***HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN***

**The Apostles’ Creed – Week 7**

**By Andy Manning**

1. **INTRODUCTION**
   1. Right down the road from my house there is a school called Ascension Episcopal School. Why “Ascension”? What does that word mean? Did you know that the ascension is a major event in the Bible and in the life of Christ? If you don’t know what the ascension is about, or why it is important, you’re not alone.
   2. Author **Kevin DeYoung** calls the ascension “the forgotten ending,” because it isn’t discussed very often. He wrote, “Is there any part of Christ’s life that we talk about less than His ascension (Kevin DeYoung, *The Good News We Almost Forgot*, 95)?
   3. Theologian **Al Mohler** adds, “If the Apostles’ Creed omitted Jesus’ ascension into heaven and his place at the right hand of the Father, would you have noticed (Al Mohler, *The Apostles’ Creed*, 103)?”
   4. The implication is probably not. Very few sermons cover the ascension. I must admit that in the twenty years that I have been preaching at Church Acadiana, I think I only preached on the ascension of Christ once.
   5. And yet it must be an important doctrine because it is included in all three of the ecumenical creeds (The Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian). The creeds are short summaries of Christian doctrine. They include only the most essential teachings of the faith. And yet they all cover the ascension of Christ.
   6. This is one of the benefits of studying the Apostles’ Creed. Right now we are studying the Apostles’ Creed, which is an ancient summary of Christian doctrine affirmed by Christians of every denomination. Not only does the Creed help us to stay doctrinally correct, but it helps us to stay doctrinally balanced or symmetrical. Every once in a while I will see a guy at the gym who is asymmetrical. He looks like a potato with tooth pics for legs because he only works out his upper body but neglects his legs. It is possible for Christians to become doctrinally asymmetrical if they focus too much some doctrines but neglect the others. Some Christians might focus on Jesus but neglect the Father and the Spirit. Some might focus on Christ’s death and neglect the resurrection or focus on the resurrection and neglect the ascension, or focus on the second coming but neglect the cross. The Creed helps us to stay doctrinally balanced.
   7. So let’s begin by reciting the Creed together, and then we will learn about the ascension: (This version of the Apostles’ Creed comes from the website of the Episcopal Church.) “I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth; I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”
   8. We are still studying the middle part of the Creed that deals with Jesus. It says that after He died and rose again, “He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.” Let’s study the ascension by asking two questions: What happened, and what is Jesus doing today?
2. **WHAT HAPPENED?**
   1. Let’s begin with what happened. How does the Bible describe the ascension?
   2. Jesus predicted His ascension.
   3. **John 20:17** “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus told her, “since I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”
   4. This occurred on Easter morning. Mary Magdalene went to the tomb where Jesus was buried, and she encountered the resurrected Christ. Jesus told her that He was going to ascend to His Father. To ascend means “to go up.” Jesus predicted His ascension on multiple occasions, but His followers didn’t understand.
   5. The ascension itself is described in Mark, Luke, and Acts, but the best description is found in the book of Acts.
   6. **Acts 1:3, 9-11** 3 After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 9 After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. 11 They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven.”
   7. After the resurrection Jesus spent forty days with His disciples before His ascension. So there are forty days between the resurrection and the ascension. This is why every year Christians around the world celebrate Ascension Day, which is forty days after Easter, or the sixth Thursday after Easter. This year it was Thursday, May 29.
   8. Then Jesus led His disciples to Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem (Lk 24:50-51). As they were watching, He was taken up, and a cloud took him out of their sign. The disciples are, no doubt, wondering what just happened, so two angels suddenly appeared standing next to them and said, “Jesus has been taken from you into heaven.”
   9. Here are some definitions of the ascension:
      1. **Millard Erickson** defines the ascension as Christ “leaving the conditions of earth and reassuming his place with the Father.” (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 796)
      2. **Alexander Ross** “That act of the God-man by which he brought to an end his post-resurrection appearances to his disciples, was finally parted from them physically, and passed into the other world, to remain there until his second advent.” (*Baker Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*)
   10. This is affirmed all over the New Testament.
   11. **Ephesians 4:10** The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things.
   12. **1 Timothy 3:16** And most certainly, the mystery of godliness is great: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.
   13. As an event, the ascension simply refers to Christ being taken up into heaven after His resurrection.
   14. That leads to a question: What is Jesus doing today? The Bible says several things about this.
3. **WHAT IS JESUS DOING TODAY?** 
   1. **He is bodily in heaven.**
      1. First, let’s deal with where Jesus is today – His current location. The ascension tells us that Jesus is bodily in heaven.
