

## The Ascension

Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-11; Philippians 2:5-11

### Introduction:

**Kyle:** “When you think about the ascension of Jesus Christ, what comes to mind?”

**Eden:** “I love Jesus”

### Historical Conversation

- Ascension Day or the communal celebration of the ascension of Jesus Christ often goes unnoticed and usually receives little attention in many evangelical circles
- It was Luke’s reference in Acts 1 of the period of forty days following Christ’s resurrection that is responsible for the arrangement of the day on the Christian calendar
- Typically Ascension Day falls on a Thursday, but it is celebrated on Sunday
- The celebration of the Ascension did not take place until the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

*The Lord’s Day, the day of resurrection, the day of Christians ... is also called the Lord’s Day, because on it the Lord ascended as a Victor to the Father (Jerome, Early Church Father).*

- In Pentecostal settings emphasis is given to the Day of Pentecost (50 days after resurrection), but the ascension is downplayed
- The ascension of Jesus Christ is intimately tied to the resurrection of Christ and more importantly is vital to God’s plan of salvation and sanctification

*The two primary celebrations of salvation history in the Easter season are Ascension Day and Pentecost Sunday” (Webber, p. 160).*

*It is ... an important event in the history of God’s salvation (Webber, p. 161).*

- Like the resurrection, this is a piece of Christian doctrine that must not be ignored nor misunderstood

*The present, ascended status of Jesus is a foundational aspect of the apostolic faith, well attested in the NT writings. Usually, Jesus’ exaltation in heaven is thought of as the counterpart of his resurrection (Green, McKnight, and Marshall).*

- Often viewed as a transition event marking the end of Christ’s earthly ministry and launching his heavenly ministry

*The ascension, because of these many references, was undoubtedly an important event in the life of Christ marking the conclusion of His earthly ministry and bringing to culmination that series of events which had begun with His incarnation (Walvoord).*

Theological Foundation for our Discussion

QUESTION: Where does Ascension Day fit into the theological discussion about God?

Arms and Branches of Theology:

- 1) Anthropology – “study of man”
- 2) Hamartiology – “study of sin”
- 3) Soteriology – “study of salvation”
- 4) Pneumatology – “study of the Spirit”
- 5) Ecclesiology - “study of the church”
- 6) Eschatology – “study of end times”
- 7) **Christology – “study of Christ”**

NOTE: Within Christology, there are also several branches of theology related to the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is under the umbrella of Christology where we will focus our discussion on the ascension of Jesus Christ.

NOTE: Within Christology, there are two main branches related to Christ — humiliation and exaltation

1) Humiliation

- a. Incarnation (Word became flesh)
- b. Suffering
- c. Death
- d. Burial

2) Exaltation

- a. Resurrection
- b. Ascension into Heaven
- c. Session (Sitting) at the right hand of the Father
- d. Return in glory and power

NOTE: Our focus will be centered on the exaltation of Christ as outlined in His ascension and session.

**I. Biblical Evidence for Christ’s Ascension**

Direct Biblical References

A. Mark 16:19-20

***<sup>19</sup> So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. <sup>20</sup> And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen. Mark 16:19-20 NKJV***

1. “He was received up into heaven” (v. 19a)

- a) Mark makes reference to a place or Jesus’ destination—heaven
- b) Mark does not provide a method for Jesus’ ascension—He was just received up (Elijah chariot and whirlwind of fire)

2. “Sat down at the right hand of the Father” (v. 19b)

**NOTE:** The Marcan reference to the ascension is questioned by some based on textual grounds (longer ending), but it does line up with other portions of Scripture

B. Luke 24:50-51

***<sup>50</sup> And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. Luke 24:50-51 NKJV***

1. “Carried up into heaven” (v. 51)

- a) “Anaphero” = “carried up”
- b) Different Greek word used by Luke in his second volume work (Acts)

2. Luke prepares his audience throughout his gospel for the departure of Jesus

***<sup>30</sup> And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup> who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Luke 9:30-31 NKJV— Transfiguration***

***<sup>51</sup> Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. Luke 9:51 NKJV— Toward Jerusalem***

3. Jesus’ blessing

- a) Marks the end of his earthly ministry
- b) Sets up his eternal priestly role
- c) Moses at the end of his ministry (Deut. 33)
- d) Jacob prior to his death (Gen. 49)

4. “Carried up” speaks of his glory and regal power/authority

C. Acts 1:6-12

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”<sup>7</sup> And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me<sup>in</sup> Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”<sup>9</sup> Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.<sup>10</sup> And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,<sup>11</sup> 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.”<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. Acts 1:6-12 NKJV

#### 1. Time and date of the ascension

<sup>3</sup> to whom 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. Acts 1:3 NKJV

NOTE: This ascension narrative will highlight the completion of post-resurrection appearances

#### 2. Acts provides an expanded ascension picture

- a) “Taken up” (v. 9) = “epairo” (lifted up, hoist a sail)
- b) “Cloud received him up/out” (v. 9) = “hupelaben”

