

Ascension Day 2021

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Date: 13 May 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, I often talk about, if people are asked, and I ask this question fairly regularly, Christians, what is Jesus doing now, or where is he, or what's happened to him?

And we often get only the vaguest kind of answer, oh yeah, yeah, yeah, he's in heaven. Okay, well, good. Sometimes it's, oh, he's waiting for me in heaven, he's waiting for me in heaven.

Okay, so that means I'm going to end up in heaven, and Jesus is somehow going to take me to him. But it's still very vague, it doesn't, what is he doing? Well, he's kind of waiting, because it doesn't say that he's sat on a throne, and when we think of sitting, we think of not doing much.

Like, we sit down once we've done our work, maybe lounging on the couch, scrolling through Netflix. That's how, if someone is sitting, it's time to relax. It's not quite the image that sitting in the Bible has.

Or Jesus thought of being in some sort of limbo state, not really dead, but not really alive either. He is coming back, but he's also going to take us to himself. And so there's this vague understanding of what Jesus is doing now, where is he, and what's happening.

[1 : 13] He's in heaven, maybe. The place of fluffy pink clouds and cute angels with harps. But we've seen in Revelation, heaven is not filled with cute angels with harps. Yeah, they do have harps. But they're not cute.

Heaven is a very dangerous place if you don't belong there. The Heidelberg Catechism, a catechism is a teaching of Christian doctrine to kids, actually, but for adults as well, and poses this question, how does Christ's ascension into heaven benefit us?

And the answer is, first, he is our advocate in heaven before his Father, and that's true enough. Second, we have our flesh in heaven, we have our flesh in heaven, as a sure pledge that he, our head, will also take us, his members, up to himself.

And notice, everything is revolving around heaven over here. Third, he sends his spirit as a counter-pledge, by whose power we seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God and not the things that are on earth.

And obviously, there's elements of truth to all of those things. But this talks about us having benefits with him in heaven. But I want to look at what the benefits are of Christ's ascension, what it means for us here on earth.

[2 : 27] Because we have a very difficult relationship in understanding that Jesus is in heaven, but it means he's got some stuff for us to do on earth. Or it means that he's got stuff, that he's doing stuff on earth.

There's still a little bit of a disconnect, I think, in many Christians' minds. After all, we are here on earth. But before we do that, what the ascension means for us, we've got to ask what the ascension means for Jesus.

What does it mean for him? What does it tell us about Jesus? And only after that can we take implications about what it means for us. Are you with me? So, my claim is that the ascension of Christ is the event that changed the history of the world.

The ascension of Christ is the event that changed the history of the world. And the first thing about when you connect the ascension and Jesus, the ascension means that Jesus is the most important person in the history of the world.

Now, I'm using this term, history of the world, on purpose. Because I want to tie who Jesus is to what happens in time and space on planet earth, where we are. In other words, in our time and space. In other words, for us.

[3 : 36] Generally, when Christians think about heaven, they think of it as escape from planet earth. So, if Jesus has gone there, we could be tempted to think that he no longer has any influence

over the affairs of men, other than a sort of general, vague, loving kindness.

After all, doesn't John 3.16 talk about the fact that God loves the whole world? Well, Acts 1, as we've read, tells us that Jesus ascended. But behind the imagery of Jesus going up on a cloud, as it's recorded in Acts 1 and in Luke, is Daniel chapter 7.

And we've come across Daniel chapter 7 often in our study in Revelation, if you remember. But if you've got your Bibles, perhaps turn there. I'll put it up on the screen. But it's important for us to follow these truths in the Bibles. Because we're going to look at Daniel 7 in a bit to see what it tells us about Jesus.

So, Daniel chapter 7. It's on the screen, but maybe it's a bit too small. So, if it's too small, then grab your Bibles. Daniel is having a vision.

He's up in heaven. He's already seen the Ancient of Days. He's seen the throne room of heaven earlier in Daniel chapter 7. Some things happen, and then he has a look. In my vision at night, I looked.

[4 : 43] And there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.

