

XI. The Apostles' Creed in Biblical Perspective

"I Believe..."

"He Ascended into Heaven"

Acts 1:1–12

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

August 16, 2020 • Sunday Sermon

God's Word is true, inerrant, infallible and sufficient for all of faith and practice. As believers we build our lives on it and we look through life from it. Acts 1:1–12 says [1] *In the first book* (referring to the book of Luke), *O Theophilus* (referring to Luke), *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.*

[4] And while staying with them He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, "you heard from Me; [5] for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

[6] So when they had come together, they asked Him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" [7] He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. [8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." [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."

[12] Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

We are at an interesting point in our study of the Apostles' Creed – He ascended into heaven. In the Reformed church out of the Reformation, here is a truth we embrace but don't really celebrate it as I think we ought. I have been thinking on why this is for the past two weeks. I believe in the creed and look at the section of Jesus. The Apostles' Creed is as follows; *I believe in God the Father Almighty, (first affirmation)*

maker of heaven and earth;

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, (second affirmation)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again;

he ascended into heaven,

is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, (third affirmation)
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

I believe 'ascended into heaven' is the ultimate symbol clashing moment in the creed. What about the resurrection? I believe that's the penultimate moment for that's the one you have to have to get here, but the resurrection was designed to be affirmed in the celebration and coronation of Jesus. Remember this creed is a collection of the essentials – not all the essentials but we believe more than we find in the creed but we don't believe less.

The first affirmation in the creed about God the Father gives us our created identity. Then it goes to His Son and of the 100 Latin words the creed is comprised of, 75 belong to Jesus. It doesn't say anything about what Jesus teaches but only focuses on what He has done. The first half that talks about Christ is the flow that you find in the Philippians 2 passage that talks about the humiliation of Christ. That humiliation is the descent even to the implications and consequences of the separation of the soul and the body in His atoning death – His body buried in the tomb, His soul to paradise, hades, Sheol. But He did not abandon the soul of the Messiah to Sheol/hades and He did not allow His body to suffer corruption and the third day He arose. Now we start the exaltation but this is the penultimate moment in His exaltation. The ultimate is that He ascended into heaven.

Interestingly, in the life of the church the first part of what Jesus has done we celebrate and we call that Advent Season – conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. We sing all those Christmas hymns that celebrate this and rightly so. And we celebrate, contemplate and reflect on 'suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, He descended into hell, on the third day He arose' and we call that Holy Week. But much of the professing church does not bring much emphasis to 'He ascended into heaven' on the church calendar. The church calendar is a matter of an assisted element and there is no obligation on conscience. The only obligation on conscience is the Lord's Day, but the church calendar has been used a teaching tool and is an opportunity for outreach around the events on it.

So why is it, that we don't deal with ascension and what affirms the ascension? What affirms the ascension? It is Pentecost. There is no Pentecost without the ascension. Jesus said 'I must go away to send the Holy Spirit to you.' I don't think this is just a matter of the church but I think it's a matter of us as individuals. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say 'I just living for Jesus but I would have given anything to have been alive when He was alive.' Jesus says we're better off living now than when He was on the earth and said this to those He was around when He was on earth.

Here's a hypothetical question. If you were given the power and the authority to make this decision – would you want Jesus where He is right now or sitting next to you where you are now? Our inclination would be for most of us to say 'right next to me where I am now.' But then you would be making a lesser choice. We all have an inclination for it because we are all waiting for the Blessed Hope. Many of us have heard John 14:1–3 where Jesus says [1] *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."* We all want to be with Him but right now it's better that His glorified body is

at the right hand of the Father on the throne for you than if He was sitting right next to you now. I know that because He told the Disciples that.

One of the places Jesus told them that is in the Acts 1 passages at the beginning of the study and in John 14. When Jesus tells His Disciples that He is going to go away from them they do not like that and He sees that they do not like that. We see this in John 16:4–7 which says [4] *But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. “I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. [5] But now I am going to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are you going?’ [6] But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. [7] 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 go, I will send Him to you.”* Until He comes again, it is better for Him to be where He is now than to be sitting right next to you. I hope you will see this as we go through this study.

We go to the passage that records the last day, the last hours and the last minutes that Jesus was bodily on this earth until He bodily comes again and this is in Acts 1. In this text we are informed that Jesus has been risen, He has been in ministry in His resurrected, glorified body where His soul coming from the place of the dead (Abraham’s bosom, paradise, hades, the intermediate state for the believer), joined with His body and they saw Him as He was with them. The Bible tells us He had many appearances after He was raised with many proofs of His resurrection and many works/teaching He did post resurrection, pre-ascension for 40 days where 15 of them are recorded in the Bible. Now comes a Sabbath Day outside of Jerusalem near Bethany on the Mount of Olives and three times in this text it tells us He was taken up into the heavens.

