



Passion Week: March 28, 2024

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The Ascension

Basic Story and Ideas

- The ascension is usually understood to include two key concepts: Jesus' ascent from the earth and His sitting at the right hand of the Father.
- There are two narratives about the ascension, both from the pen of Luke: Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-11.
- In order to understand the ascension, it's important to understand the backdrop of Daniel 7:13-14, where the Son of Man comes on the clouds to establish his eternal kingdom.
- Some have used the relatively small space given to the ascension in the New Testament as a demonstration that it didn't matter much or doesn't hold much importance for the Christian life. Although the ascension is only narrated in Luke's writings, Patrick Schreiner notes that its verbiage is all over the New Testament: "to go up" John 3, 6, 20; Acts 2; Eph 4; "to go away" Luke 24; John 7, 8, 13, 14, 16; "to go into" Hebrews 6, 9; "to go through" Hebrews 4; "to go" John 14, 16; 1 Peter 3; "to be taken up" Luke 24; Acts 1; 1 Tim 3; "to sit" Eph 1; Heb 1, 8, 10; "to be exalted" Heb 7.
- A clear understanding of the ascension of Jesus demonstrates both his activity and presence with His people today, while also recognizing His physical absence and longing for the day of His physical presence.

Question 1: Why did Jesus Ascend to the Father?

- John 16:7 – To send the Spirit
- Rev 4:12 – To receive His rightful honor, glory, and power
- John 14:3 – To prepare a place for His people
- Hebrews 4:14-16 – To serve as our High Priest in mediation and intercession (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25)
- Throughout Acts – To act as the Head of the Church in Heaven: "What Acts underlines for us is the ongoing involvement of Christ in the mission of the gospel as it progresses to the ends of the earth." -Peter Orr.

Question 2: Where did Jesus Go When He Ascended?

- 1 Peter 3:22: Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father. This is a spiritual reality, since God the Father is Spirit and doesn't have hands.
- Heaven isn't far away in Scripture, but could be thought of in terms closer to a hidden dimension to reality.
 - a. 1 Cor 1:7: "As you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ." Revealing – apokalupto, which means unveiling, revealing what is currently hidden.
 - b. Patrick Schreiner: "The ascent tore a fabric in the universe, allowing sight into the spiritual reality."

Question 3: What Is Jesus Doing in Heaven?

- Col 1:17 – Holding all of creation together
- Eph 1:22 – Ruling over all creation
- Eph 1:23 – Filling all of creation
- Col 1:18 – Leading the Church
- Eph 4:8-16 – Equipping the Church
- Romans 8:34 – Interceding for the Church

Question 4: So ... Is Jesus Present or Absent?

- There is a tension in the Gospels between Jesus telling His disciples that He's going away and telling them that He will be with them always. It is important that we believe both sides of this are true, even as there is a certain amount of mystery in understanding them.
- Concerning His presence, Jesus promised to be with His people: "And lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age." -Matthew 28:20; He is also with His people in the authority given to the Church: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." -Matthew 18:20
- Jesus is currently present with us in several ways:
 - a. Eph 1:23 – Through His omnipotence (Jesus' divine nature transcends His physical body)
 - b. John 14:26 – Through the Spirit's mediation of His presence and will
 - c. 1 Cor 12:12 – Through the Church as a picture of His body
- Concerning His absence, Jesus is currently absent from His people:
 - a. John 14:3 – Jesus told His followers that He was going away from them.
 - b. Revelation 6 – There is a coming and going from the presence of Jesus. Jesus didn't shed His body when He ascended to the Father; He is physically in the presence of the Father.
- We make a mistake if we believe that the Christian life is meant to fill all our current longing. In fact, becoming a Christian should also create a longing within us to be with Jesus because we deeply feel His physical absence.
 - a. Romans 8 – All creation groans for the return of Jesus, revealing of the children of Jesus, and the transformation of the world.
 - b. Phil 1:23 – Paul desires to "depart" and be with Christ, signifying his longing to be with Jesus face to face in His physical presence.

Conclusion

- The ascension is important because Jesus is now in His rightful place of exaltation
- The ascension is important because Jesus sent the Spirit to His people
- The ascension is important because it showed Jesus "unveiled" in His glory
- The ascension is important because it fulfills Old Testament prophecy
- The ascension is important because it helps us understand Jesus as our High Priest
- The ascension is important because it shows Jesus isn't limited by creational realities