Now, I've taught this before, but just so that we know. Daniel is not on earth, looking up to heaven. So, Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven is not him coming down to earth. It's Jesus going up into heaven where Daniel is looking.

He's already there. He's already there, and now he says, someone else is coming to heaven now. He doesn't know who it is. One like a son of man. Are you with me?

So, Jesus coming on the clouds in Daniel 7 is Jesus going up into heaven. Are you happy about that? Everyone got that. Well, look what happens when he arrives, this person. One like the son of man, meaning a human.

He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worshipped him.

[5 : 43] His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. And his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. The New Testament tells us that this unnamed person, the one like a son of man, is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

What's important for us to grasp here is that this event has already taken place. Jesus has already been given the things described in Daniel 7, because we've read in Acts 1 of his ascension into heaven, and of his receiving of all these things.

Very often, Christians think too often, that Jesus is the king of kings, but these things are only going to happen really at the end of time. Yes, they're going to be fulfilled, or they're going to culminate in the end of time.

But they're already happening now. Are you with me? So, Jesus in heaven means that stuff is happening on earth. You got that. So, notice what he receives upon his ascension.

Authority, glory, and sovereign power, as well as a kingdom and dominion. Now, this is not a kingdom in heaven. It's a kingdom on earth, or kingdoms, I should say. Because it talks about how all nations and peoples in every language will worship him.

[7 : 00] That's not people in heaven. That's people on earth. The nations here on earth turn to this person and start worshipping him. So, Jesus is the one that has been given ultimate authority.

Over what? Over who? Over the nations of the world. Which nations of the world? Which peoples are we talking about? Well, the English, the Japanese, the Germans, the French, the Australians, the Chileans, Chileans, Chileans, Chileans, Chileans.

People who live in Chile. The Poles, the Poles, the Polish, the Italians, everyone. Capitanians, Plumstedians, the Lowe's, the Swanets, the Barnes's, the Meraes.

Now, this makes Jesus the most important figure in human history. He controls what happens in every square inch of planet earth.

He's the ruler of all the nations of the earth, whether they acknowledge it or not. To rule in heaven is not to be removed from the affairs of the world, but to be elevated to rule over the affairs of the world.

[8 : 16] The world is not to be removed from, but to be elevated to rule over. Heaven, after all, is the abode of God, and to be at his right hand is to be at the executive power of the Almighty.

The ascension is proof that Jesus really is who he says he is, the ultimate ruler of the universe. Now, that's where the sitting imagery comes from. Kings sit when they take their throne and when

they pass judgment.

That's when they've got business to do. They take a seat and everyone else rises. Or it's almost like, think of courts. If you're in trouble and the judge comes in and you've been caught out and your judgment is about to pass, the judge sits and I guess you've got to rise.

And so the sitting is like a law court imagery. When Jesus is sitting on God's right hand means, okay, the judgment is now about to take place. Business is going to happen. Not in heaven. They haven't done anything wrong. It's down here on earth that things must change.

So that's what Jesus sitting in heaven is all about. It's not him twiddling his thumb or crocheting or playing ping pong or something. It's him getting busy with the business of planet earth. Okay.

[9 : 22] So the first thing the ascension tells us, Jesus is the most powerful figure in human history. Because what he does in heaven has direct implications for planet earth. Happy with that. Then, the ascension releases the most powerful force in the history of the world.

How does Jesus do his implementing of rule on planet earth? How does he go about conquering evil and establishing his kingdom? Well, he starts with the Holy Spirit.

And what the Holy Spirit does is change unholy people into holy people. People fit for the kingdom. Citizens of the kingdom of Christ. He takes dead things and brings them to life.

If you've got your Bibles open, maybe just turn to John chapter 14. In the book of John, in the gospel of John, you've got an extended discussion with Jesus and his disciples.

From John 14, 15, 16, 17, all the way up to 18 as he's heading to the last few days of his life. And he's talking about how he's not going to be with them forever.

[10 : 27] But that he's going to send the Holy Spirit to be with his disciples and his church. And that the Holy Spirit is the person that is going to carry on the work of Christ. So John chapter 14, I'm going to look at verse 16.

