

**WHERE IS JESUS, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?
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**Luke 24:44-53; Eph. 1:15-23
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The plot of Jesus' story, as it usually gets celebrated in our churches, can be summarized as his birth, his death and resurrection, and his gift of the Holy Spirit to the church—Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. But something is missing in this plot, and that missing piece is what makes sense of the rest. It's Jesus' ascension. Why does the ascension typically get second billing? One reason is that it's hard to understand what happened.

Luke 24:51 says “he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.” Acts 1:9 says “he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” But we know Jesus didn't just keep going up and up till he reached heaven. Heaven isn't just “up”. There's something fundamentally mysterious about Jesus' departure from his earthly life

There's also a logistical reason why Jesus' ascension gets overlooked. Through history, the Church has celebrated the ascension forty days after Easter. But forty days after Easter always falls on a Thursday. Without some Sunday attention, Ascension gets overlooked.

The Bible is clear about what Jesus' ascension means in God's plan of salvation. Paul writes: (Ephesians 1:16-22)

Peter writes: “...Jesus Christ... has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him” (1 Peter 3:21-22).

We could add other examples from Scripture. But the point is clear. Jesus' ascension to heaven completes God's work of redemption for the human race. Jesus' exaltation to God's right hand reestablishes God's kingdom, as far as earth and its inhabitants are concerned.

Jesus' ascension crowns him as Lord: (Philippians 2:9-11) Jesus didn't just disappear to heaven, with a promise to come back someday to fetch us. Jesus returned to the Father to begin the real work of running God's restored kingdom on earth.

Jesus told his disciples that it was to their advantage that he go away, so that he could send them the Holy Spirit. Jesus did that on Pentecost. When Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, he told the crowd, “Exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has poured out this that you see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

Jesus guides and governs the church. God “put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body” (Ephesians 1:22-23). Jesus is Lord of the church, his body, and Lord of us, its members.

Jesus asks to be not just our savior, but our Lord. He asks us not just to believe what he has done for us, but to follow and obey him, to be his disciples. And he asks this as rightful Lord of all. Jesus calls us to be his witnesses and ambassadors here on earth, guided and empowered by his own Spirit. “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth,” he said. “Go *therefore* and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-19). Jesus' ascension and exaltation are the reasons for being his disciple. It's only because Jesus is where he is now, that he is able to save from sin and death. It's only because Jesus is Lord in heaven now, that he can heal and forgive.

Where Jesus is, matters because of who Jesus is. Jesus is the eternal Word of God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Jesus is the eternal Son of God: “In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son,...through whom also he created the world” (Hebrews 1:2). But Jesus is also the Word made flesh. He is both God and man. The eternal Son took on human nature, to die as a sinless man in our place. Jesus rose from the dead as the firstborn of the new creation, the pioneer of the renewed human race. And when Jesus ascended to heaven, he did so as the God-man. Jesus has not reverted in heaven to his pre-incarnate state. The perfect man who is also the eternal Son of God is now at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places.

That's very hard for our minds to grasp. But why does it matter so much? Let's hear what Paul says: (Ephesians 2:4-7).

Why does it matter to us that Jesus is now enthroned in heaven? Because the Bible says that we who belong to him, who are "in Christ Jesus", are there with him.

It's hard to get one's mind around everything that's packed into that little phrase "in Christ Jesus." But the Bible tells us that what is true of Jesus is also true of us who belong to him. We have died with him, we have been raised with him, we are seated with him in the heavenly places. Jesus is our representative before the Father. Paul tells us that through Jesus we "have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:18). Jesus is interceding for you and me, and what's more, it's like you and I are right there with him, whispering into our heavenly Father's ear.

Jesus' ascension orients Christian life. The ascension gives our positions, Jesus' position and our position. He is in heaven, Lord over both heaven and earth. We are his band of ambassador-witnesses on earth. Yet our unity with him is so close, that we actually have access to everything he has in heaven.

Jesus' ascension is a key, but not the final, plot element in the redemption drama. Jesus is coming again. He will judge the world and bring in the new creation in all its fullness. The decisive victories are already won. The true king has been crowned, even though the rebel usurper still rages.

Jesus' ascension is the climax his saving work. The goal of Jesus' coming, of his life, his suffering, death and resurrection was to install the God-man as Lord of heaven and earth, with authority to bring all believing humanity into direct fellowship with God.

And so, belonging to Jesus, you are seated with him at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places. This means that you as his disciple have an amazing, privileged relationship with God. You have Jesus' access to the Father. You have the gifts of the Holy Spirit to make Jesus' rule effective on this earth. But this privileged relationship comes with responsibility. Jesus your Savior is your Lord. If you believe him, then follow and obey him.

Ascension Sunday invites us to ask, "Do I believe the whole complete good news about Jesus? Do I believe Jesus is Lord? That he is my Lord?" Maybe you need to bow the knee and confess that today.

Ascension Sunday also invites us to ask, "Do I believe what my Lord Jesus says about me, that I am in some wonderful way already with him in God's presence, with full access to my Heavenly Father? Have I been missing out all that Jesus bought for me with his blood?" Maybe you need to claim that position by faith today.

Prayer: "Jesus, thank you for saving me from sin and death at the cost of your own life. Thank you for giving me eternal life through your resurrection. I praise you now, raised to the Father's right hand, with all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus, you are my Lord and king. I belong to you; all that is mine is yours. But all that is yours is also mine. Fill and direct me by your Spirit, so that I can experience all the hope, joy and power that you have won for me, to be your disciple and ambassador here still on earth. In your name I pray. Amen."