

Why We Celebrate the Ascension

Ephesians 1:15-23

Introduction

Beginning with Advent, the Christian Calendar tells the salvation story in a year, from the First Coming of Christ as the Baby in a manger to His Second Coming as the King at the end of the age. Festival days mark important happenings in the life of Christ or His church. While the world thinks Christmas is our big day, the highest holy day and the one the Calendar is centered around is Easter. This day shapes Christian worship, as it changed the worship day from Saturday to Sunday, and every Sunday is a “mini-Easter”, celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Other festivals are still important, such as Baptism of Our Lord and Transfiguration of Our Lord, but secondary to Christmas and Easter. Then there are minor feast days that usually celebrate the life or martyrdom of saints. Where does Ascension fall on this spectrum?

The Apparent Passing of Ascension

The fact that we are observing it today and it took place Thursday tells us something about its importance. And about why we are asking this question today. Every year our circuit has a combined Ascension service, and every year attendance gets less. This tells us that Ascension is getting less important to people and if this trend is left unchecked, it will go the way of the 8-track. It will no longer matter because it will no longer fit into our busy schedules. After all, what does Ascension have to do with our salvation anyway?

What Ascension Is

That’s a good question. If the Christian Calendar tells the salvation story, then everything must somehow point to salvation. To find the answer to that question, we look at what Ascension is. What it’s all about.

The Conclusion of Jesus’ Earthly Ministry

The most obvious thing that happened when Jesus ascended into heaven was that it was the end of His earthly ministry. Even though He only appeared a limited number of times after the resurrection, Jesus was still a big part of the lives of His disciples. In **Acts 1**, just before He ascended, the disciples asked Him, “*Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*” (**Acts 1:6**). They acted like they weren’t expecting Him to leave. They figured that now He has the crucifixion behind Him, He can just go on with His ministry. Maybe He is going to be the Messiah they were looking for after all. His going back to the Father would change all that.

A Doorway to Something New

As one era passes, a new one comes. Jesus’ Ascension is the doorway to a new beginning. In **Acts 1:4**, Jesus tells the disciples to *stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father*, the Holy Spirit. The new thing that is coming is what we refer to as the “Church Age.” The Holy Spirit will come upon all believers and indwell them, to lead, comfort, strengthen, and build up the people of God.

Christ's Ascension to His Throne

Paul says in **Ephesians 1** that God *raised [Christ] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:20)*, that He has given Him *all power and dominion (v. 21)* and *put all things under His feet (v. 22)*. Christ, whose throne was the cross, has now ascended to His heavenly throne. He has taken His rightful place as Lord.

What Ascension Means

What does all this mean? How does it affect our salvation?

The Changing of the Guard

The fact that Jesus' earthly ministry has concluded means that we can trust what He said on the cross, *"It is finished" (John 19:30)*. It also means that His chosen ones, the Twelve, could start doing what He had been training them for. They have the whole story now. Our salvation is complete in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nothing else needs to be done.

The Holy Spirit Will Come

Jesus says in **John 16**, *"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" (John 16:7)*. In **Matthew 28**, just before Jesus ascended, He said, *"I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20)*. Now, if He's still physically here, he cannot be with every Christian all over the world. His presence would be localized. But, if He goes away, the Holy Spirit will be with and *in* every believer everywhere.

The Body and Blood Are Available

Because Christ's humanity and divinity were joined at the Incarnation, His human nature, still with His divine nature is at the right hand of God. Some say this means that His body and blood cannot be present at Communion, since He is in heaven. But "the right hand" of God is the *power* of God, which fills heaven and earth. So, the **Formula of Concord** says: *By this communicated divine power, according to the words of His testament, He can be and is truly present with His body and blood in the Holy Supper. He has pointed this out for us by His Word. This is possible for no other man, because no man is united with the divine nature the way Jesus, the Son of Mary, is (Formula of Concord, SD 29)*. Because Christ has ascended, He can give us His body and blood to eat and drink in the Lord's Supper. Our salvation and the life of the church are tied up in and dependent upon His Ascension. And that's **WHY WE CELEBRATE THE ASCENSION** of Jesus Christ.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
