

The Exaltation of Christ in His Ascension

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Text: Luke 24:50-53

Proposition: Christians should live courageously and joyously in light of the ascension.



Main Text

50 And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

51 While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

52 And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,

53 and were continually in the temple blessing God.

The Exaltation of Christ in His Ascension

Intro:

General Dwight Eisenhower had just pulled off one of the largest and perhaps the most famous invasion in history. After the costly success of D-Day, the Allies were facing a massive German counteroffensive of about 200,000 Nazis.

Much of the leadership was on the verge of panic when they learned the news. Eisenhower had a much different reaction and intervened. He would not accept such a reaction from the Allied commanders.

When he addressed them, he said this: "The present situation is to be regarded as opportunity for us and not disaster. There will be only cheerful faces at this conference table." With this mindset, Eisenhower was able to see the innate flaw in his opponent's plan and exploited it to keep the momentum in the Allies' favor.

I think too often Christians are like the cowering generals in that moment. Too often we focus on the obstacles and problems without finding solutions.

Too often we allow pessimism...

- **into our language** When we use the words "nowadays" or "these days" so often to complain about how things are different than they used to be.
- **into our music** When the sound of our joy is heard only or mainly when signing about heaven, and not when singing about the present union we have in Christ.
- **into our (functional) theology** When we make excuses for our spiritual laziness (not pursuing a vibrant relationship with Christ or not taking active steps to expand God's kingdom) because "the world is just getting worse and worse" anyway.

It is no wonder that Friedrich Nietzsche, who was an opponent of Christianity, said this: *"If your belief makes you blessed, then appear to be blessed! Your faces have always been more injurious to your belief than our objections have! If these glad tidings of your Bible were written on your faces, you would not need to insist so obstinately on the authority of that book."*

In reading through Luke for Christmas, (24 chapters and 24 days) I noticed a passage of Scripture and God confronted me about a lack of spiritual optimism in my own life. I believe that there is a teaching in the Bible, which we neglect, that impacts the way we think about life and our relationship with God. I would like to share this with you. Today, I would like to talk about Jesus' exaltation, or His ascension, in the New Testament.

You see, the Holy Spirit took care to explain the manner of Jesus' leaving the earth to us through the Gospel writers. It is certainly no accident that we are given some detail and briefly, I would like to examine some of these details and to show how the exaltation of Christ should exalt our view of Him, of our calling as believers, and of the future.

Truths we find in the ascension:

1. Jesus was exalted in the ascension to show His power and authority

The disciples response to Jesus' ascension is just so powerful. They worship Him, they had this immense joy that seems to overwhelm them, and this joy bubbles over into continual praise in the temple.

You see the ascension wasn't like a Sunday morning worship experience that was soon forgotten. It wasn't like an emotional time at a concert or a conference that where you really experience the presence of God but when you leave that environment the effects start to fade.

The Christian camp phenomenon.

The ascension was a concrete reality that produced a global shift in the apostles perspective. Everything was different now because not only had God raised Jesus from the dead, but now He had received the ultimate validation of being physically exalted by the Father. The man they followed was now fully revealed as God of very God.

Now they are proclaiming a Christ who has been glorified as well as crucified. The power of Christ that will empower them to reach the nations had been revealed.

However, it wasn't just for these disciples to experience the awesome authority and power that God displayed in Christ that day.

The Apostle Paul, who was not converted at this time we see in Luke's Gospel, but saw the ascended Christ later, wants the exaltation of Christ in His ascension to affect those who did not witness it. He prays that these believers over a thousand miles away from the site of the ascension would know the same power.

19 ...what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, Ephesians 1:19-20

- Paul's very pastoral prayer for the Ephesian church was that they would know the power of God
 - This knowledge is experiential. He wants them to know, to understand these things in the way that you know bike-riding or throwing a football.
- look at the evidence of this same power that he wants God to work in our lives: **which he wrought in Christ set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.**

The ascension truly emboldens believers because when we understand the majesty of God on full display in that moment, the overwhelming glory of God that caused Isaiah to say, **“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts,” (Isaiah 6:5)**, when we understand that staggering power, we see that this is the same power and authority that God gives to us.

He gives us this power that we might obey Him and bring Him glory by the choices that we make. He gives us this power that we might be emboldened to proclaim His kingdom to our neighbors and to the nations. He gives us this power that we might live soberly and righteously before our friends, our coworkers, and strangers.

**7 Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,**

that the King of glory may come in.
8 Who is this King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle!
9 Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
10 Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory! Selah
Psalm 24:7-10

If someone were to examine your life, if they were to listen to the language you use, and the way that you talk about life in general, would they ask this question? Who is this king of glory?

