

# *THE WONDER OF THE ASCENSION*

Luke 24:50-53

May 24, 2020

*When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany,  
he lifted up his hands and blessed them.  
While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.  
Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.  
And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.*

Luke 24:50-53



## **The wonder of the Ascension**

*Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy . . . .*

Luke 24:52 (but compare this to John 16:16)

## The setting for the next scene in the GATDOTL: The vicinity of Bethany

*When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany . . .*

Luke 24:50

1) Keep your eyes on \_\_\_\_\_

2) The plot is simple: \_\_\_\_\_ then \_\_\_\_\_



## The theology of Christ's Ascension

*Then God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name . . . .*  
Philippians 2:9 (reflecting back on Isaiah 45:23)

1) The Ascension is the \_\_\_\_\_ moment of Christ's exaltation:

1. Coronation: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Intercession: \_\_\_\_\_

2) The Ascension allows \_\_\_\_\_ to step forward

3) The Ascension means that heaven is \_\_\_\_\_

1. Jesus is \_\_\_\_\_

2. The "diverse gifts of his grace" are mine \_\_\_\_\_

## Getting practical regarding Jesus' Ascension

*“. . . I am going to send you what the Father has promised;  
but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*  
Luke 24:49 (see also Acts 1:1-8 and all of Chapter 2!)

1) We practice the disciplines of Christ's absence, beginning with \_\_\_\_\_

2) Jesus will \_\_\_\_\_ when he returns!

3) The Great Commission will \_\_\_\_\_

COLLECT FOR ASCENSION DAY

Almighty God, whose only-begotten Son our  
Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven: May  
our hearts and minds also there

**ASCEND,**

and with him continually dwell; who lives and  
reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God,  
for ever and ever.

Amen.



Anglican Network  
in Canada

## Resources for further studies of Christ's ascension

Bob Deffinbaugh's sermon on the end of Luke at <https://bible.org/seriespage/77-invisibility-invincibility-luke-2436-53>

Spurgeon's "Our Lord's Attitude in Ascension" on Luke 24 (ending attached below) at <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwimrNzoqMvpAhXiHTQIHxDOUQFjAJegQIBRAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.spurgeongems.org%2Fvols49-51%2Fchs2949.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0iZNKGoXv4O8fiDSxNjt1L>

I like Kevin DeYoung's "Primer" on the Ascension at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-the-ascension/>

Kim Haines-Eitzen, religion professor at Cornell, has an interesting article on hope at [https://getpocket.com/explore/item/ancient-texts-encouraged-hope-and-endurance-when-they-spoke-of-end-times?utm\\_source=pocket-newtab](https://getpocket.com/explore/item/ancient-texts-encouraged-hope-and-endurance-when-they-spoke-of-end-times?utm_source=pocket-newtab)

John Calvin's *Institutes* has a good summary at <https://www.monergism.com/3-benefits-imparted-our-faith-christs-ascensionhttps://www.monergism.com/3-benefits-imparted-our-faith-christs-ascension>

Ligon Duncan has a helpful message at <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/i-believe-in-jesus-christwho-ascended-into-heaven>

Timothy Keller's audio of a sermon on "The Real Jesus" (he calls the Ascension the "detonator") in Acts 1 is available at <https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/the-ascension-6496/>

Alexander Maclaren's commentary at [https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.asp/link/ale\\_maclaren%5Eale\\_maclaren.ES.4B.html/at/Expositions%20of%20Holy%20Scripture](https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.asp/link/ale_maclaren%5Eale_maclaren.ES.4B.html/at/Expositions%20of%20Holy%20Scripture)

Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Baker Academic, 2005) is my favorite contemporary book on Christological preaching in the Old Testament.

Paul Scott Wilson's *The Four Pages of the Sermon* (Abingdon Press, 1999) is the preaching text used at Calvin Seminary.

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 18, discusses the Apostles' Creed statement on the ascension at <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/heidelberg-catechism>

N.T. Wright's Pentecost sermon at <http://www.ntwrightpage.com/sermons/Pentecost07.htm>

I still am using the themes from J. C. Ryle's short commentary on the Luke 24 at <https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/l24.htm>

# 4 Results of Christ's Ascension

<https://www.christianity.com/theology/4-results-of-christs-ascension-11671403.html>

When Jesus told his disciples that he would be leaving them, they reacted with sorrow, but when it actually happened they reacted with joy. Why?

Have you ever noticed that when Jesus told his disciples that he would be leaving them, they reacted with sorrow, but then, when it actually happened, they reacted with joy? (Compare John 16:16 with Luke 24:50) What can account for this change? In his book *The Work of Christ*, R.C. Sproul provides a simple answer: the disciples had come to understand why and where Jesus was going. From here he shows four great results of Christ's ascension. ~ Tim Challies

#1. Glorification. "When Jesus departed this world on the shekinah cloud, He was going back to the realm of glory. He was going to receive the glory that He enjoyed with the Father from all eternity. So, the ascension was a glorious thing. That is why, after He ascended, the disciples went back into Jerusalem and praised God in the temple. They understood that their Master was getting His glory back. His humiliation was over, and His exaltation had begun."

