protects us, his people, from Satan and demons. We could put it this way and sum it all up: rebellion against the ascended Christ is futile. And if any of you are here today in a state of rebellion against Christ, you're not reconciled to him, you haven't turned from sin to submit yourself to his ascended authority, let this be the warning that shakes you out of your slumber and motivates you to flee to Christ for mercy, for salvation, trusting in the crucified and resurrected one to save you out of this wicked generation because the authority of Christ is on full display and a sinful life of neglect, rebellion, indifference to Christ, ultimately will be called to account. So turn to him while there is time.

Well, secondly, we have seen the authority of Christ on display by the ascension, what else does the ascension teach us? Oh, this just gets better and better. It's just one aspect of glory multiplied on top of others. Secondly, the ascension teaches us the finality of the cross. The finality of the cross. The ascension teaches us that the work of Jesus Christ on the cross for sinners is complete. He has done everything that is necessary to secure the salvation of those who trust in him. There is nothing left undone. There is nothing left to do. There is nothing to add to his work of redemption. Look at the book of Hebrews 1. Hebrews 1, a book that, the book of Hebrews which speaks about the superiority of Christ and speaking of the superiority of Christ as its primary theme, it's not surprising that it would speak of his ascension as well which speaks of the authority and the superiority of Christ.

Look at Hebrews 1, let's start in verse 1 just to get into the flow of the text. We're ultimately heading for verse 3 here but the book of Hebrews opens up saying, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world." Verse 3, "And He," meaning the Son, meaning the Lord Jesus Christ, "He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power." Now watch this for our theme for this morning, "When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they." Why could Christ sit down at the right hand of the Father? Why could he go to heaven and, as it were, take his seat? It's because the work was finished. The purification from sins that was the impetus for his earthly mission was done. It was over. There was nothing left to do so just as you sit down after your work is done at the end of a day, so also Christ sat down because the work of his earthly ministry was finished. It was accomplished. Jesus said from the cross, "It is finished. It is done."

The work for sinners was fully accomplished and Hebrews emphasizes this theme again and again. Look at Hebrews 10, if you would. Hebrews 10, we'll just look at one passage here that, again, ties things into the sufficiency of Christ and weaving that together with his position of exaltation in heaven. Look at Hebrews 10:10, "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins," making a reference to the Old Testament priests who slaughtered animals on a repeated continual basis but they were never able to deal with sin in a final way. The blood of animals was never able to take away sin in a permanent way, in any kind of way that expunged the guilt of the offerer. Not Christ, look at verse 12 by contrast, "but He," meaning Christ, "having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time," what did he do? "He sat down at the right hand of God." Scripture ties the fact with the seating of Christ at the right hand with the Father to say that the work of purification for his people's sins is finished. He did it once. Having done it, it was complete. It was sufficient. It was enough. It covered it all. He paid it all. Therefore he could sit down because it was done.

Once sat down, all indicating the finality of the cross. The work of redemption was complete. That speaks to us who know him. It assures us that there is nothing that we need to add to his work. The work was perfect. The justification we have before God based on the merits of Christ is perfect and sufficient and complete. There is nothing that we could add. There is nothing that we have to add. We rest in him because his work is finished as shown by his ascension to the right hand of the Father. That's a positive way of looking at it. Coming at it from a different angle, Roman Catholics pretend to offer Christ repeatedly in their Mass again and again as another offering for sin. Well, you can see that that's false, that that's absolutely not true. That's an illusion and a figment of their own imagination that they are doing anything that involves Christ when they do that because Christ was offered one time. Once for all, not to be repeated multiple times at the

hands of a human priest. We've talked about that in the past with regard to Catholicism. But let me bring something else out to you that maybe you haven't thought about and put all of this together in a way. When I think about it this way, honestly as I was driving into church today and just thinking about getting to this part of the message, it shook me a little bit just to talk about the Mass in light of the theme of our message here today because of this, because of what this means.

Do you realize that that practice that is saying that, "We are going to sacrifice Christ again," do you realize that that is a violation? It is an assault on his ascended glory? Scripture says that the ascension demonstrates that his work is finished. For someone to come along and to babble words of a ritual over a little piece of flour and say, "Now we will sacrifice Christ again," is to violate the ascended glory of Christ and it makes me tremble to even critique it because that holiness of the ascension of Christ should be respected and deferred to and nothing done to suggest that you're adding to what he has done after he has already sat down. And we see from the perspective of the ascension that to pretend to offer Christ again as a sacrifice when Scripture says his ascension shows its finality, oh, the fear that that provokes in any right-thinking man of the violation of the utter holiness and glory of Christ ascended in heaven should make any thinking man tremble in response and just want to flee from any thought of that, let alone any participation in it.

