Rich Results of Jesus' Ascension
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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Well, as we turn our thoughts toward the Lord's table and toward the wonderful work of Christ on the cross and through His resurrection, I want to direct us a little bit ahead. We have certainly through the years considered the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in numerable ways. We have considered His resurrection as well. But there is an event that follows His death and resurrection that is rarely ever discussed, and yet it is God's own commentary on the work of Christ on the cross. It is one of the most neglected events in the life of our Lord, it really is the consummate event of His own life on earth with immense significance, particularly immense significance given how often it is ignored. Perhaps this event deserves a holiday as well. In actuality, this celebration brings together everything our Lord came to accomplish. It is none other than His ascension into heaven...His ascension into heaven.

Rarely do we consider the greatness of our Lord's leaving. But what happened when He left is God's commentary on what He accomplished while He was here. And in reality, one of the best things that the Lord did for us was leave. It didn't seem so at the time. The disciples struggled with His leaving, they were grieved, they were fearful. They had difficulty grasping its significance. They would even have attempted to prevent it if that were possible. But in John 16 verse 7, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage if I go away.....It is to your advantage if I go away."

For all the marvelous blessing that came through His humiliation, there was even greater blessing to come through His glorification. For all the great things that were accomplished while He was here on earth, even greater things would be accomplished when He returned to heaven. The ascension is the culminating event in His earthly ministry. It is so designated in the rich doxology that we find in 1 Timothy chapter 3, and I know you're familiar with these words. "By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness. He who was revealed in the flesh was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." Six short stanzas in a hymn that summarizes the gospel. And the final one, the culminating one, "Taken up in glory."

The record of that ascension, of course, is found in the first chapter of the book of Acts. We need only to read verses 9 through 11 to have it in mind. "And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men, two angels in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky, this Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into

heaven.'"

That is the simple, straight-forward account of the wonderful event of the ascension. As simple as it is, it is on the other hand an equally monumental event, for it signifies so many critical things. Let me give you a list, and I won't dig too deeply into these, but merely suggest them to you with an appropriate text of Scripture or so.

Number one, it marked the completion of our Lord's earthly work. It marked the completion of our Lord's earthly work. In John 4:34 He said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and finish His work." In John 17:4 He said, "I glorified Thee on earth, having accomplished the work which You gave Me to do." On the cross in John 19:30 it is recorded He said, "It is finished." And then He repeated in John 17:5, "Glorify Me together with Yourself, Father, with the glory I had with You before the world began." The ascension marked the end of His earthly ministry.

Secondly, and as such, it signaled the end of our Lord's limitation. We remember that in Philippians He thought it not something to hold on to, to be equal with God, but voluntarily abandoned the prerogatives of deity, humbled Himself, became a man, even humbled Himself to death, even the ignominious death on a cross." And now as I noted, John 17:5, He prays, "Glorify Me together with the glory I had with You before the world began." And the ascension brings that into reality.

Even after His resurrection, He was still limited in some ways. He was still here on earth, though in a glorified body, not yet fully restored to heaven and to the Father's heavenly presence. And in fact, on His return to heaven, He was more than preincarnate glory, He was different than when He originally left heaven. He left heaven as spirit, He came back as the God/Man, *theonthropos(??)*, He left as pure deity, He came back as pure deity and pure humanity, no longer just the *logos*, pure deity, but the *logos*distinctively and man distinctively. He was restored in that newness to limitless intimacy with God as the perfect God/Man which He remains forever. And according to Revelation, the signs and scars of His suffering remain on His glorious and eternal body forever. And so His ascension ended the time of His ministry on earth and it ended the limitations that were placed upon Him because of that ministry and He is now restored to full communion, face-to-face with the Father.

Thirdly, therefore, consequently, it marked the exaltation of our Lord....it marked the exaltation of our Lord. Scripture is clear that He ascended and that when He ascended into the Father's presence, He was given a name which is above every name, that is the name Lord, that is the supreme name, the superior name, the name at which every knee will bow on earth, under the earth and everywhere else. His return then was not just a return to Trinitarian fellowship with God in its fullness. It was not just a return to intimacy with God. It was not just a return as *theonthropos*, the God/Man, but it was an exaltation as King and Lord and Ruler over all the redeemed which He had in fact purchased with

His sacrifice. And so the redeemed of all the ages now in heaven and forever in heaven and we'll join them one day, worship and praise Him as the lamb who was slain and who is now sovereign Lord.

