

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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He Ascended Into Heaven

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The ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ is an historical event of no less enormity than His resurrection.

Like His resurrection, His ascension was an event set before the eyes of the apostles. Jesus made no clandestine departure from this world. He did not reach His fortieth day of new life (Acts 1:3) and

then slip away from a crowded room never to appear again. Such a departure would leave men in speculation, searching for ages, wondering if Jesus, like Lazarus, had merely returned to the grave.

On the contrary, Jesus publicly ascended. He gathered His disciples and was lifted up bodily into a cloud as they looked on (Acts 1:9). Angels were in attendance (Acts 1:10-11), instructing and encouraging, just as they were over a month earlier outside the empty tomb.

What this tells us is that the ascension itself is an event of revelation about who Christ is and what He has done and is doing for us. It was not merely the home-stretch or final stage of the resurrection. The church asserts as much in the Apostle's Creed, marking out the ascension as a distinct article of faith.

Of the nine consecutive past tense verbs with which the creed narrates the ministry of Christ, the ascension is the last, just before the first present and future tense verbs are used: "...He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead."

Positioned in the creed as it is, we see the ascension is both an end and a beginning. It reveals how Christ closed His earthly ministry in the flesh and how He inaugurated his heavenly ministry in the flesh.

Jesus wants us to see, through the apostolic witness, that He has taken to heaven what once only belonged to the earth, a human nature. He has taken it into the place it has never gone before, the dwelling place of God.

Why does Jesus want us to see His ascension? Because it reveals some of the choicest benefits that we children of flesh and blood have in being united to Christ.

Question 49 of the Heidelberg Catechism asks: **"How does Christ's ascension into heaven benefit us?"**

The catechism provides three concise answers.

"First, He is our Advocate in heaven before His Father."

The ascension testifies to our souls that the body which sanctified us (Hebrews 10:10) is now the body which intercedes for us – Jesus Christ. The import of this is revealed in Romans 8:34. "Who

is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

Jesus has brought the only sufficient offering for our sins into the holy place, before the Father – His own body. With great sympathy the one who suffered in the body and sustained all righteousness in it now pleads His wounds for His brethren who are also in the body. Our heavenly Advocate is like us in every respect, save sin. Earthly pilgrims cannot imagine a more sympathetic representative.

The catechism continues: **“Second, we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, our Head, will also take us, His members, up to Himself.”**

The ascension of Christ reveals the destiny of all believers. Wherever He has taken our human nature, He intends to take us. In Christ and with Christ we shall reach the dwelling place of God, entering the life of God in unbroken and undefiled communion. Jesus said, “I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3).

Christ’s ascension pledges that our humanity is not to be barred from the life of God. He shall transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body so that we can dwell where He does now. As Augustine so beautifully said: “Do you wish to ascend also? Then be a member of Him who only has ascended. For He the Head, with all the members, is but One Man.” (Sermons 41.7).

Heidelberg 49 finishes with this: **“Third, He sends us His Spirit as a counter-pledge, by whose power we seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, and not the things that are on earth.”**

The ascension of Christ secures for the church the ministry of the Spirit. As universal king, risen and enthroned, Christ sends His Spirit to empower believers of every nation and ethnicity, setting their hope above and not below.

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At Jesus’ ascension the Spirit was given to the Son by the Father. The Son then poured out the Spirit on the church (Acts 2:33) as a counter-pledge, meaning that the Spirit ministers here below to fix our hearts

on the pledge we have above, Jesus Christ, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

So the Spirit is a “guarantee” that we too shall ascend to Christ. The Spirit clears our eye, enlarges our heart and sets our mind on the dwelling place of God. He compels us to look and see our own flesh there in Christ. Seeing Him we see our true family, our true society, our true place. Our affections for what is earthly are chastened and our affections for the heavenly are invigorated.

There are many wonderful truths that radiate brilliantly from the doctrine of our Lord’s ascension. Here we have just begun, but we have not missed the glowing center: through His ascension your life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1-3).



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