

Providence Church (CREC)  
 Ascension Sunday, Last Sunday of Easter  
 May 16th, 2010 60th sermon  
 Sermon: Ascension and Dominion  
 Text: Luke 24:44-53  
 Pastor Uriesou T. Brito

Text: **44** Then he 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 and 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** Then 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.

Prayer: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Kinsman. Amen.

Sermon: People of God, this is the last Sunday of Easter. Today we will celebrate the Ascension of our Lord. Let me begin by making a few observations about the liturgical year. One of the great advantages of following the liturgical calendar is that your life becomes Christo-centric. It is surrounded by the events that define us as a people. Our children will never have to wonder what the gospel is because they will hear it and see it week by week, year after year. But another significant point about the church calendar is that it explains the mission of the Church. The Pentecost Season, which begins next week, celebrates the pouring out of the Spirit of God upon an infant church in the first century, but a church growing and maturing through the ages. This liturgical model is precisely what we see in Luke’s account this morning. We see today the *Ascension* of our Lord in the end of Luke when Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father and Luke continues with the other half of the story in Acts where we see the beginning of the Church’s

labor in proclaiming the gospel of Christ and conquering the world through the power of resurrection. Our calendar is divided into the life of Christ from his coming down as an infant to His going up as the *ascended* and ruling King. And the other half of the calendar focuses on the mission of the Church from Pentecost to the exaltation of Christ and His gospel spreading throughout the nations of the earth.

Liturgically, *Ascension* is a joyous event. It is Jesus' triumphal entry into heaven; the king mighty in battle. He is the greater Enoch and the greater Elijah taken up into heavenly glory exalted and interceding for us and for the nations. The life of the Church is a joyous life because we are a Resurrection people, but we are also an *ascended* people. Our citizenship is in heaven, and because we are a heavenly people, we are called to live a heavenly ethic on earth. It means that we live like ascended saints. Paul makes this very clear when speaking about the life of the church in Ephesians. In chapter two, he says that God made us alive and seated us in the heavenly places.<sup>1</sup> This is precisely why we pray each Sunday that God's kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven. We are praying for this sacred merger between heaven and earth. We are praying that earth will reflect more and more our own citizenship in heaven; that heaven will become earth and earth will become heaven.

Today we celebrate Jesus' enthronement! He sat at the right hand of the Father fulfilling Psalm 110, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." The resurrection begins the enthronement, but the Ascension establishes the enthronement. The great rule of Christ the Messiah officially begins at the Ascension. Jesus begins to rule the nations at the right hand of the Father from the heavens. And He will only return when His enemies are made His footstool.

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:6

But yet, Ascension is a strange event. It is sort of tucked in between Easter and Pentecost. We hear of Easter, we hear of Advent, but Ascension does not receive the attention it deserves. “It is a neglected episode in the gospel story.”<sup>2</sup> Atheists love to mock any of the gospel narratives referring to Christ and His miracles. The late Carl Sagan talked about the impossibility of Jesus flying up into heaven before the technology was available. You often wonder how foolish these statements are, but then you remember that the biblical accounts tell us that unbelievers are spiritually blind and do not see the things of God. For us, we believe in a historical ascension, but we also affirm that the Ascension is a mystery. This morning I am not going to explain the cosmology of the *Ascension*, but we will see the theology of the *Ascension* in Luke’s gospel.

Luke’s gospel ends with the *Ascension* because if we stop at the resurrection and do not teach about the implications of the *Ascension*, we have failed to explain the gospel. The Gospel includes the *Ascension*. We confessed this morning:

Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into Hades, the third day he rose again from the dead; **he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty...**<sup>3</sup>

In question 54 of the Westminster Larger Catechism we read:

*How is Christ exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God?*

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<sup>2</sup> Rich Lusk, sermon on Luke 24 at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Al. Lusk tends to see the accounts in Luke 24 and Acts 1 as separate accounts. I am not persuaded yet. At this point, it seems to me that Luke reiterates the Ascension in Acts 1 as a foundational/starting point to the apostolic work. So this is the same event, but with different emphases. Luke (part 1) is interested in the earthly work of Christ ending with the ascension and Luke (part 2, Acts) is interested in the mission of the church on the basis of the present reigning of Christ at the right hand of the Father. Thus, he records the Ascension account in the beginning.

<sup>3</sup> The Apostle’s Creed.

Answer: Christ is exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God, in that as God-man he is advanced to the highest favor with God the Father, with all fullness of joy, glory, and power over all things in heaven and earth; *and does gather and defend his church, and subdue their enemies; furnishes his ministers and people with gifts and graces, and makes intercession for them.*<sup>4</sup>

The rule of Christ begins to unfold the promise of God to bring all enemies under the authority and dominion of His Son. And how is this accomplished? This is the story of the book of Acts. This is the story of the Pentecost Season which begins next week.