16 to 21. I've done a bit of jiggling. There's some things I want to highlight there. So Jesus is talking. He says, I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.

The Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him. For he lives with you and will be in you.

Because I live, you also will live. And on that day you will realize that I am in my Father. And you are in me. And I am in you.

Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. What an incredible, incredible promise. Now, we get to live because Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit.

[11 : 30] We get the Holy Spirit because Jesus has left birth. It's as simple as that. And so the one main thing, one of the main things that the Ascension does for us, or does, is release the power of the Holy Spirit into the world to bring about regeneration, to bring about new life, new birth, a new way of living.

And that's probably the best way to think about regeneration. It's a Christian word that you might hear often bandied around. Have you been born again? I've been born again. But it gives us new life, regeneration, or the Holy Spirit gives us new life, in order to live in a new way.

That's a point of getting a new birth. So you don't live like your old self anymore. So that our response, or people's response, people who receive the Holy Spirit, their response, it's our response, to sin and temptation and evil, is going to be different to the way the world responds to those things.

For the first time in human history, people on planet Earth will say no to sin, love God, obeys commands, and love others in a way that has not happened before.

That's the promise that Jesus makes in Acts chapter 1, when he says, listen, I'm going to go away, but you're going to receive the Holy Spirit in my place. Now this is a massively powerful force that has been unleashed in the world, because it overturns the strongest opposition to God there is, the rebellious human heart.

[12 : 58] Now we take it for granted as Christians that we love God and we obey His commands, but this is a major, major miracle. It took a major work from God to get it done. In fact, it involves all three persons of the Trinity.

The Father to send the Son into the world to atone for sin. The Son to ascend back to the Father to send the Holy Spirit to draw all people back to Jesus.

So it's a major operation that God underwent to get this salvation project going, the renewal of the world. And that's why the ascension is so important, because the Spirit does what Jesus could not do while He was still on Earth.

We often don't think of it like that. But the Spirit allows Jesus to be everywhere, and He can operate in multiple spaces at a different time at the same time. In John 3, the Spirit is the wind of God that blows wherever He pleases.

Wherever He blows, He creates life. Just like there is wind all over the world, the Spirit operates over the entire planet Earth, over the entire globe.

[14:02] This is why Jesus had to ascend, to allow His influence to grow exponentially by means of releasing the Holy Spirit into the world. It's one of the major impacts of the ascension.

To get our heads around this, think of the ascension like a torch. You know, I'm sure you must have done this with your torch, especially those new ones with those high-powered beams. You turn all the lights off, you take the torch and you stick it close to the wall, and just a bright little call on the wall.

And if you move the torch back, that little bright spot gets lighter and brighter and brighter, and a few feet away, it covers the whole wall. Well, the ascension is like that. Jesus only had influence while He was walking around in Palestine in the first century AD.

Oh, this guy needed help. Okay, he helped him. Okay, that guy asked a question. He gave him an answer. Oh, this guy needed help. Every now and then, Jesus would be like, you know, I don't feel like walking all that way. It's fine. He's healed. It's okay. But people outside of Palestine, you know, you had to go all that way to speak to Him.

Now, we don't think of it like this, but as Jesus ascends, and because He sends the Spirit, His influence, not in heaven, on planet Earth, grows and grows and grows.

[15:13] Is that a good illustration? The torch thing? It's dangerous to ask. Is it a good illustration? If someone says no, well, you're in trouble then.

I can't help you. It's the only one I've got. Okay. So, the ascension means that Jesus is the most powerful force in human, powerful person in history, the most important person in human history. The ascension releases the most powerful force in human history, which means, the ascension means that we are the most important people in human history.

Now, we don't often, again, we don't often think of it like that, but let's see the logic of how we get there. If the ascension means that Jesus is the most important figure in human history because He decides the fate of the nations, Jesus controls the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the one who applies the work of Christ to people, it gives them new life, and so the Holy Spirit is the most powerful force in the world.

Then, we who are the products of the combined most powerful forces in human history must be also, then, the most important people in human history if we've received these things from Him.

