

He Ascended For His Glory & Our Good

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- [0 : 0 0] Lord, as we open your word and consider your ascension, please use my own feeble and weak efforts to glorify you.
- ! And as the song said, please help us to give you all the glory. Amen. As we consider the ascension of Jesus, of all the miracles of Jesus, can you imagine seeing him ascend?
- Think of it for a moment. His disciples saw Jesus turn water into wine. They saw him heal a hundred diseases, cast out demons, raise the dead, calm the storm, multiply the bread, and even walk on water.
- But here comes a moment where before his disciples they see him rising into the sky.
- I wonder what must that have been like? I was thinking about this. Water is denser than air.
- [1 : 3 0] And somehow walking on water, though it's impossible and we know it, it somehow seems more likely than levitating. And yet his disciples saw Jesus ascend into the air.
- How high must he have gone to be hidden by a cloud? Think about that. I don't know if you've ever been up in a hot air balloon or, I don't know, doing a bungee jump or jumping out of a plane.
- Me and Jennifer jumped out of a plane for 14,000 foot. How high have you been? Some of you, I'm sure, wouldn't even be comfortable going 10 feet in the air.
- Let alone 100 or 1,000 foot. Have you ever stood atop a mountain? Been above the clouds? How high must Jesus have went?
- Floating in the air to be hidden by a cloud. And yet he is not just going up. Like heaven is just past that wee cloud there.
- [2 : 4 3] Go to the moon, take a left. Round the corner from Jupiter and now you've reached heaven. He is going between dimensions, crossing between realms.
- Entering into the heavenly realm from whence he came. I've always wanted to say that, whence. From whence he came. And so every year in the Christian calendar we celebrate and focus on certain things like Jesus' birth.
- The appearing of the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Incarnation. Or the death of Jesus, the crucifixion of the suffering servant in Isaiah. Or the resurrection of Jesus.
- The conquering of death when he was declared to be the Son of God in power by his resurrection. We are familiar with these parts of the Bible. They seem to take up a decent amount of space in the Bible.
- But if you were to be asked where in the Bible it talks about his ascension, where would you go? Probably Acts chapter 1. If you were asked by someone, how much does the Bible make of Jesus' ascension?
- [3 : 5 4] What would you say? Because we've already read in Acts chapter 1 a very short account. Compared to all the words in the Bible, a very short account of his ascension.

Yet, his ascension actually takes up a lot of space in the New Testament. For instance, if you were to guess what is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament, what would it be?

What do you think it would be? It's Psalm 110. The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Most quoted.

And throughout the New Testament, his ascension is woven into just about every single book. That Christian living and the mission of the church and the kingdom coming is dependent on Christ ascended.

And so the ascension, though it seems impossible for a person to be taken up beyond the clouds, isn't just about Jesus going up. Nor is it just about Jesus crossing realms and entering the heavens.

[5 : 01] He is ascending into glory. Rising to power and position. Ascending the throne that is above all thrones. That's what the ascension is about.

And the New Testament is riddled with the reality and implications of his ascension. As it says in Acts chapter 3, Peter says that heaven must receive him until the time for restoring all things.

Or Paul says in Philippians 2, that God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every other name. Or in Ephesians 1, God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.

And so his ascension is made much of in the New Testament. But I wonder this question.

It's a challenging question. If you're honest with yourself, and maybe you're better than me, but if I'm honest with myself, this is a very challenging question. Have you ever imagined what it would be like to be with Jesus on earth?

[6 : 13] Have you ever wondered if it might be easier to be his disciple if he was here on earth with us? Have you ever thought that it would be more of an advantage to us if Jesus was with us in person?

That's a challenging question. But I want to read from John chapter 16 just now. So it will be up on the screen. John 16, verses 5 to 11.

These are the words of Jesus. John 16, verses 5 to 11.

John 16, verses 5 to 11. It says, But now I am going to him who sent me. And none of you ask me, where are you going?

But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away. For if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you.

[7 : 22] But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict a world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. Concerning sin because they do not believe in me.

Concerning righteousness because I go to the Father. And you will see me no longer. Concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged. These words of Jesus are hard to fully grasp.

He says it is to your advantage that I go away. It's to your advantage that Jesus is not here.

But does it feel like that? And he even gives us the reason. He doesn't leave us in the dark. He says, For if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you.

Yet perhaps we have this feeling that we would rather have Jesus in person than the helper. That's maybe what we think. I know that I've thought that before.

[8 : 26] It doesn't always feel like an advantage. Perhaps it's because we are all too used to living by sight rather than living by faith.