#2. Coronation. "In the ascension, Jesus went up to His coronation. He did not go up simply to enter into His rest. He went up for His investiture service. He ascended to the throne, to the right hand of God, where He was given dominion, power, and authority over the whole earth. The Lamb who was slain became the Lion of Judah, who now reigns over the earth."

#3. The Gift of the Comforter. "One of the most important reasons for Jesus' ascension was that Pentecost might take place, that the Father and the Son might pour out the Spirit on the church to strengthen it and empower it for its earthly mission. As we all know, to witness for Christ in a corrupt world requires strength greater than our own. John Calvin said that the most important task of the church is to be the visible witness of the invisible kingdom, and for that we need the Holy Spirit."

#4. The Ministry of the High Priest. "We have a great High Priest who offered a sacrifice for us on the cross once and for all—His own blood. That portion of His priestly ministry is finished. But His priestly work for us goes on as He intercedes for us. ... Today, Jesus is in heaven, interceding for you and me, if indeed we belong to Him, and His prayers for us are equally effective. We should rejoice that He has taken up this priestly ministry on our behalf in the heavenly tabernacle."

## **Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 18**

Q 46. What do you mean by saying, "He ascended to heaven"?

A. That Christ, while his disciples watched, was taken up from the earth into heaven<sup>1</sup> and remains there on our behalf<sup>2</sup> until he comes again to judge the living and the dead.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Luke 24:50-51](#); [Acts 1:9-11](#) <sup>2</sup> [Rom. 8:34](#); [Eph. 4:8-10](#); [Heb. 7:23-25](#); [9:24](#) <sup>3</sup> [Acts 1:11](#)

Q 47. But isn't Christ with us until the end of the world as he promised us?<sup>1</sup>

A. Christ is true human and true God.

In his human nature Christ is not now on earth;<sup>2</sup>  
but in his divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit he is never absent from us.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Matt. 28:20](#) <sup>2</sup> [Acts 1:9-11](#); [3:19-21](#) <sup>3</sup> [Matt. 28:18-20](#); [John 14:16-19](#)

Q 48. If his humanity is not present wherever his divinity is,  
then aren't the two natures of Christ separated from each other?

A. Certainly not.

Since divinity is not limited and is present everywhere,<sup>1</sup>

it is evident that Christ's divinity is surely beyond the bounds of the humanity that has been taken on,  
but at the same time his divinity is in and remains personally united to his humanity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Jer. 23:23-24](#); [Acts 7:48-49](#) ([Isa. 66:1](#)) <sup>2</sup> [John 1:14](#); [3:13](#); [Col. 2:9](#)

Q 49. How does Christ's ascension to heaven benefit us?

A. First, he is our advocate in heaven in the presence of his Father.<sup>1</sup>

Second, we have our own flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that Christ our head will also take us,  
his members, up to himself.<sup>2</sup>

Third, he sends his Spirit to us on earth as a corresponding pledge.<sup>3</sup>

By the Spirit's power we seek not earthly things but the things above,  
where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Rom. 8:34](#); [1 John 2:1](#) <sup>2</sup> [John 14:2](#); [17:24](#); [Eph. 2:4-6](#) <sup>3</sup> [John 14:16](#); [2 Cor. 1:21-22](#); [5:5](#) <sup>4</sup> [Col. 3:1-4](#)

# Theological Primer: The Ascension

Kevin DeYoung | May 20, 2020

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-the-ascension/>

*From time to time I make new entries in this continuing series called “Theological Primer.” The idea is to present big theological concepts in around 500 words. Today we will look at the ascension, as tomorrow marks Ascension Day in the church calendar (the 40th day of Easter), and the next Lord’s Day is Ascension Sunday.*

Having triumphed over death and the devil in his resurrection, Christ ascended into heaven locally, visibly, and bodily—locally in that he spatially left earth below for heaven above, visibly in that the disciples saw with their own eyes (as a public event) that he departed from them, and bodily in that the physical flesh of the Son of God is no longer with us on earth.

We can think of Christ’s state of exaltation (as opposed to his state of humiliation) as consisting of four events, each part tracking with a phrase in the Apostles’ Creed: resurrection (he rose again from the dead), ascension (he ascended into heaven), session (and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty), and physical return (from there he will come to judge the living and the dead).

