

Small Group Guide

Risen, Ascended, and Coming Again | What's a Christian Anyway? Pt. 4

Before You Begin

Open your time together in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide your conversation. Invite group members to share one word that describes where they are emotionally and spiritually as they arrive today.

Overview

This week's sermon focused on three phrases from the Nicene Creed that describe who Jesus is right now, not merely who he was in the past. Using these three realities -- that Jesus is risen, ascended, and coming again -- the sermon challenged us to move beyond a frozen or historical picture of Jesus and to engage with the living, active, present Lord. Each reality carries a profound truth for how we live: because Jesus is risen, we have victory; because he is ascended, we have the Holy Spirit; and because he is coming again, we have hope.

Key Takeaways

1. Jesus is risen -- Resurrection is not resuscitation or escaping death. It is the defeat of death and the beginning of new creation. Because Jesus rose, God proved he will do what he said he would do, and everything is on the table for God's power in our lives.
 2. Jesus is ascended -- The ascension is not Jesus going on break or going away. It is Jesus going to the throne and, through the Holy Spirit, filling all things and filling each of us. We do not have to take turns with Jesus.
 3. Jesus is coming again -- The return of Christ is not a revenge tour or a personality change. It is the putting right of all things, the end of mourning and pain, and the making new of all creation. This gives us genuine, grounded hope -- not wishful optimism, but confidence in the future based on what has already happened in the past.
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Discussion Questions

Opening -- Getting Into the Conversation

1. The sermon opened with the idea of people we used to know being frozen in our memories as they were, rather than who they are now. Has Jesus ever felt that way to you -- more like a historical figure than a living, present person? What has contributed to that feeling?
 2. Before today, how familiar were you with the Nicene Creed? What was your reaction to reciting it together as a church?
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Section One -- Jesus Is Risen

3. The sermon made a distinction between resurrection and resuscitation. In your own words, what is the difference, and why does it matter?
 4. The sermon suggested that because Jesus rose in accordance with the scriptures, it proves that God will do what he said he would do. How does that truth speak to something you are currently trusting God with?
 5. The phrase "everything is on the table" was used to describe the implications of the resurrection. What area of your life -- a struggle, a broken relationship, a physical need, a pattern you cannot shake -- do you most need to bring to a God for whom nothing is impossible?
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Section Two -- Jesus Is Ascended

6. The sermon argued that the ascension is not Jesus leaving but Jesus filling all things through the Holy Spirit. Does that reframe how you have thought about the ascension? What is new or surprising about that idea?
 7. Jesus said in John's gospel that it was actually to our advantage that he go away so that the Holy Spirit would come. Do you find that hard to believe? Why or why not?
 8. A story was shared about a young adult who felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to stop and pray for a stranger on the side of the road, and that obedience had a profound impact. Have you experienced a moment of being led by the Spirit in your everyday life? What happened, and what made it possible for you to respond?
 9. The sermon expressed a desire for the church to become "radically more dependent on and led by the Spirit" -- not just on Sundays but Monday through Saturday. What does Spirit-led living look like practically in your daily routine? Where do you sense the most resistance to it?
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Section Three -- Jesus Is Coming Again

10. The sermon described Christian hope as "confidence about the future because of what has already happened in the past." How is that different from simple optimism? Which one more accurately describes how you tend to face the future?
11. Julian of Norwich asked God why sin was not prevented in the first place -- a question many of us have asked. The answer she received was, "It was necessary that there should be sin, but all will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well." How do you respond to that answer? Does it comfort you, frustrate you, or raise more questions?
12. The sermon gave permission to say two things at once: "This is not how it ought to be" and "This is not always how it will be." Is there something in your life or in the world right now where you need to hold both of those statements together? Share as you feel comfortable.

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to practice individually or as a group before you meet again.

Risen -- Living in Victory

Identify one area of your life where you have stopped believing that God can move. Write it down and pray over it this week, specifically asking God to remind you that if he defeated death, nothing in your situation is beyond his reach.

Ascended -- Following the Spirit

Each morning this week, begin your day with a simple prayer: "Holy Spirit, lead me today. Make me aware of what you are doing and give me the courage to follow." At the end of each day, reflect on where you noticed him at work or where you may have missed his prompting.

Coming Again -- Anchoring Your Hope

Find a person in your life who is carrying something heavy right now -- grief, uncertainty, discouragement. Spend time with them this week not to fix their situation but to remind them, gently and honestly, that things will not always be as they are. Pray with them if they are open to it.

Closing Prayer

Close your time by praying for one another specifically. Invite each group member to share one thing from the discussion that they want to bring to God this week -- a question, a struggle, a hope, or a desire to grow. Pray over each one together.

A Thought to Carry With You This Week

"All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well." -- Julian of Norwich