

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

The Ascension

We have a living, reigning, ruling King...Lord of everything. Let's start there.

Much of Jesus' life and ministry was prophesied in the Old Testament...His birth, His suffering, His making all things new. We often forget (or perhaps misinterpret) that the Ascension was also foretold. In Daniel chapter 7, which is often misunderstood to be pointing to Christ's second coming, we see a picture of the Ascension. *"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. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."* (Daniel 7:13-14)

This is a reality NOW! This isn't something we are waiting for. Christ has authority, glory, and sovereign power NOW! His kingdom and dominion are at hand. Is it in its fullest form? No. But let's not discount the actuality of it Here and Now.

As we look at the gospel accounts we see that John did not mention the Ascension. Mark gives it one verse, *"After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was taken up into heaven and He sat at the right hand of God."* (Mark 16:19...though it should be noted that this section of Mark was likely a later add on...your Bible likely notes that.) Matthew does not mention the Ascension, but he does mention something worth noting. Matthew ends with Jesus saying these words, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20). This is a power-packed passage. Notice that ALL authority HAS BEEN (not "will be" at some point in the future) given to Jesus. Notice also that He is WITH US ALWAYS. We want to keep this in mind as we look at Luke's accounts of the Ascension. In the Gospel of Luke, it simply states, *"While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven."* (Luke 24:51). Luke elaborates in his sequel Acts, *"...He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight."* (Acts 1:9) (Insert the passage from Daniel...Daniel caught a glimpse of the Ascension from the receiving end.)

In the first Christian sermon, preached on Pentecost, the apostle Peter said, *"God raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."* (Acts 2:32-33). In his epistle Peter also mentions the Ascension, *"...It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him."* (1 Peter 3:21b-22).

Both the apostle Paul and the writer of Hebrews also make mention and comment on Jesus being, presently, at the right hand of God.

“Who is He that condemns? No one. Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” (Romans 8:34). “That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.” (Ephesians 1:19b-21) “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” (Hebrews 1:3a) “The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.” (Hebrews 8:1) “But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right had of God. Since that time He waits for His enemies to be made His footstool, because by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” (Hebrews 10:12-14) “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2)

What I hope you catch from all these passages is how important the writers of the New Testament understood the Ascension to be. Where Jesus currently is, and what He is currently doing is of the utmost importance...right up there with all that He has done in the past.

But wait...there’s more. Paul has even more to say that we ought to take note of: *“But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-6) Likewise, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory.” (Colossians 3:1-4)*

Did you catch that? When Jesus promised that He would be with us always, He could have also said, “And you will be with Me always.” He is with us as His Spirit indwells us AND we are WITH HIM seated at His right hand. That’s incredible. Somehow in the cosmic economy of it all (which Jesus is in charge of, as we’ve already established), we are reigning WITH HIM presently...which is what we were created for in the first place. This should give us a whole new grasp on what we call the “Christian Life”. We are far more than just good, nice, moral, ethical people who get together on Sundays to worship Jesus and who are “good examples” for not-yet-believers. And the goal of the Christian Life is not about securing our eternal destination. Rather, we are administrating and managing God’s Kingdom on earth here and now. You and I are representatives, officials, dare I say, politicians of the Kingdom of God. And our mission and motto is, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” And we are active agents in making that so. It’s more than a prayer, it’s our calling and duty. (And as we’ll see this coming Sunday as we turn our attention to Pentecost, we are also empowered for this task.)

Now here's another really cool theological tidbit for you to ruminate on. Jesus is God...and Jesus is human. The One who sits enthroned who has been given power and authority, honor and dominion, is human. Jesus will be human for all eternity. Makes you kind of glad to be human, yes? What great dignity He bestows upon us. God condescended in becoming human, but in Jesus He is remaining human. There is no greater compliment we could possibly receive (and how utterly undeserving we are of it). Additionally, we often look back to Genesis to glean the knowledge that humans are image-bearers of God and should be treated as such. But we can also look to the reigning and ruling King, who is human, to be reminded of the honor, respect, and dignity we ought to have for one another. When we look at each other we see image-bearers of the King. If you really want to blow your mind, consider this: The Trinity includes a human...and the work/ministry of that human was to create a way for all humanity to enter into relationship with the Trinity. WOW!

Let me offer you a deeply theological look at the incarnation and ascension from Baxter Kruger's book, "The Great Dance" ...

"The incarnation means the coming of the eternal trinitarian relationship of Father, Son and Spirit. In Jesus Christ, not just divine life, but the great dance of the Trinity, the joy and fullness and glory of Father, Son and Spirit, their life and communion and fellowship, entered into our world and set up shop. That is the simple and astonishing truth of it.

In the first instance, the life of Jesus Christ is to be understood as the living out, the enfleshment, not merely of a divine life, but of the Trinitarian life itself inside human existence. What happens in Jesus Christ is that the great dance of the Trinity is earthed and lived out as a divine-human reality.

If you start with a legal holiness as the fundamental truth about God, then, when you come to Jesus, you are in such a hurry to get to the cross to solve the sin problem that you fly past the incarnation. When you start with legal holiness, you have eyes only for the cross, and you never see that in Jesus Christ, nothing less than the eternal trinitarian life of Father, Son and Spirit is being lived out inside human existence. You never really get the staggering meaning of the incarnation. And you never see the equally staggering meaning of the ascension.

The cross, on the legal model, looms so large on the horizon that the incarnation, resurrection and ascension of Jesus are overshadowed. Do you know what the ascension means? Have you ever heard a sermon or a series of sermons on the ascension? The ascension means that the incarnation is not over. The ascension means that now and forever the Son continues to live out his sonship as a human being.

When the Son became human, it was not as though he put on a robe which he would take off later. He is now and forever one of us, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, man, a human being. As Trevor Hart points out, the incarnation was not a "temporary episode in the life of God,] but a permanent reality for the Trinity. Seated now and forever at the right hand of the Father, inside the circle as a full participant in the dance, is the fully divine Son of God as man. The earthing of the Trinitarian life, the enfleshment of the dance of the Trinity, was not a passing phase. What the Son of God became is not over and done with. The incarnation was not a moment in the past. When the Son of God became human, he became human and he will

be human through all eternity. The dance of the Triune life is no longer just a divine dance. It is now and forever a divine-human dance."

- Q. As you imagine God, and live/function in faith, is He close or far away? Explain. (We're not looking for the "right" answer here...existentially speaking how do you, personally, think of and experience God?)**
- Q. What does it mean, practically speaking, that you/we are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms?**
- Q. Lots of people like and respect Jesus (though far less actually understand Him). How would you explain, in your own thoughts and words, what Jesus set out to accomplish?**
- Q. When we think about Jesus, we can use the theological terms and events of the Incarnation (including His birth, teaching and activities), Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension. Discuss what happens if we take any one of those out of the equation.**
- Q. How does having a living, reigning, ruling King make the experience of the "Christian Life" far more than "religion"? How does having a living, reigning, ruling King impact our "spirituality"?**
- Q. What is more mind-blowing to you—that Jesus is Divine or that God is human? Explain.**
- Q. Let me preface with the fact that Jesus is NOT accountable to us (quite the opposite in fact.) With that said, however, in your careful, humble opinion, how do you think Jesus is doing at His job of reigning/ruling? Explain.**
- Q. Following up on the previous question, since our job/responsibility is to reign with Jesus, how do you think we are doing at our job? Explain.**
- Q. Practically and specifically, what does our reigning/ruling King want us to be DOING (WITH HIM) here and now?**