The ascension is more prominent in Scripture than we might realize. Luke describes the ascension in the most detail, first in his Gospel ([Luke 24:50-53](#)) and then in Acts ([Acts 1:9-11](#)). Peter’s Pentecost sermon on Pentecost is, in part, about the ascension and enthronement of Christ ([Acts 2:32-36](#)).

Likewise, John’s Gospel is full of references to the ascension of the Son of Man ([John 3:13, 6:62](#)) and the importance of Jesus returning to the Father ([John 14:2-3; 16:5](#)). The ascension is not simply how Jesus gets to heaven, it is a further fulfillment and vindication of the triumph of the resurrection ([John 16:5; 20:17](#)).

It’s no wonder that the ascension is highlighted throughout the New Testament, as a necessary precursor (1) to the giving of Messianic gifts ([Eph. 4:8-10](#)), (2) to the intercession of our High Priest ([Heb. 4:14-16](#)), and (3) to the subjection of all things under Christ’s feet ([1 Peter 3:22](#)).

What, then, does the oft-overlooked ascension mean for us?

**First, the ascension means that we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous** ([1 John 2:1; Rom. 8:34](#)).

**Second, the ascension means God’s people are, in a manner of speaking, already in heaven.** We set our minds on things that are above, because our lives are hidden with Christ who dwells above ([Col. 3:2-3](#)).

**Third, the ascension means we can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** Once ascended to heaven, Jesus sent another Helper ([John 14:16; 16:7](#)) to give us power from on high and to be with us forever.

**Fourth, the ascension means human flesh sits enthroned in heaven.** God has granted all power and authority to a man ([Matt. 28:19; Eph. 1:21-22](#)). Jesus Christ is exercising the dominion that human beings were made to have from the beginning ([Gen. 1:28](#)). The ruin of the first Adam is being undone by the reign of the second.

Because of Christ’s ascension we know that the resurrection is real, the incarnation continues, Christ’s humanity lives on in heaven, the Spirit of Jesus can live in our hearts, and a flesh-and-blood, divine human being rules the universe.



# 3 Benefits Imparted to our Faith by Christ's Ascension

by John Calvin

<https://www.monergism.com/3-benefits-imparted-our-faith-christs-ascension>

From [Christ's ascension] our faith receives many benefits.

**First** it understands that the Lord by his ascent to heaven opened the way into the Heavenly Kingdom, which had been closed through Adam [John 14:3]. Since he entered heaven in our flesh, as if in our name, it follows, as the apostle says, that in a sense we already "sit with God in the heavenly places in him" [Eph. 2:6], so that we do not await heaven with a bare hope, but in our Head already possess it.

**Secondly**, as faith recognizes, it is to our great benefit that Christ resides with the Father. For, having entered a sanctuary not made with hands, he appears before the Father's face as our constant advocate and intercessor [Heb. 7:25; 9:11–12; Rom. 8:34]. Thus he turns the Father's eyes to his own righteousness to avert his gaze from our sins. He so reconciles the Father's heart to us that by his intercession he prepares a way and access for us to the Father's throne. He fills with grace and kindness the throne that for miserable sinners would otherwise have been filled with dread.

**Thirdly**, faith comprehends his might, in which reposes our strength, power, wealth, and glorying against hell. "When he ascended into heaven he led a captivity captive" [Eph. 4:8, cf. Vg.; cf. Ps. 68:18], and despoiling his enemies, he enriched his own people, and daily lavishes spiritual riches upon them. He therefore sits on high, transfusing us with his power, that he may quicken us to spiritual life, sanctify us by his Spirit, adorn his church with divers gifts of his grace, keep it safe from all harm by his protection, restrain the raging enemies of his cross and of our salvation by the strength of his hand, and finally hold all power in heaven and on earth. All this he does until he shall lay low all his enemies [1 Cor. 15:25; cf. Ps. 110:1] (who are our enemies too) and complete the building of his church. This is the true state of his Kingdom; this is the power that the Father has conferred upon him, until, in coming to judge the living and the dead, he accomplishes his final act.

## I Believe in Jesus Christ Who Ascended Into Heaven

Sermon by J. Ligon Duncan on Mar 23, 2003

<https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/i-believe-in-jesus-christwho-ascended-into-heaven>

### Who Ascended into Heaven, Acts 1:9-11

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Acts, chapter 1. We are continuing our study through the Apostles' Creed and today we come to the phrase in which we confess that "we believe in Jesus Christ who ascended into heaven."

Now, the wise old Reformed theologians of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century used to speak of Jesus' exaltation in three stages: His resurrection, His ascension, and His session; that is, His sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. You will notice in those three stages the references that we are studying. We started last week with the resurrection; we'll look at the ascension this week; and next week, Lord willing, we'll look at that heavenly session and we will examine each of those clauses of the Apostles' Creed. That Jesus was raised again on the third day, ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand are the three phases in the exaltation of Christ.