The Apostles’ Creed says ‘The third day He arose, He ascended into heaven’ and that shows the creed is affirming the authenticity and reality of a place called heaven. It’s not a concept. It’s where Jesus is now and where He will stay until He comes again. I don’t follow those who tell me Jesus showed up here or there for Jesus warned in the Bible people would say that in the last days. Jesus says ‘You know where I am, I’m at the right hand of the Father until I come again.’ This ascended Jesus is there, seated, not in passivity but in unbelievable beneficial activity and work, because of His finished descended work so He now has ascended work.

I take people to the Mount of Olives when I take people to Israel. I tell them that they are standing on the Mount where Jesus ascended and I believe according to the Minor Prophets that is the place where He will return. Do I know where on the Mount of Olives? I do, near Bethany but I can’t be more specific than that. There are about seven different organizations who, if you give them \$5 they will take you right where they think it will happen. I can tell you He is coming back in like manner according to Acts. Acts 1:11 says [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.”* He is enthroned up in heaven. Then they were reminded of the job they were to do so don’t stand here looking for it’s time to go to work. Then they departed.

Before they departed it said He would come in like manner and I don’t think it means it was partly cloudy. I think the cloud is referring to the one that settled that showed the presence of God and the Holy Spirit’s Shekinah glory that descended in the tabernacle, in the temple. That is what Jesus ascended up into – the glory of the Lord. When He comes again He will come on the clouds – the Shekinah glory of God. But He can’t ascend in celebrated victory and coronation as Messiah, Redeemer and King unless He first descends.

This is why Ephesians quotes from the Old Testament of an actual experience that people in the first century would be well aware of from history and from the present. Ephesians 4:7–10 says [7] *But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

[8] *Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high he led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men."*

[9] *(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? [10] He who descended is the One who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)* You can't ascend in victory until you descend into the battle. Now He has ascended. We are told five things about Him from this Ephesians 4 passage.

One, we are told where He is – He is in the heavens. Two, we are told who is with Him – those who are His captives for He had redeemed His enemies. Thirdly, He is ascended until He fills all things. Fourthly, He is giving gifts to men. Fifthly, He has done all this because He has first descended. In His humiliation He now is in exaltation, the ultimate statement of celebration and coronation.

Here is the picture. It would have been very common to the first century people that there is a King/Ruler/Caesar who are in the palace and the palace is up on a hill as they are on their throne. There are these enemies that need to be defeated so they descend into the valley where the battle takes place. Once the battle is over and the victory is won, now the warrior King victorious ascends back up to the city to take his seat again back on the throne with all the victory accolades for the achievement of his battle success. We see this with King Nebuchadnezzar. He comes down (descends) from Babylon in his chariot to Israel. He conquers Jerusalem and then goes back taking the booty piled up in his chariot from the temple and captives – Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Tethered to the chariot are the representatives, authorities, principalities, powers and enemies that have been defeated and captured. In the King's ascent to victory he throws the prize, the booty from the chariot out to the people and from the throne he gives it out. That's the picture we have here in Ephesians.

We don't live in a monarchy so we have a hard time with that illustration. The closest thing we do is a presidential inauguration. When I was about five or six years old I have a little button that says 'I like Ike' which is what my parents gave me when Eisenhower was elected president, but inaugurations aren't the same thing as what is being referred to here. Dr. Ferguson was there in England when Queen Elizabeth was coroneted. Ferguson said that all the citizens received a gift on the day of her coronation.

So here is Jesus as King. He descends and humbles Himself into the battle. He wins the victory and comes back with all of the prizes and tethered are those whom He has defeated. That's you, sin, Satan, death, hell and the grave. Romans 5:8 says [8] *but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners (enemies), Christ died for us.* Now we are tethered to the King by grace and love. When He ascended we ascended with Him. We are joint heirs with Christ. We're in Him and He is in us. We belong to Him and He belongs to us. That is the picture that is being given. Do you see why this is so glorious? This is the ultimate statement of victory to celebrate. This is the coronation of Messiah as Prophet, Priest and King.

From the Latin word ascent we get a word called session. There was a song we used to sing when I was a kid that said 'when the court's in session, here comes the judge' but actually here it's the opposite for when the Judge comes the court is in session because when the Judge comes in the Judge says 'the court is now in session.' Now Jesus has taken His seat over the Kingdom of God that is at work by the Gospel of God, by the grace of God to spread to all the nations for He is now in session as He ascends. We use this language every Sunday. The first

hymn sung was known as the hymn of ascent. In the Bible there are the Psalms of ascent as the people would come up the hill of Zion to Mount Zion, to temple mount, to enter into worship. What we now do because He is enthroned, we ascend, not up to the earthly Jerusalem but to the heavenly Jerusalem, not to a type king but to the King of Kings to give Him praise and glory. We ascend in worship because He ascended in victory, has the victory and is coroneted in victory in glory. As He is in that moment He is now giving gifts to men. He will keep giving those gifts until His Kingdom fills all things, then He shall come again to judge the living and the dead.

