

The Right Hand of the Father - Acts 1:6-11, Hebrews 7:25-27 & I John 2:1-2
Argyle – 3/26/17 – *Encounters With Jesus* (Keller)

Introduction to Scripture

Where is Jesus today and what is he doing? In fact, what has he been doing since he left this world 2000 years ago? Is he on vacation? Is he just biding his time until his return? When we talk about Jesus, we usually talk about him in the past or in the future. Rarely do we talk about Jesus in the present. But, this morning we are going to talk about what Jesus is doing today and the implications of that for our lives. We are going to look at a number of Scripture passages starting with Acts 1. We'll be starting in verse 1 so we have the context for Jesus' ascension. (Read) (Pray for one another)

Introduction

For 40 days after his resurrection Jesus hung around this world appearing to his disciples to prove that he was really alive and to instruct them. Ten of these appearances are recorded in the Bible and others are referred to. One of Jesus' is the one recorded here in Acts 1 where Jesus warned them not to leave Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit. Jesus went on, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

And then it happened! When he finished saying this, Jesus was taken up into the sky until a cloud hid him from their sight. This is one of the more dramatic

moments recorded in the Bible. One minute he was there and the next he was gone until his return. As the disciples were staring intently up into the sky, two angels appeared to explain to them what had just happened. They told the disciples that Jesus had been taken from them into heaven and that one day he would return just as he had left. Wow! Just like that, Jesus was gone. We call this “The Ascension.”

Not only was Jesus’ ascension surprising, but so was the reaction to it by the disciples. In the description of the ascension at the end of his Gospel, Luke wrote, “When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.”(Luke 24:50-53) You would have thought that the disciples would have been distressed that Jesus was gone. Instead, they rejoiced and worshipped. Their response is a key to understanding the significance and implications of the ascension. It is an event that should bring us great joy and lead to worship.

Yet, I suspect that for most of us, the ascension is something we have barely ever thought about. Since it occurred between the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, it is easy to overlook. But to overlook the ascension could leave us with an impoverished spiritual life. So, we are going to look this morning at the significance of the ascension and its implications for our lives.

The Significance of the Ascension

If you asked the average Christian about the significance of the ascension they would say that it is how Jesus got from earth to heaven after his resurrection. Our understanding of the ascension is that it was simply the mechanism for Jesus getting from here to there. But it was actually much more than just a change in location. As Tim Keller points out, Jesus' ascension was an enthronement. In Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost he said, God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. ³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ...³⁶ "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." (Acts 2:32-36)

Likewise, in writing to the Ephesians about the power that God has given to Christians, he wrote, "That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:19-23)

This is how Tim Keller summarizes the significance of the ascension. “The elevation in space symbolized the elevation in authority and relationship. ...He was going, now as the unique God-man - fully human and fully divine - to take his place as the new king and head of the human race. ...To put it simply, Jesus is directing a cosmic transition plan - one that will bring about new heavens and a new earth.

(*Encounters With Jesus*) Jesus has ascended to begin his reign as the Lord and head over everything.

Another significance of the ascension is that Jesus is no longer limited by the space-time continuum of this world. He can now be more than one place at the same time. That is why he said to his disciples in John 16 that it was good for them that he was going away. While he lived in this world, he could only be in one place at a time. Now that he has ascended, there is no limit to how many places he can be at once, through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Implications of the Ascension

So, what does it mean for us that Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father and that he is no longer limited by the space-time continuum? Let’s look at some of the implications of the ascension for our lives. I have been greatly helped by Tim Keller’s insights on this and most of this is adapted from *Encounters with Jesus*.

One implication of Jesus ascension is that he is present with and available for fellowship with every Christian. One of the last things Jesus said to his followers was “...surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b).

That is a key promise and assurance for our living out of the Christian faith. It means that Jesus is with us this morning as we gather for worship. But not only that, he is with our friends who are worshipping with us by live stream. Recently that has included people as far away as Texas and Hawaii. Not only that, but he is with the folks at Durkeetown Baptist and and Twin Tiers EPC and Hilltown Baptist and Highland Park Presbyterian. Not only that, he is with Andrew Brunson in his prison cell in Turkey. Not only that, when we leave here this morning, if we are one of his followers, he will go with us. Because he has ascended, Jesus is able to be present with us through his Holy Spirit and to pour his love into our hearts, no matter where we are.