The exaltation of Christ was necessary. We are going to see in just a few moments that just as He came into this world and took on our flesh, and lived and died on our behalf, and experienced humiliation on our behalf, it was also necessary that He would be exalted. He is the humiliated and exalted Lord, and each of these phases of exaltation are essential to God's witness about Jesus Christ and about His work—God's witness to us to remind us of just who His Son really was and just what His work really accomplished.

So today, we are going to look at this truth and we could look at many places in the New Testament, but a beautiful synopsis of the teaching in the New Testament on the ascension of Christ is found right here in Acts 1 beginning with verse 9. Let's hear God's Word.

“And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and the cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. And they also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.’” Amen.

Thus ends this reading of God's Holy Word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

*Our Lord and our God, we ask that by Your Spirit, You enable us to understand what the ascension is and what it means for us, and then by Your Spirit, apply that truth to our heart in such a way that we would embrace it by faith and walk in it by obedience. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

A lot has been written about the resurrection of Christ, and appropriately so. The resurrection has always been challenged by unbelievers and consequently, Christians have written many pages to explain what we believe and even to defend what we believe about the resurrection. And of course, the resurrection is a precious truth of the New Testament repeated many times.

And much has been written about the session of Christ, His sitting at the right hand of the heavenly Father as He intercedes on our behalf; as He rules the world by His word and Spirit for those who have embraced Him by the gospel. And it is perfectly appropriate that that truth would be celebrated. It's a precious comforting truth.

But it is a shame that we haven't studied more the ascension of Jesus Christ. The New Testament is filled with references to the ascension, not just here in Acts 1, not just at the end of the gospels, but also in the letters of the New Testament. Paul refers to the ascension on numerous occasions, and the Book of Hebrews contains numerous allusions to the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is a doctrine which is not only rooted in Scripture, it is a doctrine rooted not only in the creeds and the confessions of the Church from the days of the old Roman rule, not only in the Apostles' Creed and through the various confessions of the Protestant churches, but it is a truth which is filled with comfort for believers. And so, what I want to do is simply look at what the ascension is and secondly, look at what the ascension means, especially with regard to its application to us.

### **I. What the Ascension is: Jesus' bodily departure from earth into the Father's presence at His right hand.**

So let's begin by looking at what the ascension is. Look again at Acts 1:9-11. When we say that Jesus Christ was taken up into heaven; when we say that Jesus ascended into heaven; we mean Jesus' bodily departure from the earth into the Father's presence at the Father's right hand. Jesus' ascension is a vital stage in His enthronement. He's going to the right hand of the Father to be enthroned. As King of the universe, He'll rule the world from the right hand. The ascension is the vital aspect of that enthronement. It is designed to exalt Him and to encourage us.

In the ascension, the Son of God in the flesh, the incarnate second person of the Trinity, was raised visibly. The disciples saw it; locally, from one place to another and bodily, in His flesh, from earth into the heavens. Think about it. Jesus came into this world and He had to depart this world somehow. The way that God chose for Him

to depart the world is uniquely appropriate in order to emphasize the truth that God wanted to emphasize to the disciples - that Jesus was going to heaven to reign.

The disciples were going to have every reason to doubt that truth in their lifetimes. They were going to experience persecution. That doesn't look like a world that their dear Lord, friend, and Savior Jesus Christ is reigning over. And so the Father in numerous ways testifies to them that His Son is reigning. Even by taking Him up, even as a king would ascend the steps of the dais to be enthroned, anointed as king, appointed as king over a nation; so also, Jesus ascends into heaven.

In the Bible there are various meanings of the term *heaven*. Heaven can refer to the skies, it can refer to space, it can refer to the place where God is, and the place where His people enjoy His presence and communion with Him. When Jesus is taken up into heaven, first and foremost it means that He is going to be in the presence of, and in communion with, His heavenly Father. That even His body is going to be in the presence of His heavenly Father, and so it is uniquely appropriate that He would ascend up into the heavens.

In our experience, the skies and the space beyond are the closest thing in our experience to something that is infinite, eternal. It's the closest thing that we can relate to. Of course, communion with God, in the presence of God, is an endless experience for all of those who trust in Christ. So when we say that Jesus ascended into heaven, we don't mean that He went into outer space, but the fact that He ascended into the skies points us to the reality that He has gone to be in the infinite presence of the infinite God to sit at the right hand.

And if you ask me, "Where is Jesus?" I'm going to tell you, "He's at the right hand of the heavenly Father." And if you ask me, "Where is the right hand of the heavenly Father?" I'm going to say, "It's where Jesus is." I can't tell you locally, but I know that He is locally present there; He is bodily present there. It is so vital for us to understand that a man is at the right hand of the heavenly Father right now. The God-man Jesus Christ. That's what we mean by the doctrine of the ascension.