Here is the takeaway I'd love for you to embrace at this point. When you get to the point of 'He ascended into heaven' in the Apostles' Creed don't just skip by it. Here is what you are saying, He has ascended into heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father (He is in session) in celebration of His victory and in His coronation as the King. Jesus having finished the work of redemption for His people is in celebration, has ascended to heaven for His coronation where He is now at work upon His people. He has finished His work of redemption but He hasn't finished working on the redeemed. He is gathering them, bringing them, sending them, perfecting them, growing them, with them, overshadowing them, and interceding for them.

From Acts 1:1 the first of Luke's volume contained what Jesus began to do and teach. So if this is what the first volume is then what is the second volume about? It is about what Jesus is continuing to do, not here on earth for that is in book one that looks at the Incarnate earthly ministry of Christ. Now His heavenly ministry through His body number two, the church, empowered by the Spirit of God is what He is continuing to do and teach. He is now working on the redeemed, in the redeemed, to the redeemed and through the redeemed and the Disciples got it. In other words, if the Disciples had been here and I asked them if they would bring Jesus here with them right now or if they thought it's better for Him to be there, what do you think they would say? They'd say 'not only is it better He is there but we're glad He's there and not here' because it means that it produces. No I don't think I can channel them and them this but the reason I know is because the Bible tells me so.

Let's look at Luke 24 and the last paragraph in that chapter. This is a summation of what has now been expounded in Acts 1. Luke 24:44-53 says [44] *Then He (Jesus) said to them, "These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."* [45] *Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,* [46] *and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,* [47] *and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.* [48] *You are witnesses of these things.* [49] *And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."*

[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.

If this had happened about 60 days prior they would have had a pity party. They wouldn't have wanted Him to go. When He actually does go from their sight into heaven and they can't see Him no more, they return to Jerusalem with great joy. In the original language it basically reads that they return to Jerusalem rejoicing with joy. Their joy was rejoicing and they were continually in the temple worshipping God. There was no pity party, no questions and no concerns. All of that has been dismissed now for they've been convinced that it is better for

Jesus to be where He is. Why? It is because He is going to fill all things from there. Why? He is going to send the Kingdom from there. Why? He is going to send the Holy Spirit from there. Why? It is because it celebrates His victory. He couldn't go back if He hadn't come down and He couldn't go back if He hadn't won the victory when He came down. So this is better for this is celebration in His coronation.

He has also given us a promise that we will yet be with Him in the new heavens and the new earth. So why is it better that He is there? It because He is giving gifts so that we can do what He commissioned us to do. I want to show you this as well that they understood this. Let's look at Mark 16. This gives us Mark's distillation of the Great Commission.

Mark 16:14–20 says *[14] Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen. [15] And He said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. [16] Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. [17] And these signs will accompany those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; [18] they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."*

[19] So then the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. [20] And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

This is shows why the Apostles' Creed says that He is seated at the right hand of the Father. They went out to fulfill the Great Commission *while the Lord worked with them*. Where is the Lord? He is at the right hand of the Father. Where are they? They are on the earth and as they obey the Great Commission He is with them and He had already told them that in Matthew 28:18–20 which says *[18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

So how can He be with them if His glorified body is right there at the right hand of the Father, the Lamb standing as if slain? He is with them by His Spirit. It is the same Spirit that was with Him in the womb, at the manger, that ordained Him when He entered into the public ministry of Prophet, Priest and King at His baptism, that led Him in the wilderness, that helped Him grow in wisdom, stature, favor with God and with man, as He taught in the Galilee, that led Him to the cross, that brought His body out of the tomb and His soul from Sheol and now all the way back to the throne when Jesus gets to the throne, He now pours that Spirit upon His people. This is why Paul loved to call the Holy Spirit, after the ascension of Jesus, the Spirit of Christ. This is the same Spirit that is with you at your new birth when you are born again until He takes you to glory. He is with you.

If He is sitting with you now then He can't be with me. He is with you as He dwells within your heart by His Spirit through faith from the throne. He isn't physically with us but He is in us. We have a lot more intimacy with Him in us than if He were sitting next to us. Jesus is at work through the Spirit of Christ, not beside you simply but in you, on you, upon you and through you. He is giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit, affirmed at Pentecost. Jesus gave Himself from the throne through His Spirit to you and it's better. I know it's better because if He didn't do it you wouldn't have the Bible, the New Testament, if He had not given His Spirit to bring to their minds all that He had taught them.

