

## ASCENSION

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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**Scripture:** Luke 24:50-53, Acts 1:1-12

For our meditation today, I have two passages of scripture that I'd like us to look at. Both have the same author; Luke writing in the gospel Luke, and then writing in Acts as well. Thursday was Ascension Day, the day that the church celebrates the Ascension of Jesus – it's 40 days since the Resurrection. We know that during these 40 days, Jesus met with His disciples, met with many people, taught them about the things that had happened, trying to help them make sense of everything and to understand how scripture had been fulfilled by all the events that had transpired that connected with Him. Now, after these 40 days, we read that He is ascending.

### **Luke 24:50-53**

*And He (that is Jesus) led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.*

### **Acts 1:1-12**

*The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*

*And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, "Which," He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

*Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."*

*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.*

### **The Ascension of Jesus**

Not too much is known, and we rarely spend too much time on the Ascension of Jesus. Yet, it is such an important aspect of all of God's plan. In a sense, it's like a culmination. It starts with, and we see that beautiful passage in John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."* Because of the love that God had for each of us, you and me, and the whole of humanity, His creation, the incarnation happened. And we read that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,

and we saw His glory – glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth – talking about Jesus. The Father gave the Son because of the incredible love that He had for each one of us. And so the incarnation happened.

But the incarnation was the first step: Jesus coming from heaven, living on earth, living a completely unblemished life, a life without any sin so that He could be the Lamb given. He could be the propitiation for our sins. He could be the One who was able to give His life as the penalty for the sins and be able to meet God's requirement of justice. As He said, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ." The life that He lived – such a beautiful, blameless, sinless life. He went to the cross and He gave His life for each one of us. He took the penalty of our sin upon Himself.

So we see – from God's love came the incarnation, and then from the incarnation came the crucifixion. It didn't end there. Death couldn't have the last word. Satan couldn't have the last word, and He burst through the tomb. Death couldn't hold Him and He came out victorious. So we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus – that He paid for our sins, He gave His life, and then He came back to life. so we celebrated the resurrection on Easter, that glorious day.

Then we come to this day, the Ascension of Jesus. God's love initiated the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and then to complete the circle, the Ascension back to heaven and the Father. In fact, the Apostles' Creed says it, "On the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

So, forty days Jesus spent with His disciples teaching them, helping them to understand scripture, understand the reasons and the implications of His death, teaching them about the kingdom of God. Then His final instructions to them was, "Stay here. Don't go anywhere for you will get clothed with power from the Holy Spirit." Then follow the orders or the commandments that He kept giving them as we just read in Acts 1:2. So typically, the church celebrates Ascension Day forty days after Easter; and in another ten days it will be Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came.

Ascension is the culmination of the plan of salvation. But Ascension puts in place also another plan. Salvation happened when Jesus came down, finished His work and went up. But now, as we begin to look at life ahead, sanctification must happen – the changing of who we are. Even though we are assured now because we have accepted the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross of each one of us, we have accepted that He paid the penalty, we still have to live on this earth. And God's plan then, as He ended with the Ascension, was also to initiate the sanctification that comes with the Holy Spirit coming into our lives. But that's for another Sunday.

What can we really glean from the Ascension? What nuggets of truth are embedded in the fact that Jesus went up to heaven? Let's look at some of the important or salient points of the Ascension, what may be the implications for us, and try to answer those questions.

### **What happened at the Ascension?**

#### **1. JESUS RETURNED TO THE FATHER**

When the ascension took place, Jesus returned to His Father. Both before and after His death and resurrection, Jesus declares that He was sent by His Father and must return to the Father. "For God so loved the world that He gave."

In John 16:28, He says, "I came from the Father and have come into the world. And now I am leaving the world and going to the Father." If you remember on that first Easter morning, Jesus said to Mary,

“Do not cling to Me for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to My brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.’”

So, He ascended to the Father having completed the work that He was sent to do. Weeks back, when we were looking at the Good Friday service, we looked at that word *tetelestai* = It is finished. The work that Jesus came to do, He had completed, and the plan of salvation was set in motion. The justice of God and the love of God were both fulfilled. Justice held and love was shown, and neither were compromised in their execution. The love of God – How often God has said to us: I’ve loved you with an everlasting love. Then the justice of God – the abhorrence that He had for sin, “the wages of sin is death.” These two came together at the cross. Jesus bridged that gap. And then, having done that, returned to the Father. And in so doing, He has shown us the way to the Father as well.

As the songwriter says: From the manger bed, what a beautiful path leads all the way back to the Father. A holy, perfect way! He has shown us the way not to get caught up in where we are in our sins, but to show us a more holy way that He modeled for us and then went to the Father. And that’s the place that we are waiting to go to. Jesus has already gone having shown us the way. The plan that God set in motion is completed – came from the Father and went back to the Father.