C.S. Lewis describes this in a short phrase. He says, "The disciples first saw a short, vertical movement. Then a vague luminosity." He was an English professor—a cloud, OK! "They saw a short, vertical movement; then a vague luminosity, and then nothing." That's exactly what they saw, and that was the translation of Jesus locally and bodily from this earth into the very presence of His God and Father at His right hand. And so, this was neither a mere obscuring of His presence to us, as if He's still here somewhere but we just can't see Him, nor a divinization of His humanity. His humanity did not evaporate when He went back to glory. No. It is a real translation of His resurrected human body to the throne of God where it will dwell until the great Day of Judgment. And though we still experience Jesus' presence by His grace and through His Holy Spirit, we will not experience His bodily presence until He comes again from that throne of judgment to judge the living and the dead.

## **II. What the Ascension means for us: Confirms God's saving work by publicly witnessing to the claims of Christ.**

Now, you may be asking yourself, "How does that doctrinal truth impact me? How can that doctrine give me comfort?" There are actually a lot of biblical answers to that question that I can't get to today. That's why you need to read Derek's book, *The Ascension of Christ*. But let me suggest five things that that doctrine means and five ways in which it is a comfort and an aid to us in our Christian life. Let me just outline them for you very quickly, and then we'll come back to them one by one.

What does the doctrine of the ascension mean for us? First of all, it means that Jesus' work worked. Secondly, it means that we will be with Jesus. Thirdly, it means that we will share Jesus' inheritance. Think about that. Fourth, it means that Jesus reigns. Fifth, it means that those who truly love Jesus will long more than anything else for fellowship with Jesus. And that fellowship with Jesus that can only be experienced by physically and locally present with Him again.

Let's look at each of these things. The ascension means for us each of these things and more. First of all, it means that Jesus' work worked. The ascension confirms God's saving work in Jesus Christ. It is God's way of saying, "He did everything I asked Him to do on your behalf. I have accepted everything I asked Him to do on your behalf and now I am exalting Him because He did everything I asked Him to do on your behalf." Let me ask you to turn quickly to Philippians 2. Isn't this precisely what Paul is emphasizing there? You'll remember that in Philippians 2:1-8, Paul is interested to show how Jesus humbled Himself. Paul says in verse 7, that "Jesus humbled Himself by talking the form of a bondservant; by being made in the likeness of men; by being humbled by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross." And then he says in verse 9: "Therefore also, God highly exalted Him." In other words, because Jesus did those things and fulfilled those things, God highly exalted Him.

Now, the ascension is God's way of saying to us as believers what He will one day say to the whole world. That Jesus accomplished all these things and therefore, Jesus has the name which is above every name. Isn't it interesting that when this ascension occurs, it doesn't occur in the middle of Jerusalem with everybody watching it. There were many witnesses to the resurrection. At one time Paul says there were as many as 500 people who saw the resurrected Jesus Christ. But the ascension was witnessed by just that inner circle of disciples. But the ascension says to the believer what one day God will say to the whole world about Jesus Christ - that His work is finished, His work is complete, His work has been accepted by God on our behalf. That is why John Blanchard can say, "When Jesus went back to heaven, His desk was clear." He had finished His work on behalf of His people, and so His people are encouraged by the reality that His work worked. And that work's work is shown to us in the ascension; God has accepted it.

There are so many significances of that truth for us that we don't have time to contemplate them. Some of you may be looking around this crazy world that we live in. You may be looking at the rampant crime in your neighborhood and in your city, you may be looking at the tension and strife in your state and in your nation, you may be looking at the world in war. And you may be saying to yourself, "Boy, it doesn't look like a place where grace is reigning or will reign." And then God says to you, "Look at the ascension. There is a Man sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, and that is a down payment, it is a deposit guaranteeing the total reign of grace one day." Right now, we've seen the pledge; He's ascended, He's gone before us. But one day we'll see the rest of the reality that that will bring in.

Or maybe you're struggling with assurance. You're one of those Christians who sees your sin very clearly and sometimes sees your sin so clearly that you can't see your Savior. And you begin to doubt whether grace can cover your sin. "It can cover other people's sins, but Lord, You don't know my heart." And then you look at the ascension, which is proof that Christ's work of active and passive obedience has been accepted by the Father. His work *worked*. He's been shown by God through the ascension to be the redeeming Son of God with power.

Maybe you're looking at your own body and you have physical maladies that will never go away. Maybe there's a disease that is working on killing you right now. Maybe you have a loved one that has a disease that is working to kill her or him right now. And you say, "It doesn't look like the Lord Jesus is reigning. My body is evidence of sin. I live in a world of sin. I live in a fallen world where things are falling apart. Then you look at the ascension and you think of a man sitting on the throne of glory; and you remember that in our flesh we are oppressed, but in our flesh we *will see God*. In this deteriorating flesh, in this flabby flesh, glorified and transformed, I *will see* my Redeemer. The ascension holds in it many comforts for the believer. But that's just the first thing: Jesus' work worked.

