

“Christ’s ascension to heaven”

Sunday before Ascension Day – May 9, 2021

Tom Mount – Holy Trinity Chico

Scripture reading - Acts 1:3-11

Introduction

- Ascension Day is celebrated this Thursday, May 13. Today we are going to look at the topic of our Lord’s ascension to heaven and what happened afterward.
- But first, we need to go back in time to his death on Passover or Good Friday (14 Nisan or April 7, AD 30). Jesus celebrated the Passover meal on Thursday night; he instituted the New Covenant; went to the Garden of Gethsemane. He was arrested, tried and tortured from before sunrise to mid-morning when he was crucified from 9am-3pm. After he died, his body was put in the tomb while his spirit descended to the place of the dead, *sheol*. There he remained Friday afternoon, Saturday and part of Sunday (3 days). Then His spirit rejoined his body, his body was transformed into a glorious body, and that body was resurrected on Easter Sunday, before sunrise.
- Then for the next 40 days, he appeared to his disciples on earth before going back to heaven. Why not go back to the Father immediately?
 1. First, he needed to “wean” them off his physical presence.
 2. Second, he needed to teach his disciples “about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).
 3. Third, he needed to allow for the proper length of time to pass to coordinate his death on *Pesach*, Passover, with the sending of the Spirit on *Shavout*, the Jewish feast of Weeks or Pentecost (50 days).

- After these 40 days, Jesus ascended to the Father, taking with him all the righteous dead who previously had been kept in *sheol*.

- So, what did Jesus do then? What happened during that week between Ascension Day and Pentecost? We will draw largely from the NT book of Hebrews. And we're going to see that two very important things happened.

1. Jesus was invested as high priest

- Investiture is the public ceremony recognizing a person who has been appointed to a high office. In this case, Jesus was being formally recognized as high priest of all His people under the terms of the New Covenant.

- Under the covenant God made with Israel, the high priest was invested in a public ceremony. He would be ritually washed with water, anointed with oil (representing the Holy Spirit), then the blood of a sacrifice was applied to his right ear, right thumb, and right big toe. When Jesus is made high priest of the new covenant, he is washed in the waters of baptism; anointed with the Holy Spirit himself; then 3 ½ years later, his own blood anoints his ear, thumb and toe.

- Under the Mosaic covenant, the high priest would make atonement each year on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. He did it by sacrificing a bull for his own unintentional sins and a goat for the sins of the people and he would sprinkle the blood on the furniture in the tabernacle. This act of sacrifice and sprinkling of blood was like hitting the reset button to make holy once again the tabernacle, altar, utensils, the people, the priests, and everything within the temple precincts.

- In the NT book of Hebrews, the author makes it clear that God's covenant with Israel was a shadow, a faint reflection of a far deeper reality: what transpires in heaven. (cf. Ex 26:30).

- The letter to the Hebrews explains that God has replaced the old covenant with the new, the old high priest with Jesus, and the OT tabernacle/temple with the true heavenly temple: the place where God dwells in heaven with his vast entourage of angels and other spiritual beings.

- And it was to this heavenly temple that Jesus went after his ascension (Heb 8:1-2; Heb 9:24).
- So, after his ascension, Christ presented himself before the Father as having offered the final sacrifice for sins; his wounds are in plain view, and Jesus is now publicly acknowledged to be high priest before all the millions of worshipping spiritual beings in heaven and all the saints who have ever lived.
- And, as the Father recognizes the efficacy of Jesus' atoning work to perfect us forever, he invites him to sit beside him (Heb 10:12-14).
- In Jesus' high priestly duties, the Father made a way for us to be restored to a face-to-face friendship and fellowship with Him. This is the significance of the curtain being torn in the temple when Jesus died. This gave us direct access to God.
- And so now, as high priest, Jesus continually represents us to the Father as the New Humanity, helping us, being available to us, interceding for us as our Advocate (Heb 7:25; 1 Jn 2:1). Jesus is not pleading with a reluctant Father! The Father loves us every bit as much as Son (Jn 16:27). He and the Father together collaborate on how to best protect and bless their people.

2. Jesus was coronated as king of kings

- When did Jesus become king of all? Complex question. The divine Logos, second person of Holy Trinity, is and always has been king. He created all things; Paul says: "He is before all things and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:17). So, as God, Jesus has always been king over all creation.
- But as a man, Jesus, *Yehoshua ben Joseph*, became king through a series of steps. He was acknowledged king by the Magi at his birth. He was anointed king by the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Mt 3:13-17). This made him "Christ" (*christos* – "anointed one"; Heb. *mashiach*). After his ascension, he was enthroned as king in heaven. And after his return to earth, he will be enthroned king on earth.

- But king of what? King of the Kingdom of God/Heaven: i.e, everywhere in which his will/authority/love are exercised on earth.
- In the Gospels, he is depicted most often as king of the Jews, because Jesus was sent only to the “lost sheep of Israel” (Mt 15:24), and by the end of his ministry the boundaries of the Kingdom of God are co-extensive with the boundaries of national Israel. Thus, the superscription on the cross over his head read “king of the Jews” (Mk 15:26).
- But Christ’s kingship would not to be limited to the borders of Israel. When giving the Great Commission, he clarified that “all authority in heaven and earth” was given to him (Mt 28:18-20).
- And so, when Christ ascended to heaven, he was coronated King over all.

Phil 2: 9-11

**⁹“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.”**

- Why was it essential that Jesus become king as a human? (cf. Gen 1:26; Psalm 9:4-6) When Adam and Eve chose to follow lies of Satan rather than obey Yahweh. They unwittingly abdicated their authority over the earth to Satan and his cohort of evil *elohim* (Eph 2:1; 1 Jn 5:19).
- So Jesus came as the new human prototype: the new Adam to head a new humanity. He would expose and defeat Satan as an imposter ruler and restore human authority to rule over the earth. Daniel saw this play out in a vision in Dan 7:13-14: ¹³“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

- This is why Jesus' favorite title was not "Lord" or "Son of God" or "God" but "Son of Man." As a man, Jesus is enthroned in the highest place in heaven. And according to Eph 2:6, we have been raised up and enthroned with him, "far above" all the angelic powers. Because we are joined to Christ, we can exercise his authority over the powers of darkness (cf. Eph 1:20-21).

Take away

- There is a human being reigning right now on the throne of the universe! He is our elder brother, Jesus. Heb 2:11: "Jesus is not afraid to call them his brothers and sisters." He rules with wisdom and power and unexcelled authority. And he is coming again to earth at exactly the right time to, that we might live and reign with him on a restored earth forever.

- It is this loving elder brother that is also our great high priest, constantly thinking about us, constantly talking about us to the Father. For this reason, Heb 4:15-16:

¹⁵ "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."