You see, you don't trifle with the Lord of the universe. You don't assault by your religious rituals that supreme position which testifies to his authority and his glory and his majesty and the finality of his work. We don't do that. Not only is it false, not only does it mislead sinners, it diverts attention from the glory of Christ which he has earned through his death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. It's serious. This is not a matter of similar religions. One biblical truth respects the ascension of Christ, another comes and says, "I'll add to that. I'll bring you down. I'll sacrifice you again by my incantations." We just need to think through what this means and the ascension exposes the falsehood of the Catholic Mass.

Coming back to those of us that know Christ, when we trust in him, when you put your faith in Christ, what that means is there is security that your salvation is settled. That finished work is credited to your account so that there is nothing left for you to do to add to the merit that earns your salvation, that accomplishes your salvation. You rest because Christ has paid it all and you know that because, as it were, you look up and you see him seated after he has done the work of salvation. There he is in heaven seated. The work is complete and your soul, having trusted in him, is now secure. That drives away anxiety and a lack of assurance when you realize that you are trusting in one whose finished work is represented in heaven. We serve an ascended Christ and that is glorious.

Well, what else has the ascension done for us? Let's go to point number 3. We have seen the authority of Christ, the finality of the cross. Let's go to point number 3 here this morning: the ascension is directly related to the sending of the Spirit. The sending of the Spirit, point number 3. There is a progression in this. Christ ascended to heaven and displayed his authority over all. Put on display, as it were, the finished work of Calvary.

That the work for sinners was done. Well, in the glory and in the love of Christ, in his care for his people, he didn't leave us as orphans. He didn't leave us to slog our way through and fight through the fog of our own sin and indifference. No, no, he said, "I won't leave you as orphans." He said, "I will send the Spirit," and that's what he did. The Holy Spirit was not present in his full working in the souls of men until after the ascension of Christ.

Look at John 7. The Gospel of John, chapter 7. John 7:37, "Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, "From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water."'" What does that mean? Well, John tells us what it means in verse 39, "But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

Look over at John 16 with that thought in mind. John 16:7. Jesus said in John 16:7, "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," saying that when he goes to heaven, he will send the Spirit upon his people which is what we see played out on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. If you're a Christian here today, you have the Spirit of God dwelling within you. There is no such thing as a Christian who does not have the Holy Spirit. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit.

Look over at Romans 8 just to reinforce that point for just a moment. It occurs to me that it might be important to stress this for someone in the audience today that by necessary definition, a Christian is someone who has the Spirit of God. Romans 8:9 says, "You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." So there are 2 classes of people in the world: Christians who have the Spirit of God and those who do not have the Spirit of God who do not belong to him. Contrary to what some teach, there is no middle ground of a Christian who has not yet received the Holy Spirit. That person is a nonexistent entity. Scripture knows nothing of that and so as we consider the nature of what it means to be a Christian, the only exception that you can point to is in the transitional time in the book of Acts where some, the Spirit was temporarily withheld until the apostles arrived to affirm the reality of their participation in salvation. The disciples of John the Baptist and so forth. But now that we're through that transitional era, Scripture teaches us that every Christian has the Holy Spirit.

Now, here's the thing, here's what I want you to think about as you're thinking about being a Christian. You say, "Wow, my sins are forgiven." Very true. "I have the Spirit of God dwelling within me." Very true, the Spirit of God being a seal of the reality of your salvation. The Spirit of God being the guarantee that God will keep you all the way to the end, never to abandon you. Scripture speaks of the Spirit of God within you as being like a deposit that is paid, a down payment that is made, the promise that the full deliverance in heaven will certainly be accomplished on your behalf. We have the Spirit of God testifying to us, sanctifying us, helping us understand the Scriptures, guaranteeing our future hope in Christ that we will be there in the end and what a great blessing that is. He

has opened our eyes and he helps us in our struggle against sin and on and on we could go.

