

## THE MOST NEGLECTED SUBJECT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

How many church members have ever heard a sermon on the ascension of Christ, and why is there such famine of religious books and magazines that never deal with this subject? In Acts 2 when Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, he speaks of the death of Christ in one verse (verse 23) and speaks of the resurrection and ascension in thirteen verses (verses 24-36). When the risen Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene, he told her, “Stop clinging to me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father, but go and tell my brethren, ‘I ascend to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God’” (John 20:17). One of the great tragedies of the church has been a failure to realize the significance of the ascension and getting beyond the cross. The religious world is still “clinging” to Christ and will not allow him to ascend, they want to keep Him at best on the cross, shedding his blood and not presenting it to the Father on our behalf in the Holy Place not made with hands. So much emphasis on the cross has led to the neglect of the importance of the resurrection and to the ignoring the ascension as having anything to do with our spiritual life. They have clung so tightly to the cross as the instrument of salvation they have failed to understand that the cross would have meant nothing without the resurrection and the ascension. *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* states: “The Ascension becomes the key to all the spiritual experiences of the church. There is a need to clarify the meaning of the ascension for our day.” Gerrit Scott Dawson in his book *Jesus Ascended* states: “In a time when the western church is fiercely debating the uniqueness of Jesus and our people are drowning in a flood of busy, demanding lifestyles, the ascension is an absolutely crucial part of the gospel story to recover.”

**JESUS HAD TO ASCEND TO BEGIN HIS HEAVENLY MINISTRY AND COMPLETE OUR REDEMPTION.** “The main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man” (Heb. 8:1,2). The book of Acts begins with Luke telling Theophilus that “the first account I composed (was) about all that *Jesus began to do and teach.*” His earthly ministry was preparatory for his heavenly ministry, which he continues through his people as the great High Priest. His heavenly ministry began with his ascension, a little known and the most neglected doctrine of the New Testament. Our redemption was not completed with the cross and resurrection. Jesus had to “enter the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, not through the blood of goats and calves but through his own blood, he entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb.9:11,12). His ascension then, completes our redemption. He can now represent us before the Father as mediator of the better covenant (Heb. 8:6). The word mediator means “to be in the middle” or an arbitrator. He is our advocate (I Jn. 2:1,2). The Apostle Paul states, “there is one God and one

mediator also between God and men, the *man* Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5). There is a “man” in the holy place (heaven) representing us. This was the beginning of his heavenly ministry.

**JESUS HAD TO ASCEND TO ENTER HIS GLORY.** “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). When Jesus ascended “a cloud received him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). His ascension was not a blast off into space, but his entering the presence of God. In Scripture the cloud represented God’s presence. At the completion of the tabernacle “the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Ex. 40:34,35). The same thing happened when Solomon dedicated the temple (II Chron. 7:1-3). When the ark was brought into the temple “the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord (I Kings 8:10, 11). Entering into his glory meant he did not belong to this realm any longer, had he not ascended he would have been a spectacle here on earth in his resurrected body. The proper place for a glorified body was the heavenlies, the realm of the Spirit, the presence of God. Jesus had a certain glory while upon the earth. John said, “we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14). The disciples understood his kingdom to be his glory, Mark 10:37: “Grant that we sit in your *glory*, one on your right and one on your left.” The parallel passage in Matthew 20:21 reads: “command that in your *kingdom* these two sons of mine may sit one on your right and one on your left”. This glory he received at his ascension. He was “taken up in glory” (I Tim. 3:16). It was then that he was “crowned with glory and honor” (Heb. 2:9). This was the final manifestation of his glory before his appearing again.

What does his entering into his glory mean to us? John 17:22 states that the glory God gave to him he has given to us. The glory given him by God was the fact that God declared him to be His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased (II Pet. 1:17). The glory he has given us is that we have become sons of God. It is his purpose to bring many sons into glory” (Heb. 2:10). The glory of the Lord is revealed in the “face of Christ” (II Cor. 4:6). The “face” represents the “likeness” (Ps. 17:15) and when we look into this glory, as if we were looking into a mirror, we are being changed into the same glory or likeness of Christ (II Cor. 3:18). His entering into his glory gives us the privilege of sharing his glory here and now.

