

Sermon Outline

THE YEAR IN OUR LORD, 2011-2012

CHRIST JESUS, OUR ASCENSION: A MESSAGE ON THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD (EPHESIANS 2:4-7)

I. The Burj Khalifa and Heaven-Hunger

II. From Descent to Ascent

- A. Now, to help us keep our eyes on Jesus, I have been taking our Church through key points in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ in a sermon series called “The Year in Our Lord.”
1. We started in December 2011 with Ephesians 1:3, where we saw the Lord Jesus as the Place where God’s greatest blessings are found.
 2. Outside of Christ, the world is darkness and desolation.
 3. In Christ, the world finds its clarity and fulfillment.
 4. God wants us to be happy, fulfilled, and secure in his *Son*.
- B. From that big picture perspective in Ephesians 1:3, we moved out into the life of Jesus and we saw how our Lord actually worked to save us from our sins and reconcile us to God.
1. We stood with Mary and Joseph when they dedicated the baby Jesus to the God of Israel.
 2. We went with our Lord Jesus into the wilderness to do battle with the Evil One on behalf of all of us.
 3. We stood with the disciples as they saw Jesus transfigured in the presence of Moses and Elijah.
 4. We followed our Lord as he entered the city of Jerusalem for the final time before his crucifixion.
 5. We beheld our Lord nailed to the cross as the sin-removing King of Israel.
 6. We rejoiced with the disciples at the resurrection.
—When our Lord Jesus burst forth from the tomb, he emerged as the Leader of the New Heavens and the New Earth, the First of a new World of resurrected men and women (1 Cor 15:20, 23; Col 1:18; Rev 1:5).

- C. But forty days after the first Easter Sunday, the time comes for the Lord to return home to heaven.
1. Jesus returns to heaven to prepare a place for us (Jn 14:1-3).
 2. Forty days after the resurrection, the Lord Jesus “was carried up into heaven” in full view of his disciples (Lk 24:51).
 3. As he was being lifted up into the clouds, his hands were stretched out in blessing (Lk 24:50).
 4. Luke reports that the disciples were rejoicing at the ascension of Jesus (Lk 24:52).
 - a. The disciples rejoiced because their Lord has gone into heaven for them.
 - b. This implies that the Community of Jesus will never ever have to fear death or failure ever again.
 - c. Wherever Jesus goes, the rest of his people will follow, sooner or later.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What happens forty days after the resurrection of Christ? (2) According to John 14:1-3, why does Jesus need to go back to heaven? (3) What is a possible reason for the disciples’ rejoicing when Jesus ascended?

III. Jesus Represents Us in Glory

- A. Why are we assured a place with Jesus if we have believed in him?
1. Part of the answer is that Jesus himself has promised us a place with him (Jn 14).
 2. But the Lord has another answer to that question.
 - a. We are assured a place with Jesus in heaven because Jesus himself represents us there, even as we speak.
 - b. In fact, that’s the way he prepares a place for us. It’s by going there for us first, and sitting at the right hand of God for us.
 - c. Because Jesus has done all those things for us, the apostle Paul can say that we ourselves were in Christ when he ascended into the skies, and was seated in heaven.
 - d. Let’s go on now to look at what Paul says in Ephesians 2:4-6. I will begin by reading from verse 1 so that we get an idea of the apostle Paul’s flow of thought.

- B. In Ephesians 2:1-3, Paul reminds the Ephesians of where God found them.
1. We were...
 - a. spiritually “dead.”
 - b. “children of wrath.”
 - c. “following the prince of the power of the air.”
 2. None of those terms are flattering at all!
 3. That is the true state of humankind outside Christ.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why are we assured a place with Jesus if we have believed in him? (2) According to Ephesians 2:1-3, what was the state in which God found us?

IV. God Made Us Alive Together with Christ (Ephesians 2:4-5)

- A. But then something miraculous happened.
—“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, *made us alive together with Christ...*”
- B. That last phrase is important, because it basically tells us that God considered us with Christ when Christ was raised from the dead.
- C. God considered us to be linked to Christ when Christ was raised on that very first Easter Sunday.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What was the great and wonderful thing that God did while we were still sinners? (2) What does the phrase “made us alive together with Christ” teach us?

V. God Raised and Seated Us with Christ (Ephesians 2:6)

- A. Verse 6 shows us that God goes even further.
1. God not only considered us with Christ at his resurrection.
 2. God also considered with Christ at his ascension.
—“and raised us up *with him* and seated us *with him* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus [.]”

