

Sermon: Ascension Triumph

Reading: Luke 24:49-53

Ascension

Christmas and Easter mark the big festivals celebrated each year in the Christian calendar. Christmas celebrating the Incarnation of God taking on flesh and dwelling among us and the Easter celebration of Jesus rising from the tomb conquering sin and death.

A celebration day which often goes by unnoticed is Ascension. It maybe that its falls midweek, but so can Easter and Christmas? Maybe because not a Bank Holiday its overlooked! Maybe its because its because it's not weak known and understood certainly outside the church but also sadly inside the church.

Have you ever considered the celebrations and parties that take place in heaven? Heaven is not a boring place at all. Scripture speaks of rejoicing, celebrating and feasting at banquets. And when we consider some of the great musicians and choirs this world has ever known, imagine the music. The scriptures tell us that when a sinner comes to Jesus in repentance that Heaven rejoices and celebrates, Did you know the angels rejoiced the day you gave your life to Jesus to follow Him?

But imagine the celebration that must have taken place the Day the Son returned home. The Day Jesus Ascended, this indeed would be more than a celebration, the whole of heaven must have come crying out in great jubilation with extravagant celebration because of the unbelievable triumph of Jesus conquering evil and returning back to His Heavenly Kingdom, in victory.

Remember how the angels sang the night Jesus was born into this world. when after rejoicing they announced the good news to unsuspecting shepherds who had no idea the world was about to change forever. They were simply out watching their flocks until suddenly the heavens opened and the angelic hosts sang to the glory of God. The Son of God became Incarnate within His own creation.

The angels sang at his birth, they wept at His crucifixion when the sky turned dark, but what rejoicing the choirs of heaven must have sounded like on that third day when Jesus rose triumphant.

On Ascension Day, the day of Jesus return to glory after his long absence of 30 or so years, what must the choirs of heaven sounded like as the Son returned, a conquering hero. Should we not be a little more excited about Ascension Day wanting to mark this great day as a special feast of celebration to rival that of Christmas?

So what actually happened on Ascension?

Mt of Olives

For forty days after the resurrection of Jesus He had met His followers and disciples a number of times. Firstly Jesus finds them locked in a room, hiding away in fear and utterly bereft, depressed and mourning His death.

Then Jesus meets them again when they had returned to work after the lockdown. If you remember Peter loved to fish so he went back to fishing. Although now he even failed at this. All night long he fished and absolutely caught nothing. Jesus prepared a BBQ breakfast for the hungry and tires fishermen out on the beach.

Jesus had walked to Emmaus with a couple of His followers, He had comforted Mary outside of the tomb and appeared to over 500 people at the same time. It has been a busy 40 days.

On the 40th Day Jesus led His disciples to Mount Olivet, near Jerusalem. He had made them a promise, although Jesus will soon be leaving them they would soon receive the gift He had been speaking of since the evening of the Last Supper, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus gives the disciples their final instructions in a Great Commission, to go into all world and make disciples of all nations and baptising them and teaching them to follow all that Jesus had taught them. However they were not to just run ahead, but first wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit to come.

Its not difficult to work out why Jesus had to tell his disciples to wait, they were so excited, they have just discovered there is life beyond the grave and they know how to gain eternal life, this news is too good to keep to yourself, they were desperate to share the Good News.

You may well ask what was wrong with the disciples running ahead and sharing what they knew? And that is a very good question. Think about it, if Peter had run ahead of the Holy Spirit, he would have built churches in his own image and likeness. This is a valuable lesson the church today needs to re learn, especially when we return from our 'Lockdown'. If all we do is return to what we used to do, then we have missed something, for as good as it may have been, all we are doing is building services the way we like them

My favourite hymns,

Organ music

Pews

Coffee and biscuits afterwards

And short, funny and entertaining sermons, nothing too heavy or long!

Sound familiar! Is this really what Jesus came to build? This is what the disciples would have built without the Holy Spirit.