Secondly, we will be with Jesus. The ascension is the trail blazed by the Mediator into the presence of God forever and His people will follow. Jesus' exaltation through His ascension is simply leading the way for His people into glory. He is our forerunner there. Jesus is like the vanguard of the army. Just as He is the first fruits in the resurrection, so also He's the first fruits in the ascension. You remember what He said to His disciples in John 14:1-3: "Don't let your hearts be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you." His

departure is for the work of straightening up; He's preparing a place for you. He's preparing to come back for you to take you there. He's your forerunner into glory.

Jim Packer, in his wonderful little book, *Lord, I Want to be a Christian*, has a section on the Apostles' Creed. And in the Apostles' Creed section, he has a meditation on the ascension and he finds this wonderful hymn text from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. I've never heard it before; I've never sung it before. The text so beautifully illustrates this point that we will be with Jesus and the ascension witnesses to that truth. Listen to it. *Love moved Thee to die and on this I rely, my Savior. You have loved me. I cannot tell why, but this I can find. We too are so joined; He'll not be in glory and leave me behind.* That's the truth of the ascension. He'll not be in glory and leave you behind. His purpose of being there now is so that He can bring you to be with Him forever.

Thirdly, the ascension means that we will share in Jesus' inheritance. The ascension is one of the steps in which the Father publicly bestows upon His Son His earned inheritance. And Jesus' deserved inheritance displayed to us in the ascension guarantees our undeserved inheritance. Remember what Jesus tells us in Hebrews 9:15? He says that He is the mediator of a new covenant so that those who have been called may receive that promise of the eternal inheritance. And in Ephesians 2:4-6, the apostle Paul can say that that promise of our eternal inheritance of Christ is so sure that we are already seated with Him in heavenly places. We've already pulled up to the banquet table; we've already been exalted with the enthroned Jesus Christ. We've already received this inheritance which has been prepared for us. The ascension points us to that reality. We'll share in that inheritance.

One of the fundamental aspects of Jesus' teaching to His disciples is: what happens to the Master happens to the disciple. The hard side of that truth is that in this life, we go through many trials and tribulations just like our Savior. There are many losses and crosses in this life. Jesus starts discipleship by saying to us, "Take up *your* cross and follow Me." The glorious flip side of the truth of what happens to the Master happens to the disciple, is that we also share in His exaltation! His inheritance becomes ours. Union with Christ guarantees that we will participate in what Paul calls in Ephesians 2:6 "The surpassing riches of His grace." The ascension witnesses to that. We too will be exalted, we too will be vindicated, and we too will experience the surpassing riches of His grace forever. So that's a third thing that the doctrine of the ascension means for us.

But there is a fourth thing. The ascension means that Jesus reigns. That is very important and good news. The ascension is a step towards the enthronement of Christ, it testifies to His Lordship, and it sets the stage for His pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' ascension is a witness to His reign and to His Lordship just like the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In John 16:7, Jesus said to His disciples, "It is to your advantage that I depart from you so that I can send the Holy Spirit." Christ's ascension was necessary for His pouring out of the Holy Spirit on His people. By His ascension, He steps up to the seat of power, to the right hand of the Father, and from the seat of power, He dispenses and pours out and grants His Holy Spirit to His people.

Think of it. When does this happen? When does Pentecost come? When is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Acts, chapter 2. When does the ascension occur? Acts, chapter 1. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit is like Jesus saying to His disciples, "Guys, I'm here at the right hand. Throughout your lives when you doubt that I'm at the right hand, look at the Spirit poured out at Pentecost. I am ruling this world. Spirit, go." Who says, "Go, Holy Spirit?" We may pray, "Come, Holy Spirit." Who says "Go, Holy Spirit" if He is not at the right hand of power? The coming of the Holy Spirit is our evidence that Jesus is reigning. The message of the ascension is that Jesus the Savior reigns. And that is good news for us because we live in a world where every scrap of evidence that we can find tempts us to doubt that He reigns. Every time we see a death, every time we experience a broken relationship, every time we see a world torn apart, every time we see people living in sin and godlessness, we are tempted to question the reign of Christ. The ascension is saying, "Disciples, the world may not know it; but He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

