

The Ascension of Jesus to Heaven

(4/27/25)

We celebrated the Resurrection last Sunday, and today we're talking about an event nearly as important: the ascension of our Lord Jesus to Heaven 40 days later.

Please turn to *Acts 1*.

[Act 1:1-3 ESV] 1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

“The first book” is Luke’s Gospel. Verse 2 Jesus was “taken up” which is His ascension to Heaven and verse 3 states it happened 40 days after His Resurrection.

Why is the Ascension important? Once upon a time, the western church put aside a day of celebration for it much like we do the Resurrection. Think on the journey of Jesus from beginning to end.

- He starts off in Heaven on the throne, ruling and reigning as God.
- The only beings in Heaven were God the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and the angels.
- Jesus takes on human form and comes down HERE to earth, walking among us for 33 years.
- He dies on the cross and descends into Hades to preach to the spirits in prison.
- When He rises from the dead, He leads the spirits of the righteous out of Hades—setting the captives free.
- He stays on the earth in His new immortal resurrected body for 40 days.
- He Ascends to Heaven and, as we're about to read, makes intercession for us with Father.
- He sits back down upon His heavenly throne.
- At some point in the future, He gets back up and comes back down HERE...bringing His Kingdom with Him.
- And He stays here.

Remember our journey is to follow Jesus!

- We pick up our own Cross and die to the self.
- Death and the grave represent Hades, and these mortal bodies must one day pass on.
- Our spirits ascend to Heaven to be with Jesus while our bodies are in the grave.
- At the resurrection we get new bodies.
- Then we descend with Jesus from Heaven to Earth as His Second coming.
- We assist Him in establishing His Kingdom HERE and living here with Him forever.

What does all this have to do with the Ascension? **It speaks to our mission here on earth...until our Lord Jesus returns.**

[Act 1:9-11 ESV] 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

What did Jesus DO when He got to Heaven and what does that have to do with us? Let's go now to *Hebrews 9:11-14*:

[Heb 9:11-14 ESV] 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Jesus Ascended to Heaven playing 2 roles at once—something only God can do! He was:

- The perfect blood sacrifice being MADE to God the Father.
- The Heavenly High Priest PRESENTING the sacrifice to God the Father.

Let's back up for a moment. When the Jews still had a Temple, once a year—on the Day of Atonement—the **High Priest would bring an unblemished goat or bull into the HOH** where only he could enter. Within the HOH was the Ark of the Covenant and the presence of God above the Ark. The HP wore specific garments on this important day and his purpose was to ask God to forgive the entire nation of Israel including himself.

For lack of a better term, **he needed to “convince” God to accept the sacrifice and forgive the nation’s sins.** How was God “convinced”? By the status of the sacrifice: it needed to be perfectly unblemished with no flaws whatsoever. The priest would kill the sacrifice and sprinkle its blood on The Mercy Seat—which was a throne—of the Ark. God would look down from His place above the Ark and inspect the blood. If He found it acceptable, He forgave the sins of the entire nation for the past year.

This was only a temporary fix. Sin would begin to accumulate again immediately as people committed more of them. Daily sacrifices were made to atone for this, then the Passover sacrifice in the Spring, and back to the yearly atonement in the Fall. In other words, the shedding of innocent blood had to happen every day, and it still wasn't enough.

Now back to our verses on the screen. *Look at verse 12: the sacrifice Jesus offered when He ascended to the Heavenly Temple was not just superior to earthly bulls and goats, but ETERNAL.* It satisfied Father God once and for all—no further blood needed shedding. No more sacrifices to make. God forgave all and He did so forever!

What that means is that anyone who repents and receives the forgiveness of Christ has everything washed away from their heavenly record: all sin, all bad, all evil.

It's just as if we've been escorted by Jesus Himself into the throne room where He pleads with Father on our behalf like a lawyer. He states this clearly in *Matthew 10:32*:

[Mat 10:32 ESV] 32 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,

God looks down upon anyone who acknowledges Him and **inspects the blood of Christ upon us.** When He sees that it's the blood of His Son, He forgives and clears the heavenly record book of all our bad.

Jesus ascended to Heaven to make our case before Father God. To plead with Him to forgive our sins based on His shed blood and that He was unblemished and without sin.

Jesus plead for mercy and grace on our behalf. He interceded for us.