Well, beloved, speaking to you as Christians now, you have the Spirit of God. You have all of those blessings. Well, let's just ask a simple question: well, how did that come to be? How did I get to be in this blessed position? Having the Spirit of God dwelling within me and securing me for all of eternity? How did this come to pass? Scripture says that it's tied in directly to the ascension of Christ. He finished his work on the cross, he was buried, he was raised from the dead, and he ascended into heaven and what did he do? He sent the Spirit to convey all of those blessings and many more to you. You have the Spirit of God dwelling within you. You have a new nature unlike the nature that you had before when you were dead in sin because Christ in his mercy and in his goodness and his care for you ascended to heaven and sent the Spirit to be upon and within the people of God.

So as we see the ascension, we see it testifying to the authority of Christ. We see it testifying to the finality of the cross. There is nothing to add to his work of redemption. And we see that the present position that we walk in as those walking in the Spirit, those having the Spirit of God dwelling within us, it's tied to that same ascension. Christ said, "I will send the Spirit when I ascend into heaven." The presence of the Spirit is proof positive that Christ is where he said he was going and that he exercises his authority and sends the Spirit out of his love and his care for his people. The glory of this just goes everywhere. The glory of seeing his authority on display and then in a whole different aspect of the wonder and the glory of Christ, seeing that he has provided for us from his ascended glory in heaven as shown by the fact that we have the Spirit within us. The indwelling Spirit empowers us to serve and that Spirit was unleashed when Christ ascended to the throne of God and from there sent the Spirit for our blessing.

So every spiritual provision that you have is traced directly back to the ascension of Christ. We walk in the power of the Spirit because Christ has ascended in glory and sent him from there. Well, I mean, we could stop there and just say, "Wow, that's so wonderful. His glory, his authority is displayed. The work of salvation is complete and I have the Spirit here on earth. What more could you say?" Ah, there is just so much bound up in the glory of the ascended Christ that if I stopped here, you would walk out and just be overwhelmed with the majesty of it. But do you know what? We're not done. Scripture says more about the wonder of the ascension. It brings us to a fourth point as you study through all of the Scriptures. What else does the ascension signify to us about our salvation and about our Lord? Point number 4: it signals the advocacy of Christ. The advocacy of Christ. Christ, Scripture says, is in heaven as our advocate, as our helper, as our representative at the right hand of God. In other words, Christ represents us as Christians. He is in heaven now on our behalf at the throne of God.

Let's look at Romans 8 for a moment and I'll be honest with you, there are times where I don't know how to express things very well. I don't know how to communicate the majesty and the glory of what we're about to describe but let's try this way to kind of set it up and to just condition our minds so that we will appreciate what we're about to hear. You know, here we are, you and I, walking about on earth in time and space limitations,

in our sinful, fallen flesh, in our trials and subject to death and sorrows and temptations. We are born, we flourish for a while and then we start to decay and ultimately our own time comes to pass from this earth. If we're not thinking biblically, we only see what we can observe with our 5 physical senses and it all becomes very earthbound and very temporary and fragile even. Well, there is that aspect to our humanity even as Christians, to be sure, but while you and I are going through this earthly existence that is tempered with all of that stuff and the transient passing nature of it, a lot of times not even thinking about that we're just passing through. Okay, hold that thought and realize that all the while, in all of our weakness and all of our indifference and not seeing these things on a consistent basis, all the while, beloved, for you in heaven is an advocate who has ascended and who is representing you before the throne of God, without fail, without ceasing. We have a flesh and blood representative in heaven who bears our name before the throne of God and represents us and you and I belong in heaven just as much as Christ does because he represents us and owns us and we are united with him so thoroughly and without any degree of separation. So as we are walking through, struggling through our little daily lives doing whatever we do at that physical level, there is an unseen supernatural eternal realm in which Christ powerfully and strongly represents us and intercedes for us before the throne of God. Wow.

Look at Romans 8:34 where you see this laid out and you see the implications of it as the text goes on. "Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised," and watch how he keeps going. Sometimes we tend to stop at the resurrection but we shouldn't do that if we're going to think biblically. We should just follow Christ out of the tomb and follow him all the way up in the ascension to heaven with our thinking, in our understanding, in our appreciation. Verse 34, "Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised," what? "Who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." There he is at the right hand of God interceding for his people. We don't see it. We often don't think about it. But without fail, our faithful advocate is representing us in heaven.