We all have preferences and we will defend those things which we prefer, and maybe be less motivated to turn up to those things which we don't like. People can feel quite passionate about these things. The question we need to ask ourselves is this, 'Are we building the church of Jesus Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit or are we happy to return to the church that we have been brought up because thats the way we Methodists do things?

Remember Jesus will build His church and will soon return for His church, He will not simply return for a denomination but for the church that worships Him and holds Him at the centre of all they do.

Peter no doubt would have thought he was building a church for Jesus, I'm sure he would have preached his heart out, he may have persuaded a number of people to follow him and join St. Peters church. But this would not have been Jesus' church but Peter's. However on the day of Pentecost after Peter received the Holy Spirit he preached the first sermon recorded since Jesus ascension and consider what happened, 3000 people were added to the church that day.

Ascension

After Jesus had given His disciples their final instructions He blessed them and before their eyes He ascended into heaven. The account of Jesus' ascension is found in [Luke 24:50-51](#) and [Acts 1:9-11](#).

Literal bodily Ascension

A plain reading of the Scriptures provides no other explanation than Jesus literally ascending as described. There are so many unusual events surrounding Jesus, for example, His birth was miraculous, born to a virgin. He was a miracle worker and could heal the sick and raise the dead. Jesus died and the temple curtain was torn apart, Jesus was buried and on the Third Day, burst forth from the grave, conquering sin and death.

Jesus had a bodily resurrection, He could be seen, touched, even hugged He prepared food for His disciples eating with them. He still bore the wounds of the crucifixion but this body now was no ordinary body of ordinary flesh and blood, for the wounds were not in the process of healing, requiring medical attention, pain killers and bandages, etc. The scars are visible, eternal but not disabling! These scars are a sign to us, a witness to our Lord's saving grace, the debt we could not pay was now paid in full. The payment is for all time, eternal in order to redeem our souls and reconcile us back to the Father. Isaiah wrote about these amazing wounds some 500 years before saying, 'See I have engraved your names on the palm of my hands' (**Isaiah 49:16**). Don't look to the wooden beams to see how much Jesus loves us, look at his hands and feet, the scars that speak of sacrifice, so deep, so wide, so great, for your name is etched within it.

Did Jesus give up the flesh?

Many Christians seem to think the ascension means the undoing of the incarnation assuming Jesus gave up his humanity, flesh to ascended to heaven when He took up His place in His Kingdom. This is an enormous error. When Jesus became man He did not cease to become God, and when Jesus ascended He did not cease to be man.

Karl Barth once wrote, 'The Son of God our humanity to all eternity. It is a clothing which He does not put off. It is His temple which He does not leave. It is the form which He does not lose' The dust of the earth, now sits on the eternal throne of heaven! This is a remarkable concept, Jesus is still the God/man and that has enormous practical consequences for us for several reasons:

- 1) It signified the end of His earthly ministry. God the Father had lovingly sent His Son into the world, born at Bethlehem, and crucified at Golgotha. Now the Son returning to the Father. The period of human limitation was at an end.
- 2) It signified success in His earthly work. All that He had come to do, He had accomplished and triumphed victoriously, O grave where is your victory and death where is your sting!
- 3) It marked the return of His heavenly glory. Jesus' glory had been veiled during His sojourn on earth, with one brief exception at the Transfiguration ([Matthew 17:1-9](#)). Now He returns to the Kingdom He left behind to rescue fallen humanity for which He so loves.

Conquering hero

In the days of the Roman Empire if there were troubles at the boundaries of the empire, the Emperor would send his son, equipped with an army behind him to go and defend the boundary of the empire from the attacking enemies.

If he was victorious and managed to defeat the enemy of the empire, the son would return with a triumphant procession down the main street in Rome, and the crowds would turn up, lining the streets to welcome home the conquering hero the emperor's son.

The Conquering hero would lead the procession riding up front on a magnificent horse followed by his soldiers who helped to defeat the enemies of the empire and lead them into victory. The hero would lead the procession and be followed by his army.

Behind the army would be the prisoners in chains and behind them would be the slaves carrying all of the loot and bounty seized from the enemy during the battle he had won.

