

CHRIST: THE POWER OF GOD, Part 3

HE LIVES TO PRAY FOR YOU

The Power of the Ascension

By Rev. Will Nelken

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The first mention of the ascension of Jesus was inserted into the narrative of His life by Luke in the early days of His ministry.

Luke 9:51 As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

Luke realized that prior to Jesus sending out the seventy evangelists, or telling the story of the good Samaritan, or presenting His major teaching on prayer, He had an appointment with destiny, which He understood and intently pursued. He had come from heaven and was on His way back there.

In other words, in the minds of His early followers, Jesus' ascension was integrally linked to His death on the cross — His purpose for coming to the earth.

Later, when He spoke with His close disciples about the depth of their investment in Him, likening it to drinking His blood and eating His flesh, they were confused and put off by such talk. His reply to their complaint was this:

John 6:61 Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what will you think if you see the Son of Man ascend to heaven again? ⁶³ The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing.

Thus, He made the act of His ascension the dividing line — the plumb line, the acid test — between genuine spiritual faith and mere religious presumption. This act separates the men from the boys in that it embraced both His origin and His destiny, and fulfilled the purpose of His life.

I will describe it more fully in answer to five questions: How? Why? Where? What? and When?

How did it happen?

Luke records the actual event. Having spent forty days with His disciples after His resurrection, teaching them about the Kingdom of God, Jesus said:

Luke 24:49 "And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven."

⁵⁰ Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. ⁵² So they worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy.

He ascended... while He was blessing them... and that blessing has never ceased!

Why did He go?

- To complete our redemption, as our Representative.

After His death and burial, Mary Magdalene discovered that His tomb was empty.

John 20:14 She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. ¹⁵ "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?" She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

¹⁶ "Mary!" Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").

¹⁷ "Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

The letter to the Hebrews reveals what was to happen after that:

Hebrews 9:12 With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.

Hebrews 9:23 The Tabernacle [of Moses] and everything in it, which were copies of things in heaven, had to be purified by the blood of animals. But the real things in heaven had to be purified with far better sacrifices than the blood of animals. ²⁴ Christ entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf.

So, the redemptive work, which was begun on the cross and continued in the resurrection, was to culminate with the presentation of His own blood before the genuine altar of God in heaven, an act which had been dramatized by the high priests of the Hebrews year after year.

- To send another Comforter (a new dimension of relationship)

John 16:7 In fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you.

John 14:26 When the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.

Without Jesus' ascension, there could be no outpouring of the Spirit upon the believers, and there would be no church today. That's why He ascended.

Where did He go?

- Back to the Father

John 16:5 Now I am going away to the One who sent me.

He had come from the Father, and now, having completed His mission, was returning to the One who first sent Him.

- To sit at the right hand of the Majesty on high

Hebrews 10:12 Our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand.

Romans 8:34 Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

Raised to the place of honor at God's right hand, and close to His ear, Jesus sat down as our Representative, until all things would finally be submitted to His leadership.

- To the glory He had known before

John 17:4 I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began.

At last He was free to return to heaven's glory. We would probably call it R&R, but this was a magnitude of beauty and rest far beyond anything we have ever known; it was the restoration of everything He had surrendered for our salvation. Fulfillment.

What is He doing there?

- As our Baptizer, he sent the Spirit to us

Acts 1:4 Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. ⁵ John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

It is Jesus Himself who pours the Holy Spirit upon us as we ask in faith.

- As our Redeemer, He received worship and praise

I cannot do better than to let you read this wonderful passage for yourself — a glimpse beyond the veil:

Revelation 5:6 Then I saw a Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered, but it was now standing between the throne and the four living beings and among the twenty-four elders.

⁹ And they sang a new song with these words:

"You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it.

For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

¹⁰ And you have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God.

And they will reign on the earth."

¹¹ Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders. ¹² And they sang in a mighty chorus:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered—

to receive power and riches

and wisdom and strength

and honor and glory and blessing."

¹³ And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang:

"Blessing and honor and glory and power

belong to the one sitting on the throne

and to the Lamb forever and ever."

¹⁴ And the four living beings said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb.

- As Head of the Church, He is preparing a place for us

John 14:1 Trust in God, and trust also in me. ² There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?

He is building His church, not only here but also there. He is preparing us for the place that He has prepared for us.

- As our Shepherd, He is praying for us

Hebrews 7:24 Because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. ²⁵ Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.

He knows you by name and He prays for you. Every time you kneel to call on His name, He is whispering yours to the Father. And when you feel that you cannot even pray, you have an Advocate with the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

- As our King, He is establishing His Kingdom

Matthew 25:34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.

John 18:36 My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. My Kingdom is not of this world.

His Kingdom is not *of* this world, but it is *in* this world, in the hearts of those who call Him their King. And so, one by one, Jesus is planting and building His Kingdom in the earth, uniting all followers of Jesus as one new race.

When will He return?

The time is unknown, but His return is sure! To these ends:

- To gather His people to Himself

John 14:3 When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.

He will not simply gather His people, but He will gather them *to Himself* — to be with Him. It is what He asked of His disciples at the beginning, and it is what He seeks at the end of all things: to be *with* us.

Matthew 28:20 Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

- To eliminate the threat of Satan

According to Revelation 20, when Jesus returns, Satan will be bound in chains and locked in a bottomless pit for 1,000 years. The Tempter will be silenced — out of sight and out of mind.

- To model the Kingdom on earth

During that 1,000 years — the Millennium — Jesus will personally reign on the earth, his followers serving as regional governors, and the population of the entire earth will taste righteous leadership that has no agenda but to bless them.

- To conquer Satan and Hell and death

Revelation 20:7 When the thousand years come to an end, Satan will be let out of his prison.

¹⁰ Then the devil... was thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

- To reveal the new heavens and the new earth

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

³ I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

⁵ And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!"

When Jesus ascended, He intended to return. And, until that day, He has you on His heart and mind. He watches over you, like the Good Shepherd that He is. He ministers to you, through the aid of the Holy Spirit. And He prays for you...He prays for you. You are never out of God's sight or mind, because Jesus lives before Him as your Representative, ever pleading your case. If you have received Jesus as your Forgiver and are following His lead in your life, then the halls of heaven ring with your name. Forgive him, Father. Bless her, Father. Protect him, Almighty One. Provide her need.

Everyone there is anticipating your arrival!