If He didn't send His Spirit you would not be converted. You would still be dead in your sins because you have to be born again by the Spirit of God. If He didn't send His Spirit you would have no assurance of your salvation for His Spirit bears witness to our Spirit. I'd love to have Him and I look forward to the day I'll be with Him for all eternity but right now He is with me by His Spirit who was in Him. Now you can have a true intimacy and not just side to side or just see Him on the mountain wondering if you can hear Him or not. Now He is right within you. There would be no church or Gospel going to all the nations and if you weren't converted you wouldn't care, if the Holy Spirit hadn't been sent to us. We'd be dead in our sins headed to a Christless eternity. There would be no fruit of the Spirit and you wouldn't be able to grow in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.

Every one of you have a spiritual gift and if the Spirit hadn't been given/sent you wouldn't have one. There would be no paragraph three to the Apostles' Creed which says;

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

There would be no church, saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body or everlasting life if Jesus isn't ascended and from His celebration and coronation He poured forth the Spirit of God.

He has also given you the gift of intercession. He who prayed while He was here ever lives to pray for you (Hebrews 7:25). Even now He intercedes for us. We have a double safety net because of the Spirit for when you pray not only does Jesus intercede for you and not only do you pray to the Father through Jesus who takes your petitions to the throne room, but the Holy Spirit whom He sent to you intercedes for you (Romans 8:26-27). We need to pray more and more. I have a proposal in terms of prayer that I want to give you in the coming weeks as a congregation.

When I pray I don't put my confidence in prayer, I put my confidence in God and the mediatory work of Christ. Jesus translates my prayers for He is my Intercessor and even before it gets to Jesus, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. I have two Intercessors and I need both of them, as the Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words for us. Not only that, we have the gift of His promised return – from there He will come to judge the living and the dead and when He comes I need not fear. The Lord tells me there is going to wars, rumors of wars, pestilence and all those things plus one day you will die – praise God for He has ascended, is King, Lord and now that His Spirit is with me I don't fear death anymore. When I hit it, it will be the valley of the shadow of death and He'll be with me by His Spirit and He has already won the victory over it.

Whatever it is you are going through be careful, be prudent and all of those things but we are not under the slavery of fear. Please do not misrepresent me. I love it when a nation is impacted by the Gospel of grace so that its government and its founding documents bear the witness of the Judeo Christian Biblical principles and realize what lane they're supposed to be in and what God-given rights they're supposed to protect. I will tell you one thing I am not fearful. If this nation apostatizes I am not fearful. We do not walk in victory because of government assistance. We walk in victory because we have a King. That King has sent His Spirit. He has

gifted us and we are His ambassadors. He says ‘You shall be My witnesses with power to all the nations of the world.’

That’s why I love the phrase – He ascended into heaven – and He is in session. He is ruling and reigning and doing His intercession and He is coming again. He has promised to come again after He has filled all things in His Kingdom throughout all the world. Do remember how Mary after the resurrection was holding on? Jesus said to her in John 20:17, [17] *Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”* He says ‘Don’t hold Me here.’ Now He had already been to the Father in paradise for on the cross Jesus said ‘Into Thy hands I commend My Spirit’ but He hadn’t been to the throne. That is where He is going.

Go to the world and tell them there is a Lamb who was slain, who now stands, is King and announce the majesty and glory of His cross and His crown. He’s in session until He fills all things. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Take a few moments in silent prayer while the Holy Spirit speaks to your heart. If you’re reading this today and you’re still captivated by sin but you want to be a part of being captivated by grace in Jesus, the King just called you to Himself – come to Him. The church has now extended that by the Spirit of God to you so do not blaspheme the Spirit and turn away from Jesus. He alone is your Hope. He descended for you. He ascended in victory now come to Him. Put your trust in Him that you might walk in the triumph of Christ. When you do this will you let us know so that we can help you grow in Christ (call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200). Jesus, fill Your people with great joy in the ascension and evidence of the ascension, the gift and gifts that come from the Holy Spirit, the gift and gifts that come from Your intercession and the gift and gifts of Your promised return. I pray this in King Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

“He Ascended into Heaven”

The Coronation and Celebration of Jesus the Christ, Victorious Redeemer–King of Kings

LIFE TAKEAWAY

Jesus, having finished the work of redemption for His people, has ascended to Heaven for His Coronation, where He is now at work upon His people by the gifts of...

His Spirit – Pentecost

His Intercession – Salvation

His promised return – Consummation