      2. **Luke 24:50-51** 50 Then he led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. 51 And while he was blessing them, he left them and was carried up into heaven.
      3. Jesus is eternally God. He was with God in the beginning (Jn 1:1-2). When He came to earth, He took on human flesh. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14).” He was fully God and fully man. When He died and rose from the grave, God gave Him a new resurrected body. When He ascended, He didn’t leave His body here on earth and return to His pre-incarnate form, He ascended to heaven as the God-man. Therefore, today Jesus is physically in heaven, fully God, and fully man.
      4. When you go to heaven, you will be able to see what Jesus looks like, and when He returns, He will give you a new resurrected body like His, and you will be physically with Jesus for all eternity (1 Jn 3:2). You will be able to touch Him, to hold His hand, to give Him a hug.
   2. **He is sitting at the right hand of God.**
      1. When Jesus ascended into heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God. This is affirmed all throughout the New Testament.
      2. **Mark 16:19** So the Lord Jesus, after speaking to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.
      3. This is called the session of Christ, or His session at God’s right hand, from the Latin word *sessio*, to sit.
      4. What does it mean that Christ is sitting at God’s right hand?
      5. First, the session of Christ is a sign of God’s acceptance of His sacrifice.
         1. The right hand of God is the place of utmost honor and exaltation.
         2. **Philippians 2:9** For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name
         3. There’s a story in the life of Solomon that illustrates this. He was the king of Israel. While he was sitting on the throne his mother Bathsheba approached him to make a request. So Solomon stood up to greet her, bowed to her, sat down on his throne, and had a throne placed at his right hand for Bathsheba (1 Ki 2:19). It was a sign of utmost honor and exaltation. The seat at God’s right hand was given to Jesus, and Jesus alone. Hebrews 12:13 says that not even the angels are allowed to sit at God’s right hand. What does it mean that God gave Jesus the ultimate seat of honor? It means that God accepted His sacrifice for our sins.
         4. **Albert Mohler** drove this point home in his book on the Creed. “The ascension manifests the seal of God’s approval for all that Christ has done (Al Mohler, *The Apostles’ Creed*, 111).”
         5. Christ died to pay for our sins. He died to satisfy the wrath of God so that we can be forgiven and reconciled to God. How do we know that God accepted His sacrifice? Both the resurrection and the ascension. First, God raised Him from the dead. The Scriptures repeatedly point out not that Christ rose from the dead, but that God raised Him (Acts 2:24). This is a sign of God’s approval. And then the Bible says not that Christ merely ascended, but that God took Him up into heaven (Mk 16:19; Lk 24:51; Acts 1:9-11), and then had Him sit at His right hand, the place of highest honor. This showed that God was pleased with Christ and fully accepted His blood as payment for our sins.
      6. Second, the session of Christ means that Christ is ruling all things.
         1. **R.C. Sproul** “The right hand of God is the seat of ultimate authority. This position is occupied by the One God has anointed King (R.C. Sproul, *What We Believe*, 151).”
         2. Al Mohler says that the ascension served as a cosmic coronation (Mohler, The Apostles’ Creed, 107).
         3. **Millard Erickson** “… the right hand is the place of distinction and power… It is a symbol of authority and active rule (Christian Theology, 797).”
         4. The Scriptures teach this very clearly.
         5. **Ephesians 1:20-22** 20 He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens—21 far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he subjected everything under his feet, and appointed him as head over everything for the church.
         6. Christ is now king of the universe, reigning from His throne in heaven at the right hand of God.
         7. This doesn’t mean that everyone obeys Him. It means that everyone should obey Him and will be held accountable by Him in the end.
         8. This doesn’t mean that everything that happens pleases Him, but it does mean that He has all power and is working everything together for His glory and your good.
   3. **He is preparing a place for us in heaven.**
      1. A third thing that Jesus is doing for us right now is He is preparing a place for us.
      2. Don’t let the session of Christ (Christ’s sitting at God’s right hand) mislead you into thinking that Christ is always sitting down, doing nothing. Stephen saw Jesus in heaven standing (Acts 7:56). The book of Revelation shows Jesus walking among the seven churches (Rev 2:1). Jesus is working, and one of the things that He is doing is preparing a place for us in heaven.
      3. **John 14:2-3** 2 In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? 3 If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.
      4. Christ is in heaven preparing a room for you.
      5. Who specifically is He preparing a room for? All those who are heaven-bound. Who is heaven-bound? Believers in Jesus Christ (Jn 3:16). The moment you put your faith in Jesus Christ, He begins His work of preparing a room for you.
