

I. Intro/Review

- A. Understanding and participating in the unique and significant days that the scriptures reveal is deeply ingrained in our faith. We believe they are very important and revelatory for all believers. We place a far greater weight upon the heart behind these holidays and feasts rather than the methodology of their celebratory structure. (Is. 1:10-13; 1 Cor. 5:6-8; Mk. 2:27)
- B. The scriptures stress the importance of keeping certain days and seasons set apart for three main reasons.
 - 1. To reveal Jesus - This leads to greater love and personal nearness.
 - 2. To remember Jesus - We constantly forget who He is and His love for us.
 - 3. To realign with Jesus - We set apart times and days for introspection.
- C. Times and Seasons Covered To Date - So far this year we have covered and participated to one degree or another in the following significant holidays or biblical events.
 - 1. Ash Wednesday
 - 2. Purim
 - 3. Passover/Palm Sunday
 - 4. Unleavened Bread
 - 5. Maundy Thursday/Passover
 - 6. First Fruits/Resurrection Sunday/Pentecost

II. Ascension Sunday

- A. The ascension of Jesus Christ (also called the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, Ascension Day, or Ascension Thursday) commemorates the physical bodily ascension of Jesus into heaven. It is one of the ecumenical (shared by multiple denominations) traditional holidays of Christian churches, ranking with the holidays of Resurrection Sunday and Pentecost Sunday.
- B. Traditional Celebration - Multiple writings from early church fathers such as St. Augustine and John Chrysostom declare that the celebration of Ascension Sunday to be of apostolic origin. In other words, a special observance of the ascension of Jesus has been a Christian tradition from the moment of the event.

1. The Paschal Candle: A hallmark of the service in Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran traditions is the extinguishing of the paschal candle (pronounced PASK-uhl). This act symbolizes the end of Christ's physical presence on earth.
2. Outdoor Processions: Traditionally, the congregation would proceed out of the city and typically to the top of a hill or mountain. This is intended to imitate Christ leading his Apostles to the Mount of Olives.
3. Drama in the Sanctuary: Historically, some churches used an oculus or "Holy Spirit hole" in the ceiling to hoist a statue of Christ upward until it disappeared, sometimes raining down gifts like fruit, flowers, or green branches.
4. All-Night Vigils: In Eastern Orthodox traditions, the feast is observed with an all-night vigil and specific Old Testament readings from Isaiah and Zechariah.

III. The Event

- A. The two accounts of the actual event of the ascension of Jesus are both given to us through Luke's writings. Theologically, the actual events are not nearly as focused on as their implications; however, the events are what are always pointed to in order to prove their implications. Without concrete truth of the events the theological implications fall to the ground. (Acts. 1:9-12; Lk 24:50-23)
 1. He blessed them and told them to wait for the Spirit.
 2. He ascended into the air and a cloud (shekinah) received Him.
 3. They were told He would return in the same way He went up.
 4. They left rejoicing.

IV. The Revelation (Sorrow Turned to Joy)

- A. Just days before Jesus was killed, He spoke to His disciples in detail about His death, resurrection, and ascension (Jn. 14-16). Interestingly, the scriptures tell us that they did not understand the death and resurrection but they understood the ascension. Their response was heavy sorrow. Jesus told them that He was going to the Father and if they loved Him their response would not be sorrow but rather, joy. (Jn. 14:28, 16:5-6)