Fifth and finally, the ascension draws our hearts away from earthly things and causes our hearts to desire more than anything else, fellowship with the One who is at the right hand of the heavenly Father. The ascension sets our hearts on heavenly places and focuses our ultimate hopes on divine communion. Fellowship with Jesus is the heart desire of every true Christian and the ascension draws us away from the temporal things of this world to long to be in fellowship with God. Christ's ascension draws our hearts to Him and our desires to communion with Him. Jesus says, "No man can serve two masters—God and mammon." You'll either hate one or love the other. It is also true that no man can love two masters—God and mammon. The ascension is wooing us away from mammon and wooing us to God because our hopes are there at the right hand—not here. Not until the transformation. You see, the ascension inaugurates an inconsolable yearning in the Christian. We long to be with Jesus. Our hearts are there. He's our treasure. We want to be with Him. He has put us into the world to be His salt and light. We feel the tension of Paul. It's good for us to be here and to do His bidding, to glorify His Holy name, but it is *better* to be with Him. I think sometimes that some of the pagan ideas about Avalon and Valhalla actually are just a mirror of a warped image of this Christian longing—Avalon, where Arthur is taken at the end of his life; Valhalla, the place of the dead warriors of old.

The real inconsolable yearning, the real truth, is the truth about eternal fellowship of Jesus Christ and the ascension presses us to set our hearts there, not here. We seek for a city that has foundations whose architect and builder is God, not for an earthly city. The biblical truth of the ascension is a very practical truth. I want to stress to you that it is the biblical truths that we have nothing to do with bringing about, that are most comforting to the Christian in the Christian life. Thank God, we contribute nothing to the doctrine of the Trinity. But it is a glorious truth. We contribute nothing to the atonement. Thank God. But it is the ground of our hope. We contribute nothing to justification. It is an act of God's free grace. But it is the ground of our assurance. We contribute nothing to the ascension, but the sheer reality of it is one of the great comforts of the Christian life. Friends, we need to meditate on this neglected truth and feed our souls on it and strengthen our minds on it and encourage our walks in it, and be wooed to Christ, our ascended bridegroom by it. Let's pray.

*Our Lord and our God, this is Your Word; it is Your truth. Bring it home to our hearts and bring us home to the One who is at the right hand. We ask it in His name. Amen.*

## ***NT Wright on the meaning of the Ascension***

From NT Wright's Pentecost sermon found at <http://www.ntwrightpage.com/sermons/Pentecost07.htm>

"The early Christians, like their Jewish contemporaries, saw heaven and earth as the overlapping and interlocking spheres of God's good creation, with the point being that heaven is the control room from which earth is run. To say that Jesus is now in heaven is to say three things. First, that he is present with his people everywhere, no longer confined to one space-time location within earth, but certainly not absent. Second, that he is now the managing director of this strange show called 'earth', though like many incoming chief executives he has quite a lot to do to sort it out and turn it around. Third, that he will one day bring heaven and earth together as one, becoming therefore personally present to us once more within God's new creation. The Bible doesn't say much about our going to heaven. It says a lot about heaven, and particularly heaven's chief inhabitant, coming back to earth."

## Ten Reasons to Celebrate Ascension Day

By [John D. Witvliet](#)

<https://www.reformedworship.org/article/march-2015/ten-reasons-celebrate-ascension-day>

**Q. Why does Ascension Day matter? We don't celebrate it anymore, and I need to give my congregation a better rationale for why we should. By the way, they don't have patience for a treatise on the matter. I need short, pithy explanations.**

**A.** A lot is at stake here! This is not a task to take lightly. But with the help of friends and colleagues, I offer this draft of ten reasons for celebrating Ascension Day. I welcome your suggestions for refining this list.

All ten of these reasons are based on the conviction that Ascension Day is a kind of “worldview tonic for the Christian imagination.” It offers us not merely thoughts to think, but a way to see deeply into the nature of ultimate reality. Celebrating Jesus’ ascension helps us to more faithfully visualize the unseen reality all around us in ways that are consistent with the Bible’s teaching.