   4. **He is pouring out the Holy Spirit on believers.**
      1. A fourth thing that Christ is doing right now is pouring out the Holy Spirit on believers.
      2. **John 16:7** Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don’t go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you.
      3. Jesus said three things here:
         1. I am going away.
         2. It is for your benefit. In other words, it will better for that Christ is in heaven than if He was on earth. Why?
         3. When I go away, I will send the Counselor to you. Who is the Counselor? The Holy Spirit.
            1. **John 14:26** But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.
            2. The Greek word for Counselor is Paraclete. It can be translated in a number of ways – Counselor, Comforter, Encourager, Advocate, etc. but Jesus tells us that it refers to the Holy Spirit, whom He would send after His ascension.
      4. Before Christ’s ascension, the Holy Spirit existed and was at work, but He did not indwell all believers.
      5. **R.C. Sproul** “The Spirit empowered OT leaders for limited tasks… Yet the anointing of the Spirit seems to be limited to few individuals, who are gifted for peculiar ministries of leadership (*What We Believe*, 56).”
      6. For example, the Holy Spirit empowered Moses for leadership. But Moses prayed that God would put His Spirit on all of God’s people (Num 11:29). Later, the prophet Joel prophesied that there would come a day when that would happen (Joel 2:28-29). Fast forward to the New Testament. John the Baptist said that the coming Messiah would Baptist people with the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11). Then in John 16, at the Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples that He would send the Spirit, the Paraclete, after He ascends to heaven. Finally, in Acts 2, on the Day of Pentecost, ten days after the ascension, all of Christ’s followers were baptized with the Holy Spirit.
      7. **Acts 2:33** Therefore, since he has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out what you both see and hear.
      8. Why is that a good thing? Remember Jesus said that it would benefit them if He ascended back to heaven, because then He could send the Spirit. In some mysterious way, having the Spirit would be better than having Christ physically present with them. How is that possible?
      9. The Day of Pentecost ushered in the age of the Spirit. From that day on, the moment someone becomes a Christian, Christ Baptizes them with the Spirit, or places the Spirit inside of them to live forever. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The moment you become a Christian, Christ comes to live inside you, and is with you always (Rm 8:9; Gal 2:20; Col 1:27). Before the ascension and Pentecost, you could only be with Jesus if you were in the same location as Him. But now, in the Spirit, Jesus is with you wherever you go, all the time. You have constant access to Him.
      10. The Holy Spirit does many things for the believer, but one of His main tasks is to empower you to serve Him. Immediately before the ascension Christ’s last words said this.
      11. **Acts 1:8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
      12. Because you have the Holy Spirit, you now have power to be an effective witness and servant of Jesus Christ. This applies to every man, woman, boy or girl in the family of God.
   5. **He is serving as our great high priest.**
      1. The book of Hebrews repeatedly calls Jesus our great high priest. Hebrews 4:14 says Jesus is our “great high priest who has passed through the heavens.” Hebrews 8:1 says that Jesus is our “high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”
      2. Today Jesus is serving as our great high priest. What does that mean?
      3. F.F. Bruce (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*) says that Christ’s high-priestly function is four-fold.
         1. **He made atonement for your sins.** 
            1. **Hebrews 2:17** Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people.
            2. In the Old Testament the Jewish high priest would enter the Most Holy Place in the temple once a year on Yom Kippur with the blood of a male goat to atone for the sins of the people. But this was only a shadow of Christ’s work. When Christ died, He entered the presence of God in heaven and offered His blood to God as payment for your sins (see Heb 9:11-14).
            3. What does this mean? By satisfying the wrath of God with His blood, He removed the barrier between you and God, so that now, in the name of Jesus, you have direct access to God in prayer as His children (Heb 10:19).
            4. This is why you are to pray in the name of Jesus. You are acknowledging that the reason, and the only reason you have access to God in prayer, and access to God’s mercy and grace, is because of the blood of Jesus.
         2. **He strengthens you in temptation.**
            1. **Hebrews 2:18** For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.
            2. Tony Evans had some interesting insights in a sermon called “The Intercession of Jesus.” He pointed out that Jesus is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:10). Who is Melchizedek? His story is a part of Abraham’s story. Abraham had just finished fighting a war when he encountered Melchizedek, a priest of God, and Melchizedek gave Abraham bread and wine to restore him after battle, and strengthen him for the battle ahead (Gen 14:7-19). In the same way, Jesus your great priest restores you after you have battled with Satan, and He strengthens you for future battles with Satan.
