

Thursday May 21, 2020 is the day on the Christian calendar known as Ascension of our Lord. Since we do not have an Ascension Day service as they did a generation ago, we will celebrate that great event today. It is good and right to celebrate Jesus' virgin birth, His sinless life, His death on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead. But we dare not leave out His ascension into heaven. For the homecoming of Christ, returning to the Father is just as significant in importance as is His resurrection from the dead. In order to be a whole Christian, it is necessary for us to understand the whole life of Jesus as revealed in the Bible. To skip over His ascension into heaven is to suffer a deficiency in our own Christian lives. I have met people who are chronically fatigued because they have iron poor blood, a deficiency of iron in their blood. When we as Christians skip over a significant teaching of Jesus it creates a void in our lives that can only be filled by a proper teaching of truth about Jesus and for today, that means Jesus' Ascension into heaven.

Every worship service we mention the ascension when we recite the Apostle's Creed or read the Nicene Creed. It is not as if we do not know about it already. We all agree it took place. But then we have to ask the question. So What? What difference does it make any way? Why spend any time on this historical event?

Dr. Luke writes about the ascension in his Gospel and in Acts. It took place in Bethany with the Mount of Olives just beside Bethany. Elsewhere in Luke these two places are mentioned in direct proximity, "Jesus drew near to Bethany at the Mount called Olivet." In other words, the two were so close that if a person were on the Mount of Olives, he or she could be said to be at Bethany. So, the ascension took place outside of Jerusalem where Jesus had met with the disciples so many times, the Mount of Olives.

Something hit me as I studied the location. Where was it that Jesus had one of his worse moments in time ever? This location is where Jesus experienced such torment, anguish,

sorrow, grief, turmoil, despair, and agony that He dropped sweats of blood. Jesus asked the disciples to pray for Him, but they all fell asleep. It was here on the Mount of Olives that Jesus prayed for the Father to take this cup of wrath away from Him. It was also here that Jesus said, nevertheless, not My will but Thy will be done. It is here that Jesus experienced greater depths of despair than you and I ever will, and it is at this location where He ascended into the heights of glory.

The resurrection and ascended power of the Lord Jesus Christ can take the location where you suffered the most and transform it into a holy site. This is where God changed you the most in your walk with God. Your greatest agony can be a place of your greatest transformation. The Ascension of Christ proves it. Jesus, sitting at the right hand of the Father is doing full time ministry over you and in you, changing you, and is in total charge of your life. From sweats of blood to the heights of glory, power, honor, and blessing. The ascension took place at the Mount of Olives located near Bethany.

One day we too will leave this earth with all the pain, agony, suffering, sickness, disease, turmoil, and death and we will leave it all behind. We will ascend into pure joy and feel the bliss of heaven. Jesus led the way for us and one day we will follow if we are followers of Jesus Christ.

We must not confuse Jesus' resurrection from the ascension. These are two completely different historical happenings. After Jesus was raised from the dead, He appeared to many people for a period of 40 days. On the 40<sup>th</sup> day, Jesus gave His final instructions to the disciples and He blessed them. His leaving was a blessing. Jesus' body rose off of the ground into the air and He went into a cloud which we know to be the glory cloud wherein the Throne Room of God resides. The disciples were eyewitnesses of this. It could not be questioned. Jesus was gone for good. I believe Jesus had a visible ascension to let the disciples know he was not

coming back immediately. Jesus kept appearing for 40 days but now those surprise appearances would now be over. He was gone.

They stood their looking in the sky. God sent two angels to them as we read, "They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!" Dr John Stott writes, "This time his departure was final. So they were not to wait around for his next resurrection appearance. Instead, they were to wait for somebody else to come, the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit would only come after Jesus had left. Jesus had to leave for the Holy Spirit to come.

Earlier Jesus spoke these words that we read in John. "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away (ascend); for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

Next week we celebrate Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit. I will have much to say about that next week. But there would never have been a Pentecost had there not been an Ascension. Jesus had to leave for the church to be formed. Dr Erickson writes, "The sending of the Holy Spirit was important, for whereas Jesus could work with the disciples only through external teaching and example, the Holy Spirit could work within them. Having more intimate access to the center of their lives, he would be able to work through them more freely." This would result in even greater works than Christ did. Jesus promised never to leave His disciples and Jesus remained true to that promise. He was with them through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Friends, this side of heaven we will never know all that Jesus gave up to come to this earth. John Piper writes, "The severing of the Son of God from his Father was awful." His loss was more than anyone has ever experienced. He emptied Himself. The Bible says, He who knew no sin became sin." No one has descended more than Jesus, and no one has ascended into the highest position other than Jesus. The ascension means His sacrifice is done,

complete, acceptable to the Father, and sufficient for all time. The ascension means Jesus is now King of Kings, Lord of Lord's and is reigning eternally having triumphed over all his enemies, and He is ever interceding for us.

The Bible says, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, "that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Never before or again will there be such a coronation day. From where he had dropped sweats of blood to the right hand of the Father and quicker than our minds can comprehend; Jesus was home.

In my own life there are times I can be overcome with guilt and shame for sins I committed as they come back into my memory. I relive that experience plus all the guilt and shame that went with it. It's awful. And once again I ask the Lord for his forgiveness.

Let me put this another way. Pastor, how do you know that Jesus can forgive all of our sins? Pastor, how do you know that Jesus can take away all of our guilt and shame? How do you know that there is forgiveness of sins at all? The correct answer is the Ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven. The answer is the glorious exaltation of Jesus. Had Jesus' sacrifice for sin not been complete and perfect, the Father never would have accepted him back into heaven. The Father would have said, "Go back Son for you have more work to do." But Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient for all time and the Ascension proves it. It is that simple. Once we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The judge of heaven is also our advocate and He himself bore the penalty of our sin once and for all. This is why there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Jesus' ascension into heaven means we have constant access to the Father for Jesus has made us presentable to God and invited us to have an audience with the Father. Jesus has

made us acceptable to the Father. Hebrew 7:25 Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

26 For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;

Jesus is our mediator, our go between. The only way to the Father is through Jesus. Therefore, the Ascension of Jesus means there is salvation in no one else. Only our Ascended Lord can offer salvation for it is only His completed work that satisfied the Father. Allah, Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, or anyone other than Jesus cannot save anyone. Apart from Christ, all are lost. Only Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father and no one else. There is no other god. No not one. Please do not think all religions are equal and we are all praying to the same God. How many ascensions are there? Only one, the God man, Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, Eph 1:20 - God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. 22 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church,

The ascension means Jesus Christ is the King of the universe and his kingdom has no end. God's reign is supreme. There is no authority higher than the ascended Jesus Christ. It is right for us to bow down and worship Him. Amen and Amen.