

Acts 1:1-11

Why is the Ascension Important?

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Introduction

We hear a lot about the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ but we hear far less about his ascension. Even the Gospels don't have that much about the actual event. Matthew doesn't mention it, Mark has one verse, Luke 3 verses and John doesn't mention it. Acts has the most about it. Yet today is ascension Sunday. Why do we remember something that the disciples didn't seem to mention much at all? Because the reality is that it underlies much of what was subsequently written. In many places in the writing of Paul, Peter and the others the ascension is an assumed fact and without it a lot of what they had written would not make sense. To mention a few - Jesus himself predicted his ascension:

Jesus was aware that his disciples were complaining, so he said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what will you think if you see the Son of Man ascend to heaven again?" - John 6:61-62.

Yes, I came from the Father into the world, and now I will leave the world and return to the Father." - John 16:28.

Paul celebrates it:

I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honour at God's right hand in the heavenly realms - Ephesians 1:19-20.

And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself - Ephesians 4:10.

So why the Ascension important?

1. If Christ had not ascended he would not have entered in his glory and taken his rightful place at God's right hand. His resurrection proves that he has conquered death, his ascension proves that his sacrifice was acceptable to the Father and that his work is complete. Sin brings death and that is what gives Satan his power. Death has now been conquered so Satan is now powerless for all intents and purposes.
2. If Christ had not ascended the Holy Spirit would not have been given. And if the Holy Spirit had not come we would not have power to live and be transformed.
3. If Christ had not ascended we would not have any one in heaven to intercede for us.

So how does the Ascension help us?

1. Why is this Question Important?

One question we need to ask is why a man centered question like this needs to be asked?

2. Security in an Insecure World

I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth - Matthew 28:18. The ascension proclaims the reign of Christ. Where ever we are and what ever our circumstances he is King and Lord over



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them. Nothing can affect us or afflict us but by his permission. Do we really believe this or do you like me struggle with this?

When things are going well we can accept this far more easily but when death, serious illness, conflict with loved ones, loss of job strike it is far harder to accept. Why does God allow suffering? We can give a lot of technically and even theologically correct answers to that but in the end it boils down to one very simple question – Do we trust God?

That is why Job could say:

“But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought! - Job 19:25-27

The ascension in many respects the proof of that. Jesus proved it is possible to die and still stand upon this earth.

Paul said it differently:

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them - Romans 8:28

Do we believe that everything that happens is not just random chance but is part of the greater plan of God? If we don't then we have a problem because it means that God is not ultimately in control. It also means that I can get into situations where God just can't help me or worse is taken by surprise. A god like that is worse than useless. It is only by believing that God is in control, that nothing happens without his permission that we can begin to make sense of pain and suffering and heartache and death. If we believe that he is in control then we can have security, we can have peace and hope, no matter what our circumstances.

We also always need to ask why am I in this particular circumstance. It may be that we are in that particular circumstance because we have put ourselves there, whether by design or accident. Too often in those cases we try to pray our way out of circumstances we have behaved ourselves into. God saves us from the penalty of sin, not the consequence in general. This is true not only for us as individuals but also for us as families, even as a family of God. We are not here at Balmoral because of random events. We are here because this is where God wants us. Why we are here is a different question and not one I have the answer to, other the obvious to worship God.

At other times we end up in situations which have nothing to do with us but the one thing we can be sure of is that God hasn't put us there for no reason and more importantly, he is with us in that circumstance.

- Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift or firm remain?
- We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Stedfast and sure while the billows roll,
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love

These lyrics were penned by Priscilla Jane Owens (1829 – 1907). They can be equally true of us



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today.

3. Comfort in our Suffering

So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most – Hebrews 4:14-16.

Christ was born, grew up, worked, suffered, suffered and died. Presumably his earthly father died while he was growing up as we hear nothing of Joseph once Jesus starts his ministry. As this passage tells us, Jesus faced all the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. But even more important than the fact that he suffered is the fact that now that suffering Christ is now part of the Godhead. In one sense human nature has become part of the Godhead. Our high priest in heaven is one who can have compassion on us because he has felt everything we have felt, whether it be small or great. We can go to God with our doubts, our fears, our anger, our heartaches, our fears and he will hear us and understand because he has been there. He has walked in our shoes. So never be afraid to take how you are feeling to God. No matter how small or how big – he will hear and he will understand. He may not give you the answer you want, but he will not turn you away or ignore you. This is what the psalmists understood. They didn't believe in victorious living and neither should you. They felt the pain and they wrote down what they felt and were not afraid to do that. But read through the psalms and see what happens. As they start write of their pain they realise they are not victims. Rather they choose to trust God and many of those psalms end in praise, praise to a God who is not hurt by them being real before him. God is so much greater than us, he knows us intimately. You are not surprising God with your feelings so why try to hide them. Rather be honest. God is big enough to handle it. It is in the reality of life that we praise him, not in pretending that all is OK when it's not. That's just plain dishonest.

3. Mission in Christ's Name

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit – Matthew 28:18-19. As Graham covered this in his sermon last week I'm not intending to cover this this week.

4. Resources for all our Christian Living and Serving

And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today – Acts 2:33.

What did Jesus say in John 16:5-14?

"But now I am going away to the one who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. Instead, you grieve because of what I've told you. But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgement. The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. Judgement will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged. "There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. - John 16:5-14.

So without Christ's ascension the Holy Spirit would not have come. And if the Spirit had not come



we would not be lead into all truth. The Spirit living within us is the one who gives us power, wisdom and understanding. In 1 Corinthians Paul says this about the man who is not a member of Christ's body:

When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means – 1 Corinthians 13-14.

And of us Galatians tells us:

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – Galatians 5:22,23

This is what the Spirit gives us.

I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honour at God's right hand in the heavenly realms - Ephesians 1:19-20.

For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all. However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. - Ephesians 4:4-7.

I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. ... And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 13,19.

5. Promise of Christ's Coming Reign

As this passage tells us the two men dressed in white told the disciples -

“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!” - Acts 1:11.

All authority on heaven and earth has been given to him – nothing can stop his return to judge the living and the dead as Peter tells us in 1 Peter 4:5. Jesus himself told us he would return (John 5:27,28) to judge the living and the dead. We stand in a river of time stretching from the Creation though the life and death of Jesus Christ through to his return and the creation of the new heaven and the new earth. How long that river is we do not know. All we know is that one day he will return and everything will be put under his feet.

For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet – 1 Corinthians 15:26.

The resurrection and the ascension point irresistibly forward to the return of Christ in glory when he will come to judge everyone and establish God's eternal kingdom in the new heaven and the new earth. So whether we are facing life or death, we can do it with hope.





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