## **2. JESUS NOW SITS AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.**

He sits at the right hand of God. There are numerous scriptures that talk about it. Acts 7:55, Romans 8, Ephesians 1, Colossians 3, Hebrews 1 – all of them talk about the fact that He now sits at the right hand of God.

*Acts 7:55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”*

Paul writing in Romans says, “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died; more than that who was raised, who was at the right hand of God, who is indeed interceding for us.”

Then in Ephesians, that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places. So, many scriptures that talk about Jesus now being at the right hand of God.

What is the right hand of God? It is the place of power and authority.

I went for a seminar on Thursday that was led by Dr. Steve Seamands. He was talking about the ascension, and during the course of it another gentleman and I were having a conversation with Dr. Steve. And Dr. Steve asked him, “Do you know which bible passage in the Old Testament is most used in the New Testament?” and he didn’t know. And Dr. Steve said, “It’s the Psalm 110:1, “*The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my feet while I make your enemies Your footstool.*” That particular passage is quoted twenty times in the New Testament. He sits in power and authority at the right hand as God continues to subdue the forces of evil, Satan’s plans and purposes, and puts them under the feet of His Son, Jesus.

And so we must ask ourselves, as enemies are being put under His feet: What enemies are attacking us? What foes do we have? Of course, Satan, and then the things of this world, the pull of the flesh, the allurements of sin. Jesus completed the victory over them. As we continue to exercise that victory in our own lives, then they continue to be subdued. God is putting everything under the feet of Jesus. Jesus won that victory. But now we exercise that victory and we bring this passage into fulfillment as a prophetic word that is being fulfilled.

What are the things that we struggle with? We struggle with fear, and anger, and lust, and gossip, and envy, and pride, and promiscuity, and all these things. All these, He is putting under His feet. But

here's the good news: While Jesus has ascended, Paul tells us that we too have ascended with Him, that we are sitting with Him, with Christ in the heavenly places. When we looked at Colossians, we saw the number of times he says that we are in Christ, and where Christ is we are too. the victory that Jesus won over everything here on earth, that victory only needs to be enforced. We don't need to fight a battle. We just need to make sure that we say, "No! That victory has already been won."

I remember a chorus that we used to sing when I was in Sunday school:

When Mr. Satan knocks at my heart's door,  
And says, "May I come in?"  
I say, "No, no. For Jesus loves me so,  
And took away my sin."  
So he turns around, and he runs away,  
I wish he'd go away to stay.  
When Mr. Satan knocks at my heart's door,  
I just say, "No, no, no."

That's how we need to treat some of the things – the foes, the enemies that come to us in various guises of envy, and anger, and bitterness, and rage, and lust, and gossip – all of it. We need to say, "No, no. The battle over you has been won, the victory is won and I enforce it by just saying no to you. I will not engage with you."

So He sits at the right-hand of God with power and authority. When He ascended, He told His disciples, "All authority I now give to you." And so we have that same authority, we have the same power. As we know at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit has come into us. What Jesus has in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, we too can avail of.

### **3. HE INTERCEDES FOR US.**

As we read about His ascension, we understand that He now intercedes for us. Scripture tells us in Hebrews 7:25, *Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

Romans 8 *Who is to condemn Christ Jesus is the one who die more than that who was raised, who was at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

I can think of no better imagery than the words of Charles Wesley in his beautiful song:

Arise, my soul, arise;  
Shake off the guilty fears;  
The bleeding Sacrifice  
In my behalf appears.  
Before the throne my Surety stands;  
My name is written on His hands.

He ever lives above,  
For me to intercede,  
His all-redeeming love,  
His precious blood to plead;  
His blood atoned for all our race,  
And sprinkles now the throne of grace. (or the mercy seat, as it were)

Five bleeding wounds He bears,  
Received on Calvary;  
They pour effectual prayers; (He intercedes for us)

They strongly plead for me.  
"Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,  
"Nor let that ransomed sinner die!"

The Father hears Him pray,  
His dear anointed One;  
He cannot turn away  
The presence of His Son.  
His Spirit answers to the blood,  
And tells me I am born of God.

My God is reconciled;  
His pardoning voice I hear;  
He owns me for His child,  
I can no longer fear.  
With confidence I now draw nigh,  
And, "Father, Abba, Father," cry.

All because Jesus is there interceding for you and for me. That's part of what the ascension means. But there is one more thing that we need to understand about His intercession.

1 John 2:1 says, *"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."*

An intercessor and an advocate.