This was a big deal, it was the big procession. The empire was once again in safe hands, enemies vanquished, beaten, enslaved and crushed no longer a threat to the empire and its citizens were safe once again.

The emperor watching his returning son sitting high upon his throne, exalted, watching the procession and his conquering son returning from battle. The booty and spoil from the battle would be distributed to the crowds as they processed and gift would be given. Paul uses this image when he writes to the church in Ephesus, "When he ascended on high he took many captives and gave gifts to his people" (**Eph 4:8**).

This is a powerful image that Paul presents to us in Ephesians and we capture a glimpse of the glory of heaven as Jesus returned, conquering Sin and Death to set his people free from the enemy.

When the son reached the emperor he would bow and the emperor would say to his son, "son you have conquered and have upheld my rule, come up here and sit at my right hand". Occasionally the emperor would go further than this and say, "Because of your victory you may now take my place and I give you the throne of the empire and the emperor would abdicate and hand over the empire to the son".

That is exactly what happened when Jesus ascended into heaven. It is a great day of celebration because it is Jesus Coronation Day.

The beloved Son returning to the Kingdom He left, victorious and conquering hero and the throne of the Father has been given to Him and all authority on heaven and earth now belongs to Him who now sits upon the throne.

If we designate a Bank Holiday for VE day and for Coronations and have street parties to celebrate, should not Christians also celebrate Jesus glorious ascension along with the whole of heaven? For this is the day Jesus ascended back to heaven, to take up His rightful place of honour in glory where the angels sing and all heaven declares Jesus as King. He is now back as the emperor of the universe.

The Ascension demonstrates Jesus exaltation by the Father ([Ephesians 1:20-23](#)) and was received in honour and given a name above all names ([Philippians 2:9](#)) And that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.

Why is the Ascension important for today?

1. Promise of the Holy Spirit

Jesus said when He returns to His glory He would ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit as a gift to those who repent and believe and follow Him. Jesus promise was fulfilled on the

Day of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit has been with us for 2 millennia, dwelling in the temple of our hearts for all who truly repent and believe.

2. Jesus is our Great High Priest

We can have confidence in our prayers, even when we don't know what to pray for, as Jesus knows our frailties and our weaknesses and has such an immense love for us. He intercedes on our behalf. Its extraordinary we worship God who knows what its like to be human and to dwell in this world. To live in its joys, be tempted and tested, to bear grief and sorrow and to know pain and loss. Our beloved Jesus is our Great High Priest, interceding for us on our behalf.

3. Jesus is preparing a place

Jesus said about His return to Heaven, I will prepare a place for you and will come to take you with me, so that where i am there you may be also (John 14:2). Jesus is returning to His father's home, a heavenly home, a Kingdom and He will return for us to take us there also when our time comes.

4. Jesus is returning for His bride (the Church)

Jesus promises to return again. The angelic beings tell us how we are to expect Christ to return. When Jesus comes to set up the Kingdom, He will return just as He left-literally, bodily, and visibly in the clouds (Acts 1:11; Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7).

And He will set His feet on the Mt Olives as foretold by Zechariah

Christ is the Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18). The giver of spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:7-8), and will return for His bride, His church.

The Great Commission

The responsibility for the Gospel now rests upon His people who are to preach, teach and nurture new believers in the faith through public witness of repentance, baptism into the new life, and teaching them to obey everything that Jesus taught and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The commission has the original 4 Alls
All Authority, All Nations, All Things, Always

With Jesus we not only have to just celebrate birthdays and then end with a funeral. No we can celebrate Christmas (Incarnation), Easter (Resurrection), Ascension (glory and coronation, Pentecost (Holy Spirit coming) and our great eschatological hope is the end of history Christ is returning and will remake the heavens and the earth where no sin dwells, no evil can be found, and a place of no mores....

No more tears

No more sorrows

No more death

No more diseases, famines, earthquakes, floods, famines, pestilences

Why should we celebrate - Its a great day of triumph and in a world of darkness and evil it reminds us that the King of heaven returned to his gory in triumph and is returning for His people. **Amen**