A second implication of Jesus' ascension is that since he controls all things we can face the world with peace in our hearts. Remember what we read a few minutes ago from Ephesians 1, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:20-23) The great church reformer John Calvin wrote, "Thus, since He has gone up there, and is in heaven for us, let us note that we need not fear to be in this world. It is true that we are subject to so much misery that our condition is pitiable, but at that we need neither be astonished nor confine our attention to ourselves. Thus, we look to our Head Who is already in heaven, and say,...

- Although I am weak, there is Jesus Christ who is powerful enough to make me stand upright.
- Although I am feeble, there is Jesus Christ who is my strength.
- Although I am full of miseries, Jesus Christ is in immortal glory and what He has will sometime be given to me and I shall partake of all His benefits.
- Yes, the devil is called the prince of this world. But what of it? Jesus Christ holds him in check for He is King of heaven and earth.
- There are devils above us in the air who make war against us. But what of it? Jesus Christ rules above, having entire control of the battle. Thus, we need not doubt that He gives us the victory.
- I am here subject to many changes, which may cause me to lose courage. But what of it? The Son of God is my Head, Who is exempt from all change. I must, then, take confidence in Him. (John Calvin, *Deity of Christ*)

Because Jesus has ascended we can face the challenges of this life with peace.

A third implication of the ascension is that we can know without a doubt that we are forgiven, accepted and delighted in by God the Father. The writer of Hebrews tells us, “Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf. ²⁶ He is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has been set apart from sinners and has been given the highest place of honor in heaven.” (Hebrews 7:25-26) The Apostle John put it this way. “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning

sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

(1 John 2:1-2). Jesus Christ, the perfect sin sacrifice, is interceding for you and me with the Father. He is our advocate, our defense attorney before the Father. As we'll sing in a minute,

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong, a perfect plea
A great high Priest whose Name is Love
Who ever lives and pleads for me
My name is graven on His hands
My name is written on His heart
I know that while in heaven He stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart

Make sure you sing those words with passion this morning as we celebrate our ascended Lord who intercedes as our advocate with God the Father.

One other implication of the Jesus' ascension is that Jesus is continuing his work through the church. With the ascension Jesus physically left this world and his direct ministry had ended, but his ministry did not end. It continues through the church. I have always been challenged by how Luke begins the Book of Acts. “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach...” The Gospel of Luke was about what Jesus began to do and teach. The Book of Acts was going to be about what Jesus was continuing to do and teach. But wait a minute, “Didn't we say that Jesus had physically left this world?” Yes, Jesus is gone, but his work continues through the church. That was the whole point of Pentecost. Exalted to the right hand of God the Father, Jesus poured out his Holy Spirit on his followers.

Through the Holy Spirit who comes to live in believers, we are given spiritual gifts and power and direction for ministry. The Holy Spirit is the seal guaranteeing our place in heaven so we can live with confidence and boldness. The Holy Spirit reminds us of what Jesus has said and convicts us of sin when we go astray. And so, we are equipped to continue the work of Jesus in our world.

Because of the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father, we can experience Jesus' presence; we can have peace in our hearts no matter the circumstances; we can know that we are forgiven, accepted and delighted in by God; and we can continue the work of Jesus as his ambassadors.

Conclusion

Where is Jesus today? He is at the right hand of God the Father, "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked..."

And what is he doing? He has pretty full agenda today. He is ruling the world as the Lord and Messiah and as the head of all things for the church - for us. He is interceding with God the Father on our behalf. He is making sure that his work is being carried out through the church, guiding this time of transition between his first coming and his return when he will establish the new heavens and the new earth. ascension And, he is hanging out with his people wherever they are, making sure that we know we are loved, forgiven, accepted and loved by God.

No wonder the first disciples rejoiced at Jesus' ascension! May we be filled with joy and worship, as well, as we reflect on Jesus' ascension.