- Took under him
- Supported by the cloud
- Clouds refer often to Christ’s return in power and glory

- c) “He went up” or “As He went” (v. 10) = “poreuomenou”

- Pursue a journey
- Departure from earth and journey toward heaven

- d) “Taken up” into heaven (v. 11) = “analephtheis” (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51)

- Climactic event
- Use of apocalyptic stage props — clouds and angels

### 3. Acts summary of the ascension

- a) Upward and Father is taking the Son to heaven
- b) Once in atmospheric heaven, received by clouds
- c) Ascension was a journey, not a disappearance or change of state
- d) Climactic Christ received into heaven as the destination of their journey

#### Non-Direct Biblical References

##### D. Other Supporting Passages

***<sup>14</sup> Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. Hebrews 4:14 NKJV***

***<sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. 1 Peter 3:22 NKJV***

***<sup>33</sup> Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. <sup>34</sup>“For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand ... Acts 2:33-34 NKJV***

*The mass of Scriptural evidence is one of the reasons why there has been so little question in orthodoxy concerning the reality of the ascension of Christ — Walvoord*

##### E. Nicene Creed

***He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.***

NOTE: Though the method/mode of ascension remains unclear in gospel narratives, there does remain strong biblical evidence for the ascension of Christ

## **II. Theological Significance of Christ’s Ascension**

- A. The ascension is the climax to the period of kenosis (emptied himself) characterized by Christ’s life on earth

***<sup>7</sup> but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. Philippians 2:7 — gave up divine privileges***

1. Marks the end of humiliation

***<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11 NKJV***

2. Marks the end of earthly prophetic work — role will transition to Holy Spirit

**B. The ascension makes possible for the resurrected Christ to receive glory and honor**

1. First time receiving glory and honor from the Father as both God and man
2. Resembled pre-incarnate glory

*<sup>5</sup> And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. John 17:5 NKJV*

3. Added glory of Savior and Mediator who triumphed over death and sin
  - a) This glory and status was based on Christ's work
  - b) Included victorious humanity AND deity
4. Added reward from the Father
  - a) Control and dominion

*You have put all things in subjection under his feet.<sup>a)</sup> For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. Hebrews 2:8 NKJV*

- b) God exalted Him and gave him the name that is above every other name

*<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name ... Philippians 2:9*

**C. The ascension initiated Christ's session—sitting at the right hand of the Father**

*The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." Psalm 110:1 NKJV*

*<sup>3</sup> who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself<sup>d)</sup> purged our<sup>b)</sup> sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high ... Hebrews 1:3 NKJV*

1. His session indicates a completion of Christ's work of redemption

ILLUSTRATION: King sits down at accession, but still engages other activities (clean house)

2. His session indicates Christ received authority over the universe as the God-man

*<sup>20</sup> which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,<sup>21</sup> far above all principality and power and*

*might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. Ephesians 1:20-21*

3. His session gave Christ authority to pour out the Holy Spirit

*<sup>32</sup> This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. <sup>33</sup> Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. Acts 2:32-33 NKJV*

NOTE: Holy Spirit is necessary for the growth and expansion of God's mission (April emphasis)

NOTE: Without Christ's ascension and session, the Holy Spirit doesn't come

*<sup>7</sup> 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; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. John 16:7 NKJV*

*<sup>12</sup> "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. John 14:12 NKJV*

NOTE: Sitting did not mean inactive/fixed, Jesus still walked around and stood

4. His session reminds us that Christ ascended into a specific place
  - a) Not a disappearance
  - b) Return in same manner

#### D. Glorification of Humanity

1. In the ascension, the resurrected man entered into heaven for the first time
2. In the ascension, glorification for humanity is now made possible since Christ is the first fruits

#### E. Paves the way for Pentecost

### III. Practical Implications of Christ's Ascension

#### A. Christ's ascension foreshadows our future ascension and final home with Christ

*<sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:17*

***<sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. John 14:3***

B. Christ's ascension allows us to share now (in part) and later (more fully) in Christ's authority

1. Ephesians 6 (Armor of God)
2. 2 Corinthians 10:4 (weapons are mighty in God)

C. Christ's ascension makes available the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead to dwell inside the life of the believer

***<sup>11</sup> But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:11 NKJV***

D. Christ's ascension makes available the resources for the church to evangelize and disciple the world

***<sup>12</sup> "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. John 14:12 NKJV***

E. Christ's ascension offers humanity an eternal intercessor

***<sup>34</sup> Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Romans 8:34 NKJV***

***<sup>24</sup> For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us ... Hebrews 9:24 NKJV***

- Jesus, the Great High Priest
- Jesus represents humanity to the Father
- Jesus never ceases to pray for us

## **Conclusion**

1. The ascension of Christ is extremely vital to the Christian faith
2. The ascension of Christ is extremely vital to the Christian's walk of faith
3. The ascension of Christ provides us hope in times of difficulty and uncertainty (intercessor)