Fourthly, the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ signaled our Lord's sending of the Holy Spirit. It signaled His sending of the Holy Spirit. We are, as you well know, dependent upon the Holy Spirit for everything. It is the Holy Spirit that convicts us of sin. It is the Holy Spirit who is the agency by which we are baptized by Christ into the body. It is the Holy Spirit who takes up residence in us, we become His temple. It is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us. It is the Holy Spirit who seals us unto eternal glory. It is the Holy Spirit who equips us with gifts. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to minister. It is the Holy Spirit who fills us in order that we might walk in obedience to the will of God and bring honor to His name. It is the Holy Spirit who inhabits our praise so that it might be pleasing to God. It is the Spirit who directs us to pray and who redirects our prayers even when we know not how to prayer that our prayers may be answered. This marvelous ministry of the Holy Spirit was launched upon the return of our Lord Jesus to heaven. Listen to the words of Acts 2 verse 32, "This Jesus God raised up again to which we are all witnesses, therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear." Having gone back, being exalted, He sends the Spirit. In fact, it was His own words in John 16, "He could not send the Spirit until He had ascended into heaven."

Number five, the ascension marks the start of our Lord's preparation for our heavenly home. In that magnificent text of John 14, so familiar to us, Jesus said, "If I go away, I will prepare a place for you and I will come again and receive you to Myself that where I am, there you may be also." Our Lord is still preparing the place for those of us who are not yet there, constantly preparing it. Our place in the eternal heavens, our place in the new heaven and the new earth, our place in the New Jerusalem, the capital city of heaven, where we will dwell forever within sight of the full-blazing glory of God. He is preparing for us a room in the Father's house.

Another feature of His ascension that is so vital, number six in my list, it marked the passing of the work of evangelism to our Lord's followers. We know that the four gospel accounts end basically with a commission. The synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, have a general commission. There is a commissioning of Peter at the end of John's gospel. And the promise that God is going to enable through the Spirit the followers of the Lord to carry on the work of evangelism in His absence.

And the book of Acts then begins this way with chapter 1 verse 1, "The first account,"meaning Luke, for Luke is the author of Acts, "The first account I composed Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the Apostles whom He had chosen." Just to kind of reverse that a little bit, He gave orders to the Apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel, that order came to them by the power of the

Holy Spirit, enabling them to do it. He was then taken up to heaven, having only begun to do and to teach. We talk a lot about the finished work of Christ, the finished work of Christ on the cross. He finished the sacrifice that God required for salvation but He did not finish the work of evangelism, He only began the work. And so in His ascension and in the ascending of the Holy Spirit, He then enables His followers to continue the work which He began, the work of spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Number seven, the ascension also signaled our Lord's headship over the church unmistakably. We read in Ephesians chapter 1, "Concerning the Lord Jesus, "verse 20, "that God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places," and then verse 22, "And He put all things in subjection under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." Christ was exalted to the role of being the head of the church. He is the head of the church and He is the head over the living organism, the church, His body and He fills that living organism with His own personal presence so that it can reflect His character and His will. So much occurs because Jesus ascended to heaven.

And in the same passage, another remarkable note, it marked our Lord's defeat of Satan. It marked our Lord's defeat of Satan, verse 21, "He was exalted and seated at God's right hand, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but in the one to come." And that includes everyone and especially Satan whose head He crushed at the cross and who some day will be placed even under our feet in the future. And so the ascension of our Lord, the triumph of our Lord to the right hand of the Father demonstrates His utter and total defeat of Satan who could bring no accusation against Him, who could impede nothing that He purposed to do or accomplish on behalf of the Father who could leave no mark, no stain, no successful temptation, Jesus goes back to the Father's right hand, having triumphed totally over Satan.

