



followers of Jesus seeking to glorify God

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June 1 Devotional (for Sunday June 7)

Grief and Hope Series Part 5

Practicing the Presence of God in the Present – Because of Christ’s Ascension

Last week I mentioned that Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and Ascension are all part of what Jesus accomplished, and what he continues to do. This week and next I want to look at the ascension more closely. I, like many others, have overlooked how important the ascension is. We highlight other aspects of Jesus life and work much more. Certainly the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection are more important than the ascension. Or are they?

Without the incarnation we don’t have the promised messiah coming as Emmanuel (God with us). Being fully God and fully human is essential to fulfilling scripture and to fully filling the nature of the messiah. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Is. 9:6) Indeed, Jesus’ incarnation is essential to his life and work. Unless he descends to us we have no way to ascend to him. Praise God he came!

Similarly the crucifixion is essential as Hebrews 9:22 ends, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” Though there is different ways of stating what Jesus accomplished on the cross there is no dispute among believers that it is essential to Jesus being, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”! (John 1:29, 36) Central to Jesus life and work is that he took the wages we earned (death) and thus became the way we can have true life. “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 6:23). Though there is an aspect of judgement and penalty here (penal atonement) we as Anabaptists see it more of a substitutionary atonement. Christ took on himself, not as a “penalty” but rather absorbing the cost of our sin; it might also be described as a debt we couldn’t pay (ie. the merciful master and ungrateful servant parable, Mat. 18:21-35). It wasn’t so much a penalty, but rather a cost or price that had to be paid—the master didn’t get penalized in a legal sense, or in a violent sense, but rather chose to absorb the cost of the embezzler/ungrateful servant. Jesus chose to absorb the cost of sin through his death on the cross. Praise God he was crucified!

Without the resurrection we worship and serve a dead saviour. Rather, through his resurrection Jesus conquered sin and death. 1 Corinthians 15 says,

“⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers and sisters: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.



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⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Praise God he arose!

Which of these; incarnation (Christmas), crucifixion (Good Friday), resurrection (Easter) do you identify with most? Which is usually most impacting in your spiritual journey?

How can the ascension rank with these? Does it? Is the ascension really as essential to Jesus life and work as Christmas, Good Friday and Easter?

Jesus says this in John 16, ““I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ 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.”

Jesus has already said to his disciples earlier in John 14 that¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

And earlier still in John 3 Jesus declared this about himself and about his followers, “¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” John 3

Jesus says that unless he goes away the Helper will not come. It is to the disciple’s advantage that he goes so the Helper will come. The Helper is how he dwells with his followers and we are adopted as children of God. This is all tied to his ascending to heaven since he is the only one who descended from heaven. As R. C. Sproule writes, “Jesus ascended not so much to a place but to an office”. Or rather to



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two positions, that of Cosmic King and of High Priest. We'll look more at the implications of this next week.

For now do we understand that it was essential for Jesus to ascend? He has work to do "at the right hand of the Father" as King of Kings and Great High Priest. And the Helper (Holy Spirit) has work to do in his followers. Both are essential in God's plan.

Look where the ascension is recorded in the Gospel of Luke in chapter 24 with Jesus (post resurrection) with his disciples;

"50 And 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."

Remember how the disciples were filled with sorrow when Jesus told them earlier that he was going to return to him who sent him? (John 16) Sorrow is a natural response to someone's departure. When a ship goes to sea there are many more tears than smiles. And later in John 16 he says their sorrow will turn to joy. He is speaking in this latter passage about Good Friday (sorrow and lament) and Easter Sunday (joy). They have a similar sorrow when he speaks of his departure (ascension) but when his ascension takes place here in Luke 24 their response is not sorrow. Rather, "they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy". Why not sorrow like on Good Friday? Not only was there not sorrow but there is great joy! Have they not gained a perspective and greater understanding of the kingdom of heaven? Is it not because of their growing belief in Jesus and understanding of his promises? Were they so convinced that it was to their advantage that he go that it resulted in great joy? Did they comprehend that Jesus had a great work to do as both King and Priest. Possibly. But it seems certain that they understood that Jesus needed to go so the Helper could come.

Without Jesus ascension there is no coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' ascension is essential to Pentecost. Jesus was fully God and fully man and thus limited to one place at a time. The Holy Spirit indwells and fills every believer constantly. Jesus came as Emmanuel, God with us. The Holy Spirit is God in us. This has profound implications. Praise God that Jesus ascended!

Does what Jesus accomplished in his ascension cause you to worship him and live with great joy?

What difference does it make in your daily life that the Holy Spirit abides in you?