Beloved, sometimes even through this journey of walking with Jesus, we fail Him. We fall into sin, and the moment we do, we become fair game for Satan. Then he comes in with lies, with words that say: "You're done. You can't get up; you can't get back. This is not the way a child of God....." And yet, Jesus is there as an advocate for you, for me, pleading and saying, "I've given My blood for this person." We need to understand that all we need to do is to confess that sin. Tell Satan to go away and be realigned with God because the connection with God is still there because of the advocacy of Jesus for you and for me.

#### **4. HE WILL COME AGAIN AS JUDGE.**

We are told that He will come again. The two angels that were there said, "The same way that you see Him go, He will come again." The ascension also sets in motion the next visitation of Jesus. Having completed the first as Savior, the next time He comes, He will come as judge.

Acts 1:11 says, *"He will come the same way as you watched Him go into heaven."*

So the ascension means four things:

1. The plan of salvation is complete.
2. He is putting all our enemies under His feet. He has a place of authority and power.
3. He is an intercessor and an advocate.
4. He will return as judge.

#### **Questions to ask?**

- Is the plan of salvation complete for you?
- Are you part of that circle of redemption that has taken you from being a sinner to one who is saved by grace?
- Are you using the authority and power that is yours because of the finished work of Jesus as you go through life, as you meet the challenges of life?

- Are you aware that He is your Intercessor and Advocate? I wonder whether there are some of you today who need Him to be interceding for you. While Jesus is already doing it, whether you need to know that that is true, that the thing you have done and asked Him for forgiveness – maybe you're waiting or maybe Satan has got you in a place where he says that you can't be forgiven. Do you understand that Jesus paid the penalty, that He's your advocate? To just say, "Lord Jesus, I need You to intercede for this area in my life."
- Are we getting ready as we go along life, to meet Him as Judge? Will we be ready to meet Him as Judge when He comes the second time?

This past week I was thinking about the whole idea of rest. Jesus said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and I will give you rest." We see that. and yet, when Moses was engaging with God and talking to Him, he said, "These people, You want me to lead them. But You know You must go with me." In Exodus 33 he says, "Now if indeed I have found favor in your sight, please let me know Your ways that I may know You, and find favor in Your sight." And then he says, "Remember that this nation is Your people." And the Lord answered and said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

Even as we look at the ascension today, and the implications of the ascension for us, we know that we're in a very alarming place. Things seem to be out of control; it seems like there is very little that we can do to change situations. More often than not, we are tired and weary because there is no pause in our lives; it just goes on and on from one crisis to another. I was reminded of this, that with the culmination of the finished work of Jesus, He brings to us what God said, that even as His presence fills us, leads us, that He will give rest as well.

I wonder whether there are some of you out there who are saying, "I need that rest." I wonder whether today, even as we look at the ascension and the fact that Jesus finished and then returned to His Father, we see that all of those benefits are ours. Whether we can say, "Lord, in the midst of following You, in the midst of thanking You for salvation and understanding that You are interceding, and You are advocate, and You will come again, but I need some rest. Will You give it to me?" I don't know how He will do it, but this I know that if He says He will, then He will. Maybe that's your point of need today, just to say: I need rest from striving. I need rest from fighting the things of this world. I need rest from fighting the things of this world. I need rest from just wrestling with some of the things that I have done. I need just rest in His Presence.

Beloved, our closing hymn is just a beautiful hymn that says:

There is a place of quiet rest,  
Near to the heart of God,  
A place where sin cannot molest,  
Near to the heart of God.

O Jesus, blest Redeemer,  
Sent from the heart of God,  
Hold us, who wait before Thee,  
Near to the heart of God.

There is a place of comfort sweet,  
Near to the heart of God,  
A place where we our Savior meet,  
Near to the heart of God.

And I pray that as we sing this song, and as we think about the Ascension and the culmination, the fulfilling of God's plan of salvation and what it means for us, that beyond just the thought of "I've got to live a life like this. I've got to do this, so I've got to be this," to be able to say, "Lord, I need Your presence to just follow as Moses said, 'If Your presence is not there, I will not go.'" And then to hear God saying, "I will give you My presence and rest."

Shall we pray together?

Almighty God, to the weary, to the worn, to the tired, we ask that You would give Your rest, the kind of rest that will calm, alleviate, take away fear, assuage whatever it needs. Just a time of resting in You and knowing that we are safe in Your hands. Lord, we want to walk in Your presence. But also, Lord, today especially, I pray for those who are out there who are saying that they need that rest. Lord, would You give it to them? Would You let Your Spirit flow into every home where there is that need? Would You lift them? Would You let each one feel that they are in the hollow of Your hand? And to just take deep breaths Lord, and experience You in beautiful, calming and serene ways. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.