2. Believers are united to Christ in His exalted state

Finally, the ascension not only means that believers have the same power as Christ, we also have the same position as Christ because of our Union with Him.

What is most true about your life? What is the most real thing about you?

As believers, the most REAL thing about us is that we are in Christ, that we are one with Him!

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Colossians 3:1-4

There are so many other passages we could point to about how we are in Christ, and He is in us. Galatians 2:20 is another good example. The phrase "in Christ" is the most common way that Paul uses to describe believers in the New Testament.

But what is the point of our being in Christ? It is that by being united to Him, we partake in His work and benefits. Meaning that as the New Testament teaches us in Romans and other places, we died with Him. And as Colossians above showed us, we have risen with Him.

Also, and most relevantly to our discussion today, we are united with Him in His ascension to the right hand of the Father:

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and

raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, Ephesians 2:4-6

It is not just that we have the power He showed by His exaltation, we also in an actual sense are exalted with Him and seated there with Him.

Why would He do so? Look at the next verse:

7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:7

So that we could display the grace kindness of God for all the ages to come! God wants to use us to display His glory to the world!

In part, this is why generations of believers could face the persecution of the world for their faith. They recognized that though they may be threatened, hungry, homeless, alone, imprisoned or tortured, no matter what the world could do to them, they are seated with Christ. The most real thing about them is that Jesus is on the throne and they sit right along with Him. (Not for their own exaltation, but that God might be exalted in them.)

Now for us, we may not be tortured and destitute (that day may come!). But in the temptations of our lives, we must be able to focus our mind's eye on the Truth that we are seated with Christ.

This is why I ask, "what is the realest thing about you?" Is it that Christ has raised you from the dead to sit with him on high?

When your day does not go as planned, when you have conflict with a brother or sister in Christ, when somebody wrongs you, when your family annoys you, what is the most important thing about you in that moment?

3. The last thing Jesus did is bless the apostles.

We know that many of Jesus' last hours before His crucifixion were spent giving his closest disciples promises. He wanted them to know that His care for them was not coming to an end but that they have peace, love, joy, and comfort. He wanted them to know they would not be alone.

When we think about the 40 day period between His resurrection and ascension, I think it is interesting that He even appeared at all to His disciples after His resurrection. Whatever He could have done, He appeared to them. He even sought to restore Peter. He helped to give Thomas confidence in the midst of his doubting.

And finally, the last thing Jesus did was to bless His disciples. He wanted to confer favor upon His followers.

What do you think Jesus said in this blessing to the apostles? Did he repeat promises He had given to them? Did He bless their ministry and predict their

success in Jerusalem and abroad? Did He bless their families that they might bring God glory by their leadership and servanthood in the home?

Whatever he said, this blessing was no mere symbolic gesture. This was a concrete blessing from Jesus, the Son of God, about to be exalted in all His glory and power, to His disciples.

While it may have been enough to have His promises of peace, comfort, love, joy and so much more from the upper room discourse in John 13-17, Jesus repeatedly ensures that His disciples FEEL His care. That they KNOW His thoughts of them. That they realize that though there is a parting, they are not alone.

There is much we could take away from this reality of Jesus' care, but let me say this, this is the same care that Christ has for us today.

Two points of application from this care of Jesus are:

1. Jesus cares for you.
2. Followers of Jesus should care for people the way He did.

****Conclusion:**

Charles Spurgeon in preaching on the exaltation of Christ in Philippians 2, asked his hearers to lift their perspective to heaven by saying:

*Oh! let your eyes be lifted up; bid heaven's blue veil divide; ask power of God-I mean spiritual power from on high, to look within the veil. I bid you not look to the streets of gold, nor to the walls of jasper, nor to the pearly-gated city. I do not ask you to turn your eyes to the white-robed hosts, who for ever sing loud hallelujahs; but yonder, my friends, turn your eyes,
"There, like a man, the Saviour sits;
The God, how bright he shines;
And scatters infinite delight
On all the happy minds." - Spurgeon

I think the most important thing, when you look at all of the letters of the New Testament, that the writers wanted to communicate by the ascension is that Christ's work was finished.

He came to atone for our sins, paying a debt we owed but could not pay. He rose up from the grave, uniting with us in death and resurrection that we might be alive unto God.

Have you been raised with Him? The only way is through repentance and faith.

The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. Acts 5:30-31

And believers, by His ascension we have the complete assurance that as He said it is finished and He is now making intercession for us and ministering to us.

Look up to Christ and live as though you are united with Him on high.