            3. When you pray as Jesus taught, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” it is Jesus who comes to your aid through the power of the Holy Spirit.
         3. **He supplies mercy and grace to help you in time of need.**
            1. **Hebrews 4:15-16** 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.
            2. As your great high priest, Jesus is ready to come to your aid to help in all of life’s difficulties.
            3. The New Testament repeatedly shows that Christ is now at the right hand of God. All but one of them describes Christ as sitting at God’s right hand. But one of them shows Christ standing. It is the picture given by Stephen. Stephen was the first Christian martyr. As they were about to kill him, he looked up to heaven and saw Christ standing.
            4. **Acts 7:55-56** 55 Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 He said, “Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”
            5. **William Barclay** writes, “Certain commentators have seen a special meaning in that picture of the standing Christ. They have thought that the picture may be that of the Christ at God’s right hand rising to come to the help and assistance and comfort of His own, when they are suffering for his name’s sake. Certainly it must be true that we cannot think of the Christ of glory as sitting detached and insulated at the right hand of God. He is still mighty and powerful to help, and in his exalted royalty he has not forgotten His own (Barclay, *The Apostles’ Creed*, 146).”
            6. As your great high priest, Jesus stands ready to come to your aid. Do you need comfort, courage, encouragement? Jesus is standing by. Do you need wisdom and guidance? Jesus is standing by. Do you need healing, provision, protection? Jesus is standing by, ready to give you aid.
         4. **He intercedes for you.** 
            1. **Hebrews 7:25** Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them.
            2. To intercede means to pray for someone. As your high priest, Jesus is praying for you. Since He is at God’s right hand and knows God’s will perfectly, His prayers are always answered.
            3. What is Jesus praying? There are many different theories.
            4. First, on the basis of 2 John 2:1 and Romans 8:34, some believe that Christ is in heaven defending our salvation before God. The Bible says that Satan is constantly accusing the believers before God (Rev 12:10), mocking and insulting us, but Christ is there to defend us. **Kevin DeYoung** wrote, “Our Lord Jesus is in heaven pleading our case, so that whenever Satan accuses us in our conscience or dares to lay a charge against us before the Father, Jesus Christ, God’s own Son and our flawless advocate, stands ready to defend us and plead His own blood for our sakes (DeYoung, The Good News We Almost Forgot, 96).” [**John Starke**](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/jesus-really-does-pray-for-us/) agrees, writing that Christ “calls attention to his perfect righteousness in defense of sinning saints.”
            5. Second, some, like John Piper and D.A. Carson, interpret Hebrews 7:25 to mean that the intercession of Christ plays a significant role in our salvation. [**Piper**](https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/jesus-prays-for-us) says that “he would not be able to save us forever if he did not go on interceding for us forever… This means we should not talk about our salvation in static terms the way we often do – as if… Christ did something once when He died and rose again, and that’s all there is to it. That’s not all there is to it. This very day I am being saved by the eternal intercession of Jesus in heaven. Jesus is praying for us and that is essential to our salvation.” [**D.A. Carson**](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/jesus-ever-lives-above-you-intercede/) agrees, saying that “Jesus offers ongoing prayers for his people, to the end that God will continue to forgive them, on the ground that his own sacrificial death has completely satisfied God’s demands.”
            6. Third, some, like F.F. Bruce and David Jeremiah believe Jesus is eternally praying John 17. John 17 is called the high priestly prayer. Before Christ died, He prayed for you – for all His followers. He prayed for your safety (17:11); protection from Satan – to overcome temptation so that he will not be able to ruin your usefulness to God (17:15); your joy (17:13); your spiritual growth (17:17); your fruitfulness in ministry (17:18); your unity with each other in the church (20-21); and your eternal security (17:24).
            7. Fourth, theologian [Robert Letham](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/intercessory-work-christ/), has a different view. He pointed to the ascension described in Luke 24:50. Right before Jesus ascended, He lifted up His hands and blessed His disciples. Letham believes this was the priestly benediction in Numbers 6:24.
            8. **Numbers 6:24** “May the LORD bless you and protect you; may the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; may the LORD look with favor on you and give you peace.”
            9. Just as the Jewish priests would pray this over the Israelites, Letham says that Jesus is eternally praying this prayer over you and me.
4. **CONCLUSION**
   1. The Creed is a reminder that Jesus died and rose again, but there’s more. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God. But He isn’t inactive and uninvolved. He is working, and He is active, and He is involved in your life.