His ascension also signals our Lord giving the work of ministry to gifted men. Again in Paul's letter to the Ephesians and in chapter 4, he says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives and gave gifts to men." He not only ascending brings us to God, but ascending sends the Holy Spirit and with the Holy Spirit comes our spiritual gifts. We know all about those spiritual gifts by which we are enabled to minister to one another for the edification of the body of Christ. That's in my list, nine wonderful features of the ascension.

Number ten, it launched the beginning of our Lord's High Priestly work...it launched the beginning of our Lord's High Priestly work. He always, even on earth, prayed for His own but now in a unique way, we read this in Hebrews 4:14, "We have a great high priest who has past through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God." He is not a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one

who has been tempted in all things like we are, yet without sin. We can draw near to Him with confidence because it is a throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help in time of need. We have been given this great High Priest. Chapter 7 of Hebrews, verse 26 says, verse 25, “He lives to make intercession for us. He is holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners and exalted above the heavens.”

And finally, and connected to what I read you from Acts chapter 1, we remember these words, “This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in just the same way you’ve watched Him go into heaven.” His ascension guarantees His return. His ascension guarantees the Second Coming.

This is the event by which God makes His commentary on the cross. Our Lord ascends because He is exalted. He is restored to full fellowship with God, all limitations are forever off. He sends the Holy Spirit. He begins to prepare our eternal homes. He takes the headship of the church. He defeats Satan. He passes the responsibility of evangelism and ministry to His followers. He begins the blessed work of intercession and He stands ready to return. Each one of these marvelous, thrilling elements of truth connected to His ascension could be in itself a study of a lifetime. And for most of, these very same truths are very familiar. You cannot look at the cross in its fullness without understanding what happened afterward. You cannot even look at the resurrection in its fullness without understanding what happened afterward, namely the ascension. It’s not enough to look at the cross and talk about wounds and pain and suffering and sin bearing and all of that, the final word on the cross is not Jesus’ word, “It is finished,” *teteleosti(??)*, one word in the Greek. The final word on the cross is the Father’s exaltation of the Son by which God affirms the perfection of His redemptive work.

So as we think about our Lord’s death on the cross and press that glorious reality forward to its full meaning, we end up at the ascension. So tonight as we think about the cross and come to the Lord’s table, think about it in connection with the richness of all these spiritual blessings, the fruit of which come down to us.

Father, as we come to worship You in the simple elements of the table before us, we remember, of course, that the bread signifies the body of the Lord given for us as we read in Isaiah, as we heard John sing, going back to that very same great passage. We understand that the cup refers to the blood, pouring out of life, sin offering for us. And we want to remember those things, we want to remember the elements. We want to remember the features of our Lord’s death, body, blood, the cross, suffering, the crown of thorns, piercing, all of that, mockery, scourging, spit upon, ridiculed. But the real glory of the cross goes quickly from there to the tomb and even quickly from there to the ascension 40 days later, when you, O God, declared forever this is indeed My beloved Son in whom I

am well pleased. You said it at the beginning of his ministry, at His baptism, and in effect you've said it at the end by the glories associated with His ascension. And these are glories that relate to us that we receive the richness of all that He accomplished on the cross, in the sending of the Spirit, who is the one who regenerates and gifts us and sanctifies us and seals our hope of glory. We receive the benefits of His sovereign headship over the church and His life in us. We receive benefits of His intercession as our great sympathetic, merciful, High Priest and one day we will receive the full benefits of His glorious return and the establishment of His ever-lasting Kingdom. And so, O God, we look at the cross, this time from the perspective of that day on the hillside when Jesus went up into heaven and we wait the day when He will come in the same manner. In the meantime, we worship You and we rejoice over this provision for us, for we are utterly undeserving. We come now, Lord, confessing our sins, our failures, our inadequacies, don't let us take them lightly or tritely. Don't let the familiarity of this moment produce indifference, but help us, Lord, to understand that all that the Lord Jesus has done for us should call out from us all the highest and purest and noblest and best that by the Spirit of God can be produced in and through us. May we at this time refresh our devotion and our love to our blessed Christ.

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