[16:25] Are you with me? That's my logic. What makes us important is that we get the Holy Spirit, and what the Holy Spirit does in us, we'll see in the next passage, is linked directly to Christ's ascension.

So, turn with me to Ephesians chapter 1. We're just doing a survey through the Scriptures of the idea of the ascension and what it does for the world and for us.

So, Ephesians chapter 1. Again, it'll be up on the screen, but I'm just worried the word's a little bit small. Ephesians chapter 1. Now, let me just turn there as well.

Now, Paul is writing to the people in Ephesus, to the church in Ephesus, and he says, you know, they've been blessed in every way possible because of Christ, because they've turned to Christ. So, Ephesians chapter 1, verse 3. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Now, it's difficult to know what he's saying about that, but there's something very important and powerful going on there.

[17:35] In the first part of that chapter, God has got all these huge blessings and saving work and power that he's poured out on his people. And then Paul goes on to pray for the church. He says, because of what Jesus has done for us, in the first half of Ephesians chapter 1, therefore, I'm going to pray this prayer for you because I want you to get some things into your noggin.

I want you to realize some things, people in Ephesus, and therefore, Christians all over the world, and therefore, us here in Plumstead. From verse 17, Paul's prayer.

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better.

So the spirit there, that's the Holy Spirit, who gives us wisdom and revelation, helps us understand things better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.

And then he tells us two things about what that hope consists of. Firstly, that you will understand the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. So the first thing that the Holy Spirit, that Paul wants the Holy Spirit to do, is to realize that we belong to him.

[18:46] We are God's inheritance, Christ's inheritance, and that we should be holy. And then the second thing, he also wants them to know, his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Well, what is that power? You see what Paul is praying for? You need to know what's happening here. I want you to understand who you are, and I want to understand the power that you've received. And the Holy Spirit must help you understand this.

What's his power about? Well, that power is the same. If you've got a Bible, it's worth underlining the same, because that's the whole point Paul is making. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

That's the ascension. Far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.

Paul is saying to the people in Ephesus, hey guys, I want you to know that the same power that is at work in raising Christ from the dead, that's not a small amount of power, that's a serious amount of power.

[20:00] Now, exponentialize that, however you do that mathematically, because then he's up in heaven. And once he's there, he's got all this authority. That's the same power at work in you.

Who!

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed, this is Christ now, him to be head over everything for the church. That's us. The church in Ephesus, every church that is Christian, including Plumstead, including St. Mark's, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

So look at that. The church is Christ's body. Hmm. Immediately the implications of that. What do bodies do? What do dead bodies do? They don't do much.

They just sit there. They don't do much. Living bodies? What's the whole point about being alive? You get to do stuff. Well, if we're Christ's body, we've got to do stuff here on planet Earth.

Paul wants us to know that we're powerful to get this stuff done here. You get me? We're important because we have the same power at work within us as the resurrected and ascended Lord of heaven and earth.

[21:17] Christ has triumphed over the strongest forces of evil in this world and he gives us, his people, the same power that he has. And Paul wants his people to know that.

And we should take action based on that truth. We're not just to receive this power. We're not just to be receivers of this power or to think of heaven so that we can join him one day.

So we don't receive the power of the resurrected Lord so we can just wait until he takes us to heaven. We receive his power to get stuff done here on Earth. We are to be partakers or better yet, partners in that victory.

Notice that we're not just to overcome evil in the age to come, but in this present evil age or in this present age, verse 21. Let's look at verse 21 again. You've got the same power that raised Christ from the dead that has resurrected him up to heaven and he's given a name over every name not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Now I've swapped that around because Christians are so good at thinking, oh yeah, that's cool, the age to come, that's going to be awesome. So what about the age now? Oh no, we just have to wait because Jesus is in heaven waiting for us. No, no.

[22:30] We've got this power in the present age. That's where we are and that's where God wants his work to be operating. That's why the Holy Spirit has been poured, Christ is in heaven, that's why the Holy Spirit is poured out here.