So what can we say? What does that mean for us? Well, Paul goes on and reinforces the idea of the finality and the certainty of salvation as a result. If Christ, listen to me beloved, if Christ is in heaven representing you before the throne of God, nothing can sever that relationship. Nothing can break that. Why? Because he has all authority. There is no spiritual power that has the ability to separate you from God and that is guaranteed by the ascension of Christ. That's what it says, verse 35, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" Well, he's asking that question on the heels of pointing to Christ at the right hand of God interceding for us. If Christ is interceding for you, who can sever you from him? "Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" What earthly trial, what earthly or spiritual power could sever you from the ascended Christ if he is interceding on your behalf? From that position of accomplished authority, what could possibly go wrong that would undo your salvation? The answer to that question is: nothing. There is no reason for you to be anxious. There is no reason for you to be concerned about what the future holds. There is no reason for you to tremble at the fear of earthly circumstances or at the fear of death. No, no, no, beloved, what we're seeing here from Scripture, what we're talking about here is your anchor. It is the certainty of your hope as you sit here today as one day you are on the brink of death lying

on your deathbed, just a few short breaths from eternity. All along, all through that in your life today when you are laying on that deathbed, the ascended Christ is ever interceding for you and securing you so that nothing can separate you from the place of security which he purchased with his own blood at the cross.

You see, Christ, think about it this way: Christ didn't simply go up to heaven by himself, as it were. He didn't go up to heaven just for his own benefit and, you know, like he goes to his own private resort now that the hard work is done and now he can kind of kick back because he did his earthly ministry in his 33 years on earth. No, no, no, beloved, speaking metaphorically here, Christ, as it were, carried you up with him. He carried his people up to heaven with him in the sense that he took it upon himself that he would ever intercede for us and represent us in an unbroken, unceasing way, representing us before the holy throne room of God so that we would ever be secure because he is interceding on our behalf.

You know, it makes me just want to stop and just walk down and vacate the stage so that there would just be the glory of Christ with nothing to hinder your contemplation of that. These things are unspeakably magnificent, that Christ's ascension means that he is representing you and me who belong to him there without fail and that therefore salvation cannot be broken. That therefore our future trajectory, our future lives, our destinies are utterly secure. Your destiny as a Christian will end up right where Christ is now at the right hand of God. It couldn't be any other way. 1 John 2:1 says that we have an advocate who as at the right hand of the Father. So Christ, beloved, is representing you in heaven based on his finished work and from there, he represents you. From there, Scripture says he dispenses grace and mercy to sustain you in your spiritual life.

Look over at Hebrews 4. This is precious. This lifts us out of our earthbound perception of existence into the proper biblical realm. Hebrews 4:14 says, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who," what? "Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession." What does he do for us from heaven? Well, verse 15, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." A high priest, one who represents us. Verse 16, what? "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The basis upon which we ask for mercy and grace from Christ in our Christian lives, as we ask for help in our time of spiritual need, is grounded in the fact that he has ascended in heaven and represents us there and gladly receives us when we appeal to him on that basis.

I like to say this. I've said it repeatedly, Lord willing I'll say it many times in the future: Christian, you have a brother in heaven who is there to help you and to represent you before God. A brother who will never fail. The Scottish preacher, Robert Traill, who died in 1716 is quoted to say this, "Christ's intercession in heaven is a kind and powerful remembrance of his people and of all their concerns managed with state and majesty as a Crown Prince on the throne at the right hand of the Father." Let me say that one more time, "Christ's intercession in heaven is a kind and powerful remembrance of his people

and of all their concerns managed with state and majesty as a Crown Prince on the throne at the right hand of the Father." That's what the ascension means to you. The eternal Son of God intercedes at the right hand of God on your behalf. You are utterly secure. The one who oversees all and is over all is overseeing and watching and dispensing his grace on your present-day circumstances. He represents you when you fail. He represents you when you sin. And his settled work at the cross continually protects you in the presence of a holy God. That's how great the ascension is. That's how crucial it is to your security in Christ and it's the basis on which we ask for his help.

One more. Point number 5. There are other things that others have said but I think these capture the main emphasis of it. So we see the authority of Christ, the finality of the cross, the sending of the Spirit, the advocacy of Christ. The ascension does one more thing for us. It testifies, it points to one more thing. Point number 5 this morning: the ascension points to the return of Christ. The return of Christ. Scripture says that the ascension of Christ is a prelude to his future return. Look back where we started in Acts 1. We saw verse 9, Acts 1:9 where Christ was lifted up while they were looking on. The law of gravity could not hold him down like it does us. The disciples watched that happen and in verse 10 it says, "And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky?'" That question has always struck me just a little bit funny in the sense that if I'm there and I'm one of the disciples, you say, "Well, what do you think? You know, look what just happened." And yet these angelic messengers instruct them to look beyond that ascension. "Don't get caught up in that moment of the rise. Be mindful of what that moment speaks to yet to come." So the fact that I would say, "Well, what do you mean?" is simply a reflection of my own spiritual immaturity.

Those men in white clothing said to him, "Men of Galilee, This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." Somehow, Christ went up in glory. Somehow, in a day still future to us in 2015, Christ is going to return in like manner, in glory, in power, in his second coming. Beloved, what that means is that we don't see Christ now but we will. The way he went to heaven is the way that he will come from heaven. And listen, this aspect, as you think about the authority and the finality of the cross, the sending of the Spirit and the advocacy in heaven. Stay with me here because I am almost done. As you think about it, these are all accomplished aspects of the ascension that we see now. We enjoy the benefits of it now. We have it all now and it's established. It is settled. It is ongoing now. Well, there is a future dimension to the ascension of Christ in that it speaks to his future return and just as we certainly understand and appropriate these 4 things that we have already discussed, all of that is a guarantee of the certainty of the fifth thing that we don't see yet that hasn't happened yet, the return of Christ. He went up. He has his session. He reigns. He intercedes for us. One day he is going to return. The same Scripture that testifies to the 4 other blessings testifies to that which we now have. So we trust his promise. Nothing will keep him from his promise.

Look at John 14. This is one sweet passage of Scripture. John 14:1, Jesus said, "Do not let your heart be troubled." This is what I said, you know, the ascension means the death blow to your troubled heart, your anxieties. Jesus said, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you," what? "For I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Christ said, "I'm going to go away." He's talking to his disciples before the crucifixion. He says, "I am going to go away. I am going to go to a place where you cannot come but understand that it's only temporary." It's as though Christ said, "I love you so much and your eternal well-being is so much central to my plan that if I go away, know that it's simply an indication and a prelude that I'm going to come again," because Christ would not be in heaven forever without his people there with him. Why would he? He came to purchase us with his blood and so his departure is merely an indication that he's going to come again and that we all as those who know Christ will one day be in that same presence where he is now, ascended at the right hand of God. We will share in that presence. We trust his promise.

Beloved, think about it this way: there Christ is victorious, a generous victor as we said last week. Glorious, reigning over all and his intention for us is that one day we would share in his victory. So much so that he will come back for us and take us there where his victory is eternally celebrated without diminishment. He's not going to leave you behind, Christian. He will bring you to where he is now. We will share in that glory. He promised and we know that he can keep his promises because he has ascended at the right hand of God where no authority can hinder him to the contrary.

So the ascension is a certification of the certainty of our Christian blessings. One writer says and I quote, he says and listen to it, this is the final application of everything that we've said today, "We live, work, pray, believe, witness, serve, worship, obey and die under a Lord who is now exalted as head in earth and heaven. This was the secret of the early Christian's zeal and optimism in the face of persecution. Here is our secret of peace in a world of turmoil. Jesus our head is exalted over all and has given us the power of his victory." Isn't that wonderful?

Let's bow in prayer. You may be asking, "How can I find my place in the midst of that victory? How can my sins be forgiven?" Oh, if that's you, my friend, look up. Look up to the ascended Christ. Trust not in yourselves but in that one who has risen to the right hand of God. He is able to save you to the uttermost. Call on him today for your salvation.

Our Lord, we honor and worship you, the ascended and glorious Lord of heaven. We thank you for all that your ascension means to us. We thank you that you have served us so well and we trust in your promise that you will return from that place of ascended glory to come for us one day, to come for your people so that we will one day be where you are now. What a great day that will be! How wonderful to see our Lord face-to-face in ascended, exalted glory! Lord, we thank you. We know that we don't deserve that and yet here we are on the receiving end of such blessing. We honor you, the ascended and

resurrected Lord and we rest in your finished work as we leave this place today. In Christ's name. Amen.

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