### *Ten Reasons to Celebrate Ascension Day*

1. **The ascension of Jesus testifies that what we can perceive with our five physical senses is only part of the splendor God has envisioned for us**—while doing nothing to denigrate the beauty of our bodily experience of the world around us.
2. **The ascension of Jesus gives us language to speak about both Jesus’ absence and presence**—his absence from us in the body, and his presence with us through the Holy Spirit. Being honest about Jesus’ absence is the first step to being open to God’s empowering presence with us in the Holy Spirit.
3. **The ascension of Jesus depicts the boundary between earth and heaven as permeable.** Our prayers cross over this boundary, Jesus’ resurrected body passes through this boundary, and—one day—so will ours.
4. **The ascension of Jesus changes how we visualize heaven.** It pictures heaven as a place in which resurrected bodies belong. Heaven is not just ethereal and vaporous.
5. **The ascension of Jesus changes how we visualize Jesus today.** As you read this, in the present tense, Jesus is not passive, but active. Jesus is praying for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 24-25). Jesus is sending the Spirit. Having prepared a place for us, Jesus is actively waiting for us.
6. **The ascension of Jesus helps us see lordship and sovereignty as good and gracious.** In this sad world, power is equated with bullying or coercive force. In contrast, fusing the words “reigning Lord” and “Jesus Christ” transforms our understanding of power and helps us envision the kind of power that is purely good and altogether lifegiving.
7. **The ascension of Jesus changes our picture of suffering.** The ascension of Jesus helps us see that heaven is a place that is not indifferent to human suffering (Heb. 4:14-16). This calls us to embrace the overlapping rhythms of worship, pastoral care, and justice. Ascension Day is a profound resource for addressing deep pastoral needs—for those who struggle with depression, guilt, shame, burnout, shallowness, and conflict; for those who are persecuted; for victims of war and violence; for victims of abuse and tragedy.
8. **The ascension of Jesus can prevent us from over-identifying with everyday reality.** The ascension “sets our minds on things above” (Col. 3:1), and reminds us that our citizenship is in heaven. This, in turn, teaches us to invest deeply in our work and daily life, but to hold on to it loosely. It gives us a basis for passionate living that is graced by freedom, not grasping; invitation, not control.
9. **Ascension teaches us a lot about ultimate desire, the kind of soul-aching desire that drives so much of our human striving.** It reminds us that our ultimate desires cannot be satisfied with life as we know it, that ultimately all God’s saints long for “a better country” (Heb. 11:16).

10. **Ascension humbles us.** It shows us how limited our minds, imaginations, and words really are. It teaches us to ground our worship in doxology: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!”

It is a view of the world that needs to be deeply absorbed. It is a view of the world that needs to be contemplated and savored, sung and storied.

In sum, Ascension Day, which has been tragically neglected, may actually be one of the most potent biblical worldview-healing interventions of all. Neglecting it may be as foolish as trying to live with near-sightedness without eyeglasses or contacts.

But there are challenges! If Ascension is really a worldview tonic, then simply teaching or preaching about it occasionally is insufficient. It is a view of the world that needs to be deeply absorbed. It is a view of the world that needs to be contemplated and savored, sung and storied. And that requires time and attention.

After reviewing two passionate books by Gerrit Dawson and Peter Atkins on the subject (Dawson’s *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ’s Continuing Incarnation*, and Atkins’ *Ascension Now: Implications of Christ’s Ascension for Today’s Church*), I am starting to wonder if we should change Ascension Day and Pentecost from two single-day celebrations only occasionally remembered into a summer-long season of renewal.

What would it be like to think of your summer worship season as “The Season of Ascension and Pentecost”? What about accepting the discipline of singing one Ascension song and one Pentecost song in each service for the entire summer? What about commissioning artwork in multiple media to explore these worldview transformations? What about beginning every pastoral prayer—in both public worship and in personal pastoral encounters—by calling to mind Jesus’ ascended body?

## **About the Author**

[John D. Witvliet](#)

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## Spurgeon: Our Lord's Attitude in Ascension

I have known that one thought of our Lord's exaltation lift me up from the borders of despair, in a dread hour, long since past, when reason almost reeled after great calamities had overtaken me. I recovered my balance and my peace of mind, in a single moment, by the recollection of that one text, "Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name." I felt, after the accident in the Surrey Gardens Music Hall—like the soldier who was mortally wounded, and lying in a ditch, but I seemed to hear the shout, "God has highly exalted HIM," so I did not care what became of me as long as my Lord was exalted. It is said that one of the great Napoleon's soldiers lay wounded and bleeding to death; but he saw the Emperor ride by, and his eyes flashed fire again, and he said, "Never mind what becomes of me, for the Emperor is safe." That was how I felt, in a far higher sense, concerning my exalted Lord, and I said to myself, "So long as He lives and reigns, all is well. Men may rave at me as they will, but what does it matter so long as He is exalted? "I want you, dear friends, to feel like that concerning your ascended Lord. Go home, and worship Him, and be filled with great joy.

Then there was another thing that the disciples did; they "were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God." Let your joy have adequate expression. Jesus is risen, so begin to praise Him; and, having once begun, keep on praising Him, and never leave off as long as there is cause for praising Him, and that will be forever and ever. Jesus has gone up to heaven, and cleared an open way for us right up to the throne of God, so send your praises up to Him; let your heart mount from the earth right up to the heart of God. I can urge you to do this, but only the Holy Spirit can enable you to do it, and I pray that He may do this for all the Lord's people now.

If outsiders are asking, "What have we to do with this Jesus who has gone up into heaven?" let me remind you of another purpose of His exaltation. Peter said to the high priest, "Him has God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel"—that is, to the very chief of sinners—"to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins;" and it is through faith in Him that this forgiveness may be given to you. If you trust in Him who has risen from the dead, and gone into His glory, you shall be saved, for "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them." That is what He is doing now, so trust Him with your case,

trust Him now, for His dear name's sake. Amen.