He's not hovering in heaven waiting for us to go up there and then give us the power. He's come to give us the power here. You get, you've got that. Okay. Some implications for us then. This means,

we must not be complacent with evil in the world out there or evil in ourselves.

When we see evil in the world, we can't just shrug our shoulders and, ah, oh well, that's too bad, that's just the way it is. No, no. Jesus is king of the world, it belongs to him. He doesn't want evil to be scurrying around like a little rat or like a snake causing problems in his nation, in his kingdoms. He wants it to be taken care of. He's a good king. He wants people to enjoy his rule. We can't stand by and let evil flourish. We can't let bad things happen and just leave it that way. We're compelled to act.

Now, now, you've just heard, we've got the power to take action knowing that evil has already been defeated. Now, just to give an example of what we're talking about here, one of the best examples of Christians getting involved in overturning evil in the world, abolition of slavery in the 1800s.

[23 : 48] It was so powerful. Slave trade was so powerful and so pervasive. Everyone was doing it. The whole world was doing it. And it took one man, a Christian man, to stand up and say, we need to change this.

Can you imagine facing that massive behemoth? All that money. It had been done for thousands of years. Throughout human history, we've had slaves. It took one Christian man to say, now we need to change this.

That man was William Wilberforce, a Christian member of parliament in England. And he became convicted of the truth of Christianity. And his slogan was, God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.

He means people living as Christians. Can you imagine how daunting that must have been? Well, the evil of slavery was strong. But looking at Ephesians 1, the resurrected and ascended Lord is stronger.

So, likewise, we are compelled to act to tackle the evil when we see in the communities around us, in our world, knowing that it can be halted and overcome.

[24 : 54] This should encourage us to get stuck into the moral, political, cultural and ethical evils we see in the world around us. We need to speak up and speak out. Maybe we need to act up and act out against the things in our culture that clearly violate biblical principles of justice and mercy.

Right. So, we see the evil out there that's in the world. What about the evil within? Our own sin and our own sinful ways of thinking. Paul wants Christians to realize how powerful they are.

If we think of the new spiritual life that God has given us through Christ, pouring his spirit out on us, and that's the same power as raising him from the dead, that should give us huge encouragement for the struggle against sin in our own lives.

Holding on to the truth of Christ's resurrection and ascension and having his holy spirit in us gives us the power we need to control seemingly uncontrollable thoughts or feelings.

Control deep-rooted bitterness or uproot deep-rooted bitterness. Maybe some hurt from the past or give us hope to achieve plans for the future. Parents, when you see your children struggling with an issue, can you imagine how upbuilding and encouraging it would be for your children for you to sit down with them, open this passage up, and go through these truths with them?

[26 : 16] And to have that constantly affirmed and applied in their own life? Just think how it will equip them to overcome all the challenges that life has to throw at them. You'll build an incredibly solid foundation if you use these truths correctly.

Okay, to sum up them, without the ascension of Christ, our mental picture of Jesus would be incomplete. We are not to think of Jesus only in terms of the cross or sitting idly in heaven.

Rather, ascension tells us that Jesus is the exalted Lord of heaven and earth, and that because of this, he is more active in the affairs of the world than before.

The ascension releases the Holy Spirit who, with Jesus, brings about his peace and forgiveness, his help and his love, and importantly, his justice. And because we have the same ascension power working us, coursing through our veins, the ascension in a sense releases us to go about doing the business of our king so that his will is done and that his kingdom can come where?

On earth as it is in heaven. Well, let's pray for Jesus to do these things for us. Dear Lord Jesus, what a powerful, powerful truth of who you are that the ascension teaches us.

[27 : 39] That you are the resurrected Lord of heaven and earth, the king of kings and the lord of lords, and that no evil can withstand you because you've already defeated it, and that you call us to participate, to be partners in your program of change.

Lord, sometimes it may look and feel like defeat, but we know that ultimately the victory belongs to you. Help us, Lord, as we go about our daily lives, to be filled by the spirit and have Paul's prayer answered in our lives here at St. Mark's, that we would know of the power of the resurrection in our lives, so that we can overcome evil in the world and evil in our own lives.

In Jesus' name we pray this. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen.