

Over the past three weeks we have been considering what Jesus's resurrection means for us. But this past Thursday marked forty days since Easter, and forty days after the original Easter, Jesus ascended into heaven. So either today or tomorrow, depending on when you're listening, we're observing Ascension Sunday. Today we want to consider what Jesus's ascension means for us.

Let's listen to the account of Jesus's ascension in Acts, chapter 1:

ACTS 1:1–11. (EHV)

I wrote my first book, *Theophilus*, about everything Jesus began doing and teaching until the day he was taken up, after he had given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After he had suffered, he presented himself alive to the apostles with many convincing proofs. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and told them things about the kingdom of God. Once, when he was eating with them, he commanded them, **“Do not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for what the Father promised, which you heard from me. For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”** So when they were together with him, they asked, “Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, **“It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** After he said these things, he was taken up while they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. They were looking intently into the sky as he went away. Suddenly, two men in white clothes stood beside them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

This is the fullest account that any of the Evangelists give us in the Bible of Jesus's ascension. Luke also records a shorter version of this event at the end of his Gospel, and Mark also records a summary of it at the end of his Gospel. Taken together, we learn that forty days after he rose from the dead, Jesus took his disciples out to the vicinity of the village of Bethany on the Mount of Olives, just east of Jerusalem. He lifted up his hands and blessed them, and while he was blessing them, he was taken up into the sky in their sight, until a cloud took him out of their sight. At some point after being hidden from their sight, he passed from the earthly realm to the heavenly realm and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

What is the significance of this event? What does it mean for us?

For starters, it means that Jesus had completed his work on earth. The apostle John tells us that “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work” (1 John 3:8). So if he has now disappeared, that work must be completed, that is, the devil's work must be destroyed. Jesus himself said that he came to seek and to save what was lost, so that must be done if he has now visibly left. On another occasion he said, “I have come down from heaven, not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me, but raise them up on the Last Day. For this is the will

of my Father: that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him may have eternal life. And I will raise him up on the Last Day” (John 6:38–40). So the fact that he has gone back up into heaven means that these things are true: Jesus has lost and will lose none of those the Father has given him, but will raise them up on the Last Day. And everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him will have eternal life and be raised on the Last Day.

We also have a hint about this in the account itself. While other places in the Bible refer to this event as Jesus’s ascension, the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts do not use that word. They both say that Jesus was “taken up,” which implies that someone was taking him up. It’s kind of like how the Bible speaks of Jesus rising from the dead, but also of his being raised by God the Father from the dead. Jesus ascended into heaven, but he was also taken up by God the Father into heaven, which means that God must have considered his Son to have accomplished everything he sent him to do, and that he approved of it, so that now he was receiving his Son back in his proper home.

This account, like the other highlight accounts of Jesus’s life and ministry, also proves that Jesus is the Son of God. Imagine being there with the disciples, watching and listening to Jesus bless you, and suddenly he just starts rising off the ground into the air! He effortlessly ascends higher and higher, until a cloud gently slides underneath him and hides him from sight. It’s like something out of a superhero comic, but it happened in real life more than 1,900 years before the first superhero comic appeared. It’s something that someone could do only if he was divine and had divine powers.

Psalms 47 tells us that when Jesus passed into the heavenly realm, he was welcomed with heavenly shouts of joy and the sound of the ram’s horn. The apostle Paul says that God then seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms (Eph. 1:20). Now since heaven is a spiritual place, not a physical place, the right hand of God is not a physical location. Some have argued that, for instance, Jesus cannot be present in the Lord’s Supper because he is seated at the right hand of God. But by that same reasoning, we would have to say that Jesus was lying when he said he would be with us always to the very end of the age (Matt. 28:20). He can’t do that if he’s at the right hand of God, right? No, Paul tells us exactly what the right hand of God means: “[He] seated [Christ] at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, and above every name that is given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. God also placed all things under his feet and made him head over everything for the church. The church is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Eph. 1:20–23). You heard it, right? The right hand of God is the place of supreme power and authority. Christ’s ascension means that he now rules over everything both as God and as a glorified human being for the good of the Church, namely the body of all those who believe in him as Lord and Savior.

This truth is more and more comforting, the closer we get to the end of the world. Every day it seems that there’s some shocking new story in the news, of humans defying and degrading one standard of truth and morality after another. It seems like the world is spinning out of control, devolving into unbridled chaos. But that’s not true. We have to make sure not to confuse any political entity on earth, which may be crumbling, for the kingdom of heaven, which endures forever. Everything is firmly under the control of Christ, who is gathering his Church through the gospel, punishing wickedness and evil, and bringing the world to an end in his own time and

way. He has a plan and he is putting it into practice. Nothing in the universe happens without his say-so, without the say-so of the one who has crushed death and the devil beneath his feet.

In that same vein, the apostle Paul also says that the ascended Christ is equipping and sending out public ministers of the gospel to preach the gospel and to train the saints for the work of serving, thereby building up the body of Christ, until the Church takes the full, mature shape that Christ has in mind for her (Eph. 4:10–13). In other words, Jesus’s ascension is ultimately why you have the Christian pastors and teachers you have. They are some of the proofs that Jesus is ascended and sitting at the right hand of God the Father.

Paul also tells us that the ascended Christ is interceding for us. Maybe when you were younger, if you had a bunch of brothers and sisters, one of them might have done something wrong and your parents might have come into the room and started to scold or to punish the wrong person. Maybe you spoke up and said, “No, it wasn’t her; it was him!” If you did, you were interceding for your sister, speaking up for her. Jesus intercedes for us. He speaks up for us before God the Father. I imagine him showing his Father the nail marks in his hands and feet and the scar in his side and saying, “Look, this is what you had me, your only-begotten Son, go through for them! Deal with them in grace, patience, and blessing.”

Now the one shortcoming of this imagined scenario is that it could give the impression that God the Father is out to get us, trying to hurl lightning bolts down from heaven at us, and Jesus has to dodge this way and that to block them, while he pleads with him to calm down. That’s not how it is. Remember, God the Father is the one who so loved the world that he sent his Son to save us. So Jesus interceding for us is really just an extra layer of assurance that God is not against us, but for us, and that all he does for us and all he allows into our lives, he does for our good, not to punish and destroy us.

Finally, Jesus told his disciples on Holy Thursday that he was going to heaven to prepare a place for us in the rooms in his Father’s house (John 14:2–3). How wonderful it will be to see the place prepared for us by Jesus, the one who was raised by a carpenter on earth, the one who invented carpentry long before that, yes, the author of design itself, the one who knows us better than we know ourselves! As the angel told the disciples as they stared into the sky, “This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” That will happen on Judgment Day, when Jesus will gather all those who have believed in him, who endured in repentance and faith to the end in spite of the many difficulties, struggles, and obstacles, and he will take them to the place he has prepared for them in glory.

How comforting that Jesus has ascended into heaven, and that because he has, one day we and all believers will too, and there we will be with him forever!