Perhaps it's also because we imagine that people will be more open to Jesus if he is here and not there. Seems straightforward, doesn't it?

Yet we've just been in the Gospel of Mark and we've heard Jesus tell the parable of the sower in the soils. That people don't automatically believe in Jesus just because he's there. Even if they see miracles.

And so the condition of the soil determines whether it will receive the seed or not. It's not about outside circumstances. It's not about whether Jesus is present or not.

It's a matter of the heart. Jesus could be standing right in front of you turning water into wine, calming a storm, casting out demons and raising the dead. And you could still have a heart that rejects him.

[9 : 28] The parable of the sower in the soils shows us that even our hearts need the word of God. When my own heart pains and longs to see Jesus and thinks to itself, if only I could see Jesus, my faith would be stronger.

This parable reminds me that no, that's not right. It's not your eyes that are the problem. It's your heart. And your heart needs to be ready to receive the word. Think about the thousands of faithful disciples throughout the 2,000 years since Jesus left this earth.

Who have burned brightly in their faith. Given their lives for Christ. And it's not because they've seen him. It's because of the word that was planted in their hearts.

Even our hearts need the word of God. We might think that we might do better if the skies were to tear open and reveal the heavens. And we could see with our own eyes the ascended Christ. But is that really so?

And I've often asked myself this question. Would my faith burn brighter? And would I be more enthusiastic in talking about Jesus if I actually saw him in glory?

[10 : 41] And I think, in my fallen nature, I think it would. I think my faith would burn brighter. And I think I would be more enthusiastic if I saw Jesus.

But it's a challenge. I'm relying too much on my eyes. And not on the word of God. And how do you feel? What do you think?

Would your faith burn brighter? Would you be more enthusiastic to tell others about Jesus if he appeared to you? It's a challenging question. Because we long to see Jesus.

But I think that our flesh lies to us. That we need these things. Like our lack of faith is a problem with our eyes. But it's not.

It's a problem with our heart. And so we all need to be reminded of our need for the word. And for our need to receive the word. And how can we receive the word unless the spirit of God comes and convicts the world.

[11 : 45] And convicts our own hearts. It is to our advantage that Jesus goes. So that the helper might come. You see, Jesus is right that we need the spirit to come.

Not just for us. But for the world. Because how else will they believe who Jesus is unless the spirit comes and convicts the world of sin. So this morning I thought it would be worthwhile stopping our usual series in Mark to remind us.

Myself included. Of the ascension. And to show us that Jesus' ascension is for his glory and for our good. And I want to share just a few reasons.

Not an exhaustive list. I want to share five reasons why we should consider the ascension. And don't worry.

These will be quick points. Five reasons. Number one. To push back against our flesh and set our minds on things above where Christ is seated. Number two.

[12 : 47] To have confidence against darkness that Christ really is building his church. Number three. Number three. To have comfort and temptation and trials that Christ is advocating for us before the Father.

and number four to have boldness in proclaiming an ascended Christ and not a missing Christ and number five to have joy in praising the ascended Christ and all his exalted glory and so let us quickly go through these firstly we must push back against our flesh that would have us distracted with many things on earth is that's not true you've heard the saying someone can be so heavenly minded that they are no earthly use but the same is true somebody could be so earthly minded that they are no heavenly use the truth is we all know no matter what you believe on earth we all know that our hearts are easily distracted that our earthly senses and temptations and struggles can very often dull our spiritual understanding at one time we can have such a strong sense of God's activity and the very next moment we are dull and think that the earth is all that there is answered prayers become distant memories is this not true our flesh we need to push back against it our flesh does not help us i've been fooled many times by my flesh but it never helps us to know the truth we need to set our minds on things above not on things of the earth and if you are in Christ and you have died and you've been raised with Christ so seek the things where Christ is seated at the right hand of God where your life is hidden with Christ in God and when Christ who is your life appears then you also will appear with him in glory and none of us look like what we are becoming none of us do look around the room we don't look like these glorious new creations in Christ but that's because our lives are hidden with Christ in God so be gentle with one another don't criticize one another don't judge one another encourage one another toward the life that is hidden with Christ in God when he appears it will be clear who he is but it will also be clear who we are in him and so we pray your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Christ has gone to receive his kingdom and in heaven where he is seated his will is done his kingdom has come and his will is done in heaven and so should not our minds be set there where our citizenship really is yet we are not going to do this automatically our flesh is certainly not going to do this for us our flesh is not going to do the heavy lifting that our souls need so we must work hard to set our minds on things that are above secondly we really can have confidence that the that against the darkness Jesus really is building his church Jesus is not missing it's not like someone visits a business and the CEO is nowhere to be seen we all know where the CEO is he's running things and so Jesus is not absent he is ruling and building his church from the heavens from the highest place and the gates of hell will not prevail against it as Jesus said in Matthew 16 why will the gates of hell not prevail against it because Jesus has ascended into glory he has ascended and darkness hell and death cannot touch him or overcome him it might not seem like these little gatherings that we call church are doing much we must not neglect to come together and as we come together we can have confidence that Jesus really is building his church he is building you and me through our gatherings he is maturing us as we come together he's strengthening and multiplying his people and is unimpressive as it looks at times unimpressive as we seem at times as divisive and destructive as it can appear