One more thing: **don't think of Father as this big, angry meanie who had to be talked down off the edge.**

Let me make this comparison. **Imagine you've been arrested and brought into a court of law. You walk in and the Judge is your dad.** He loves you intensely and wants you to go free, but the law is the law. In order to set you free, He sent his son—your older brother—to be your lawyer. Your older brother is a goody two-shoes. Never did anything wrong, serves his community, and helps old ladies across the street. Dad the Judge

decides he will base your guilt or innocence on your older brother's goodness. ***All you need do is accept older brother as your lawyer.***

As you can see, **Dad the Judge isn't angry with you and doesn't want you going to jail.** He's not red in the face and spewing wrath. He loves you and wants you forgiven, and set free.

That is God our Father and that is why He gave us Jesus!

How does this apply to us? **We make prayerful intercession for other people just as Jesus did for us.**

UNBELIEVERS. Do you have any unbelievers in your life you would like to be Saved? If yes then do this: next time you pray, picture yourself in the throne room of God. Just like Jesus, boldly approach the throne of grace to ask for grace and mercy in your time of need.

Plead with Father for the soul of the unbeliever—that He would make Himself known to them and draw them to the Cross of Christ. To have mercy on them, extend a time of grace, and bring them into Salvation.

Our main priority when it comes to unbelievers isn't their prosperity, health, peace, or well-being. It's for them to repent and be Saved. For God to give them more time.

BELIEVERS. What's going on in the lives of your fellow believers? Make intercession for them. Bring them to the heavenly throne room, speak their names, and plead with God on their behalf for healing, restoration, help with ministry, and better marriages.

When the Babylonian captivity was complete, God the Judge told Jeremiah to pray to Him on behalf of the people Israel that they might return to their land:

[Jer 29:7, 10-14 ESV] 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. ... 10 "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and

all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Don't you think it strange that God is telling us to pray to Him?

- He's even telling us HOW to pray?
- WHAT to ask Him for?
- Have you ever wondered why He doesn't just go ahead and do it w/o our having to ask?

Here's why: we're made in the image of Jesus as Intercessors. ***If God merely follows His Law no one is Saved, no one gets spared, everyone stands condemned.***

When you and I were forgiven, we were reborn in the likeness of Jesus. **He was the heavenly High Priest and we are His under priests.** We boldly approach His throne of grace, asking for grace and mercy. Just like the Ark in the Temple, the throne of God is a mercy seat with the blood of Jesus on it.

Father wants people to repent and be Saved, so we bring their names before Him and ask for mercy.

Father wants people healed, so we do the same.

[Mat 5:43-45 ESV] 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and **pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.** For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

We're to interceded for enemies. It's more than bowing our heads and closing our eyes. **It's to bring the name of an enemy to the throne room of God Himself and plead...on their behalf.** Not asking God to punish them or give them "karma." But to actually ask God to have grace and mercy upon them and draw them to Jesus that they might be Saved.

If you thirst for vengeance then understand this: that is already coming to anyone who doesn't receive Christ. If the enemy you're being convicted to pray for keeps being stubborn and following their own flesh, wrath will descend on them at Judgment.

When Jesus returns it's on a white horse with a sword to make war, not peace. We'll be riding behind Him with sword of our own and we'll be fighting alongside Him.

Until that time, **we're in the Intercession stage where we bring people before the Lord to plead for grace and mercy.**

[Col 1:9-11 ESV] 9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;

Paul and his team pray for the Colossians to be 1) know God's will, 2) be filled with wisdom and knowledge of God, 3) that they be holy and live righteous lives, and 4) do good works for God.

I repeat: *in the spirit they approached God's throne and asked for these things on behalf of the Colossians.*

When speaking of the 2nd coming, this is Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians:

[2Th 1:10-12 ESV] 10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. 11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, *he's praying to see them glorifying Jesus at the 2nd coming vs. the "wailing and gnashing of teeth" unbelievers will be doing at Judgment*, which Paul addresses in the verse before that I didn't read. Paul prays they will lead holy lives and walk by faith.

Finally Paul asks the Thessalonians **to pray for him because he knows the power of intercession:**

[2Th 3:1-2 ESV] 1 Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, 2 and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.

He's asking them to go to the throne room for his sake. Prayer is powerful! We are literally appearing before God when we do so more than we are "sending up" prayers from earth!

ALTAR CALL

Who came to mind during this sermon?

Come up front and let's join together to pray for this person!