But what we see at the end of Luke is the climax of Jesus' ministry. It brings together all the pieces. In Luke 2, the angels announce the birth of Jesus. There is great joy in the beginning. We see at the end of Luke that joy is brought to culmination.<sup>5</sup> In Luke 2, when Jesus is brought in the temple, Simeon pronounces a blessing. Luke ends the gospel with Jesus blessing His disciples. There is an emphasis on blessing in Luke's gospel. We know where this idea is found in the Bible, because we end every service with this blessing. It is the Aaronic blessing. Jesus is the greater Aaron blessing His people in their mission to go beyond Jerusalem to the ends of the earth with Christ's message. "Chapter 1 starts out with the announcement of John's birth...struck down because of unbelief. Dumbness in the temple at the beginning and at the end there is singing in the temple; from muteness to singing out. The world was fasting, now there is continual praising God. This is a very deliberate book-ending."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Tuuri's sermon was quite helpful in piecing some of the chiasmic material together. Also, Jim Jordan has a significant article on the patterns in Luke at [biblicalhorizons.com](http://biblicalhorizons.com)

<sup>6</sup> Tuuri.

In our passage, Jesus appears to his disciples and eats with them. And He affirms that all of the Scriptures speak of Him. He takes them to the Old Testament Scriptures and explains how his death and resurrection “fulfills the promises made to the people.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus’ death and resurrection were a divine necessity.

“Before He could be crowned with glory, He needed to be crowned with thorns. Before he could be lifted up to the father’s right hand, He had to be lifted up on the cross. These events were foretold and they unfolded exactly as God had planned. Further, He commissions them to preach repentance, beginning in Jerusalem, but radiating it to the nations. Christ achieves the salvation of the world and the disciples are called to implement it.”<sup>8</sup> Christ accomplishes the Father’s plan and He sits at the right hand of the Father to ensure that His bride’s labors are not in vain.

He states that the disciples are witnesses of these things. “Jesus is saying that the disciples are living proof to the world that my claims to be king are true. Your words and actions vindicate my claims to be king. We are to give evidence to be the evidence that the kingdom of God has come.”<sup>9</sup> But they will not be abandoned witnesses with the departure of Jesus, the Spirit will clothe them. He will give them bright garments made of fire, so that the heat of their presence will be felt wherever they go. Pentecost will unleash the power of God in the world like never before.

Jesus then leads them out to Bethany raises His hands and blesses them. This is a blessing of their new status as kingdom missionaries. This blessing is the Aaronic benediction in a New

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<sup>7</sup> Lusk’s insights from sermon on Luke 24.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

World. As Jesus is carried up into heaven in the glory-cloud, the disciples begin to understand the significance of this event and the significance of Jesus' ascension is that we are seated with Him in the heavenlies. Paul says in Colossians<sup>10</sup> that if we have been raised with Christ, we are to seek the things above, where He is seated at the right hand of God. We are called to set our minds above where our citizenship is. We are dual citizens waiting the day when we will be citizens of only one re-created Heaven and Earth. But until that day, we are to embody the ethics and beauty of the heavenly places. We are to seek those things which are above, and seeking those things above means that we pray earnestly that the will of God will be done on earth as it is already in heaven. We need a heavenly perspective on our earthly march. We need to cultivate the harvests of this world and plant the seed of the gospel, which will one day cover the whole earth with the glory of God.

The house of God is a house of joy. The ascension takes us up into the heavenlies and gives us a glimpse of the culture of heaven, so that when we come down, we begin to implement that culture on earth, and as holy architects we seek godly wisdom to accomplish this great project.

How Shall we then Live and Think?

The ascension means that Jesus now intercedes for us. He is our great high priest; the one who receives all authority in heaven and on earth. According to Psalm 110, Jesus is now subduing His enemies. Jesus has received the kingdom from the Father and is now exercising dominion over this world, until all His enemies are under His feet.

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<sup>10</sup> 3:1.

But the Psalmist says that from Zion He sends forth the mighty scepter.<sup>11</sup> The culmination of the gospel is the worship in Zion. Zion is the Church. If the rod of Christ's strength comes out of Zion, then Zion, the Church, is the headquarters of this empire Jesus is building. We are not called to be nationalists; we are not called to be republicans; we are called to be worshipers of the Triune God. From Zion goes forth the power of the ascended Lord. From the Church flows forth a river of living water. If the Church fails in her most fundamental job of worship, then all things else crumbles.

“Calvin says, the ascension means that heaven is not merely a hope, but a present possession for the church in her Head/Representative... We are commissioned to serve the world by showing the world the loving lordship and gracious government of King Jesus. Jesus rules over, directs, and guides his church for the good of the nations, so that they may be drawn to him, as he pleases. The church exists for the sake of the world, embodying Christ's love as his agent and representative on earth, even as he is our representative in heaven.”<sup>12</sup>

Luke ends by saying that the disciples were continually blessing God in the temple. This is precisely why our worship is not mournful. Our songs are not the songs of a dead prophet; they are the songs of an *ascended* King who rules and reigns for us until He makes the nations His footstool. Christ is risen! Christ reigns at the right hand of the Father! In the Name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> 110:2.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Rich Lusk, extended sermon notes.