- B. I wonder if this is true of the church today, what emotions stir in your heart when speaking of the ascension of our Lord? If you were standing there with the disciples and Jesus on that day, would you feel sorrow or great joy as you watched Him leave the earth and be received into heaven? Interestingly, Luke tells us that right after they watched Him go they returned to Jerusalem, not just with joy, but with great joy!
- C. What truths did they know or what did they see or understand that the church for the most part does not see or understand today? I believe if it did, Ascension Sunday might be as well known and celebrated as Christmas and Easter. The following theological implications concerning His ascension are going to be my attempt to stir up some of that Ascension Day joy in you this morning.
1. Glory and Vindication - Jesus prayed for a restoration of the glory that He had with His Father before the world was. He desired that we could see, know, and appreciate with awe and wonder His glory. The world was made through Him and in Him we have life and we did not recognize Him or worship Him as we should have. No, in fact, it's worse than that. We took a look at Him, His life of thirty years, His family, His friends, His words, and His actions, and decided that humanity would be better off if we ended His life. We could not even bring ourselves to end His life respectfully or show Him some dignity. No, we had to spit on Him, mock Him, and whip Him until He was unrecognizable as a man. Then, we hung Him on a cross naked in order to heap shame upon his worthlessness.
 - a. Now for the friends of Jesus who know Him and love Him, how great of joy is it to see Him vindicated of all shame, all disrespect, all misunderstanding, and under-appreciation. His disciples watch as He is rightly lifted up and given His glory back, the glory of the only begotten of the Father in full potency of His divine identity and all of heaven and creation bow to His majesty forever. (Jn. 1; Phil. 1)
 2. High Priest Intercession - During a 40 day period shortly after Israel's exodus from Egypt, God brought Moses through the veil, separating heaven and earth and caused him to ascend into the temple in heaven. There He showed him all the temple with its rooms and furnishings and then told him to replicate it on the earth so that He could dwell with them. Did you ever wonder at the fact that God told Moses that Aaron would act

as the high priest but he didn't have to tell Moses what a high priest was or what his job was? Rather, He told Moses how Aaron and his sons were supposed to carry out their job.

- a. In Psalm 110 we are told that the High Priest Melkiizedek was of a different order than the Aaronic High Priest and that Jesus has been given the title of both King and High Priest forever in that same order. We are told that Jesus ascended to that place and now stands forever as our great sympathetic High Priest offering eternal intercession on our behalf. (Makes intercession; Peter, I prayed for you)
3. Holy Spirit Indwelling and Empowering - Jesus didn't say He would send "the" Helper. He said He would send, "another helper". He called this helper His Holy Spirit and referred to Him as a divine person in oneness with Him and the Father. The Holy Spirit would glorify Jesus in the earth and show people the truth of who He is. It was prophesied that one day God would make a new covenant with His people and a great sign and promise of that covenant is that all His people would be indwelt and empowered by the very Holy Spirit of God. Through this indwelling Holy Spirit, God's people would be transformed into vessels with hearts able to love like God loves. Further, they would have abilities through His spirit to carry out actions that proved and instituted His righteous restorative kingdom.
 - a. Jesus told his disciples that unless He ascended, the Holy Spirit of Promise would not come. Why? I believe that Jesus needed to be glorified before the Holy Spirit could glorify Him.
 4. King of Kings - Jesus was not only vindicated in His glory at His ascension but it was also a "cosmic coronation" as the late R.C. Sproul called it. The theological term for the rulership of Jesus as the King of the Earth is called His session. How is this different from His authoritative rulership over the nations prior to His incarnation? That's exactly it! Daniel saw a vision of one like a son of man who came to the Ancient of Days and to him was given power and dominion over all the earth. The vision grieved and troubled Daniel. How could a man be given the very seat of authority over the nations that was reserved for the Ancient of Days alone?

- a. I imagine Daniel, along with all the other saints in heaven who have gone before us, standing there as his vision is played out in real time before him. Jesus, the son of man, the son of David, comes in the glory cloud into the very courts of heaven and receives power and authority over all nations as the King of Kings. The judgment of all men and of humanities redemptive promise will now unfold under the authority of the Lion of the tribe of Judah.
5. Concrete Hope - As the veil closed and took Jesus from their sight, angels appeared and told the disciples that Jesus would return to them in just the same way that they saw Him go. As we have looked at many times before, we are given concrete truths about what the coming of the Lord will be like in order that we have hope. Not hope we have to imagine or are guessing about; God wants us to have concrete hope, exact hope, full assurance of our faith.
 - a. Jesus, the son of David, the only begotten of the Father in heaven ascended to His throne in His resurrected physical body. A body designed for one purpose: interaction with the physical earth. He was taken up not in secret but in the public view of all His disciples. He was taken up in the glory clouds of heaven. He was taken up rightfully as justice demanded that He would be given the governing seat of all authority. He was received by the saints and offered rightful and true worship due Him forever. And He will come back in exactly the same way.