Jesus is neither missing nor out of control Jesus is strong he's not a weak shepherd he is the good shepherd he's not a powerless leader he is lord and he will build his church just as he will complete the good work that he began in me and you have confidence Jesus has the victory his purposes will come to fruition thirdly we can have comfort in our temptations and trials folks there will be times when our sinful flesh feels strong there will be times when Satan would want to sift us like wheat but our Lord and Savior is by the Father's right hand interceding for you he's interceding that you would not be overtaken by sin or sorrow that we would have endurance for every trial and strength to resist every temptation and should we sin we have an advocate with the Father he can forgive us do we not feel comfort when our brothers or sisters pray for us how much more should we have comfort and be spurred on by the prayers of our Lord and Savior he wants our greatest good and he is ever working for our benefit as Romans 8 says who is to condemn us

Christ Jesus he's the one who died more than that who was raised who is at the right hand of God and who is indeed interceding for us fourthly we can have boldness in proclaiming an ascended Christ not a missing Christ we don't we don't need to feel shy or awkward or embarrassed that Christ is not here not seen not visible not on earth he hasn't simply gone to heaven after death like some Greek platonic view of life beyond the grave he has ascended into heaven with a physical body the Son of Man approached the ancient gates in Psalm 24 the ancient gates lifted up and opened for the risen Christ he approached the Ancient of Days as it is written in Daniel 7 the Son of Man comes on the clouds to heaven to the Ancient of Days to receive his kingdom

[19 : 52] God has exalted him to the highest place which is far above Mount Everest far higher than the pillars of creation and the Eagle Nebula far above all creation above every creature every person every angel he is above all and that is where he is you cannot get higher than the Most High he is at the right hand of God and so why should we expect him to remain on earth his glorified body doesn't belong to a fallen earth and currently this earth could neither recognize him nor glorify him in the manner that he is worthy of so don't feel shy or awkward or embarrassed that Jesus isn't visible or here let us tell folks where he really is he is exalted to the highest place he is where the angels bow down so we can have boldness that the one we proclaim he's not a dead prophet like all the other religions he's not a missing person he is the risen and ascended Lord of all glory fifthly and finally we really can have joy if we remember and realize and growing the knowledge that Jesus is not only risen but he is exalted he is exalted to the highest place of glory and so it ought to result in praise of Jesus you see the angels the angels cry out myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands as it says in Revelation 5 not in a quiet murmur but in a loud voice worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing have you ever heard the voice of a thousand angels folks the angels are not quiet why should we be quiet the angels rejoice why should we not the angels bow down and worship why should we not one day all of creation will praise his name yet we know today the truth of who he is so why should we remain silent who else was slain on our behalf who else was born of a virgin who else was with God and glory before the world existed who else walks on the sea and walks in righteousness always and forever who else has ascended except he who descended who else has been lifted on the clouds to the highest place in the heavenly realm who else has approached the ancient of days who else do the gates of heaven open up for and the ancient doors lift up who else is seated far above all thrones and dominions who else is given the name far above every name in this age and the age to come who else is called the son of God and who else is feared by demons and worshipped by the angels who is this king of glory we need to hear this

I need to hear this you need to hear this all of creation needs to hear this as it says in the words of Agur who has ascended to heaven and come down who has gathered the winds in his fists who has wrapped up the waters in a garment who has established all the ends of the earth what is his name and the name of his son surely you know he is Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior the king of all glory so folks have joy have joy in the ascended and glorified Christ he has ascended for his glory and for our good who is worthy of all praise and glory forevermore all praise and glory to God the Father through Jesus Christ his wonderful son who sits by his right hand in power and glory above every throne and every name he is the Lord of all majesty he is the king of all glory he is the one who was and is and is to come great is his name and greatly to be praised is the name of the Lord Jesus forever and ever

Amen Amen Let us sing