- B. What does Ephesians 2:6 mean for Christians today?
1. It means that there is a sense in which you and I have already attained our final goal.
 2. While we have not yet reached our final goal in our own persons, we have reached it in the person of Christ himself.
 3. Because Christ Jesus is now in heaven, you and I are considered to be there in heaven with him as well.
- C. Ephesians 2:6 allows the Christian to see himself or herself as inhabiting two places at the same time.
1. On the one hand, you and I are still in this world.
 2. But that is not the full picture.
—According to Ephesians 2:6, we are in heaven as well, represented in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- D. The teaching of our union with Christ’s ascension is so important that Paul restates it elsewhere.
—Colossians 3:1-3: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) God considered us with Christ at his ascension. (2) What does Ephesians 2:6 mean for Christians today? (3) In what sense does the Christian inhabit two places at the same time? How is that possible? (4) According to Colossians 3:1-3, why should we set our minds “on things above”?

VI. Saved to Be Loved (Ephesians 2:7)

- A. But why did God do all of that? Why did God decide to save us from the world by joining our destinies to Christ?
1. Verse 7 has the answer: “so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”
 2. God saved us so that he might lavish his immeasurable kindness upon us.
- B. In short, *God saved us in order to lavish his love on us.*
- C. Where will God show us these wonderful riches?
—“...in Christ Jesus.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) According to Ephesians 4:7, why did God choose to join our destinies to Christ? (2) Where does God show us the immeasurable riches of his grace?

VII. The Ascension of Jesus, Our Union with God

- A. Let's think more carefully about what major problem the ascension resolves.
- B. Scripture teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ came to be the Savior of the human race.
 - 1. 1 John 3:8: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."
 - 2. If Adam and Eve had not sinned, the Son of God would have no reason to become incarnate (take on human flesh).
 - 3. Thus, the coming of the Lord in human flesh was a targeted response to our sin and the various consequences of it.
- C. So what sin-related problem does the ascension of Jesus solve?
- D. Let's think of the various aspects of the life of Christ.
 - 1. The perfectly obedient life of Christ is the solution to *our lack of obedience*.
—Jesus became our perfect obedience to God.
 - 2. The death of Christ was the solution to *our debt of eternal punishment*.
 - a. We owe God death for our sins.
 - i. Ezekiel 18:20: "The soul who sins shall die."
 - ii. Romans 6:23: "the wages of sin is death..."
 - b. But Jesus became the full punishment of our sins.
—2 Corinthians 5:21: "For our sake he made him to *be sin* who knew no sin..."
 - 3. The resurrection of Christ was the solution to *our poor standing before God*.
 - a. Romans 4:25: Jesus was "delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."
 - b. Jesus became our justification before God.
- E. So, what does the ascension of Jesus resolve?
 - 1. The ascension is important because it's really the next phase of our salvation.
 - 2. While the crucifixion solves the problem of our punishment, and the resurrection solves the issue of our guilty status before God, the ascension resolves *our shameful separation from God* and reunites us to God himself!

- a. In the ascension of Jesus, we are not just made acceptable to God.
- b. In the ascension, we are brought face-to-face with God himself in the person of Christ, and are adopted into his eternal Household!

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What sin-related problem does the ascension of Christ resolve? (2) The ascension of Jesus brings us into the very presence of God through the person of Christ. How does this impact you?

VIII. The Ascension of Jesus, Our Glorification

- A. After our first parents sinned, God pronounced a curse on them.
 - 1. Genesis 3:19: "...for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."
 - 2. Ever since those words were pronounced, decay and death have been the general trend of all human existence.
- B. But ever since that curse was pronounced, our people have always looked to the heavens both for help and for hope.
 - 1. We have envied the beings whom we thought lived amongst the stars.
 - 2. We fantasize about flying heroes, space ships, and taking fire from celestial beings.
 - 3. We build space shuttles, launch satellites into orbit, and build towering sky scrapers that bring us a little closer to the heavens.
- C. And yet, it always seems that we have to come back down to earth.
- D. But the ascension of Jesus breaks the logic of death.
 - 1. It promises that those of us who have trusted in Christ will rise—and never fall into decay again.
 - 2. One day, the power of Jesus' ascension will finally take hold of our bodies.
 - 3. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53: "...We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed...For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and *this mortal body must put on immortality.*"
- E. Why is the ascension of Jesus such a massively important event? —Because it guarantees our glorification, immortality, and perfection.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What curse did God pronounce on our first parents in Genesis 3:19? (2) "...ever since that curse was pronounced, our people have always looked to the heavens both for help and for hope." Discuss. (3) What does the ascension of Jesus promise us? How would the ascension of Jesus affect our mortal bodies? (4) Why is the ascension of Jesus such "a massively important event"?

IX. Christ Jesus, Exalter of the Poor, Defender of the Lowly

The blessings of our Lord Jesus' ascension are for those who recognize their own spiritual poverty and have turned to Christ alone for salvation and glory. If we have put our hope in Christ, our heavenly Father assures us that we have been seated with Christ in the heavenly places. Let us thank God for his great work of salvation in Christ. In spite of our earthly struggles and disappointments, let us continue to live in joy, because our Master has ascended to prepare a place for us. The People of Jesus Christ will not be overcome. But we will prevail through our Lord. All glory to God alone.