**HE HAD TO ASCEND TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR US.** The classic scripture on this subject is John 14:1-3, a passage usually interpreted to refer to the second coming and

mansions being built for us in heaven which we will occupy after we die. The Father's "house" is not heaven, but the church (Heb. 3:6; Eph. 2:19; I Tim. 3:15). The "mansions," correctly translated "dwelling places" is the dwelling place of God among His people ("abode" ver. 23 is the same word as "mansions" [dwelling places] in verse 2). (II Cor. 6:16; Ezek. 37:26,27; Rev. 21:3). The "place" he went to prepare for us is our place before the Father (Heb. 9:11-14). "I will come again to receive you unto myself." Note "receive you unto myself, not receive you in heaven." Did he do this? Yes (ver. 18, 23). Verses 28-29 they are told "you heard that I said to you 'I go away, and I will come to you' (ver.3) and now I tell you before it comes to pass, *that when it does come to pass you may believe.*" If they were going to believe when it came to pass it must have happened in their lifetime. This took place on Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). He says the purpose of this was "that where I am you may be also." In John 12:26 he had said "If anyone serves me, let him follow me, and where I am there shall my servant also be". In Ephesians 1:20 the Apostle states that Christ was raised from the dead and "seated on His (God's) right hand in the heavenlies. Then in chapter 2:6 he states that we have been raised up with him and seated with him in the heavenlies." It is hard for some Christians to grasp the reality and the glory of that statement. He ascended and prepared this place for us.

**CHRIST HAD TO ASCEND IN ORDER TO SEND THE HOLY SPIRIT.** John 16:7: "I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I go not away, the Helper shall not come to you, but if go, I will send Him to you." The Holy Spirit is simply the Spiritual presence of Christ and God in His people. That is why the Scriptures speak of "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ." John 14:18: "I will not leave you as orphans, *I will come to you*" and verse 23: If any man loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him and *we will come and make our abode with him.*"

Christ ascending and sending the Holy Spirit was the message that the restricted, national exclusive right of God (which the Jews claimed) was over. Verses 17 and 18 of Acts 2 is the quotation from Joel 2 which Peter uses to explain Pentecost is generally understood to describe the coming of the Holy Spirit on that day but verses 19-21 is not so generally understood. "Wonders in the sky, signs on the earth, blood, fire and vapor of smoke, the sun being darkened and the moon turning into blood" are the same terms used in the Old Testament to describe the Judgments of God upon heathen nations and the nation of Israel (Isa. 19:1; 34:5,10; Psalm 18:7-10). To understand the significance of these verses we need to note the original prophesy in Joel 2. Peter quotes it verbatim but does not quote the last part of verse 32 which states: "For on Mt. Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls." Jesus warned the people of his day that when they saw certain things begin to happen to flee and escape out of Jerusalem (Luke 21:21-23; Matt. 24:15-22). Therefore verses 17 and 18 of Acts 2 refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Jesus ascending and sending the Holy spirit would enable his troubled and bewildered Apostles to be the instruments through which he ushered into the world this Kingdom and equip his followers throughout the ages to continue his work in the world. So, he explains to them what the Spirit would

do when He was sent. Four times in John chapters fourteen, fifteen and sixteen he promises that the Holy Spirit would be our helper. The word is translated "comforter" in the King James version. It means "advocate" or literally "one called along beside to help". We have help in the time of need (Heb. 4:16). The Spirit doesn't do it all, He is one "along beside us to help." No matter the task we face or the difficulties we encounter we have the very presence of God and Christ in the Spirit as our helper. The Spirit doesn't do it all, He is one "along beside us to help." No matter the task we face or the difficulties we encounter we have the very presence of God and Christ in the Spirit as our helper. Further "and He when He comes will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin because they believe not in me, concerning righteousness because I go to my Father and you behold me no longer, and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged." (Jn. 16:8-11). The sin of which the Spirit convicts is the sin unbelief in Christ (the only sin that condemns a person). He will convict of righteousness because contrary to Satan's lie and the belief of many people, we as Christians can be made righteous in him. He will convict of judgment because he has defeated Satan and bore our judgment on the cross. In verse 13 of this chapter we are told that the Spirit will "guide you into all truth." He is called "the Spirit of truth" (Jn. 14:17; 16:13; I Jn. 5:7). Jesus said in John 8:32 that "you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." It is only by the revelation of the truth that we can be set free. The Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit would glorify Christ (Jn.16:14). For the first time in history a man (I Tim. 2:5) is glorified and takes the position that only Deity had held. Now the position of glory is made known through the Holy Spirit and we can be partakers of that glory. II Peter 1:3, 4: "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature." None of these things could take place without the ascension.

**CHRIST HAD TO ASCEND IN ORDER TO BEGIN HIS RULE AND REIGN.** The first demonstration of the reign and rule of Christ was the fact that the physical structures of all the old system and all they stood for were to be completely destroyed beginning with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD that brought the O.T covenant system to an end. His present rule and reign is disputed by many fundamentalist prophesy preachers who claim Christ will not begin his reign until after the "so called rapture" of the church, the "great tribulation" and "his return to earth with his saints" to set up his kingdom in Jerusalem and reign for a thousand years. This is a gross misinterpretation of Scripture. Christ has been "seated on his (God's) right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that named, not only in this age also in the one to come (Eph. 1:20, 21). If we deny that Christ is now reigning, we miss the message of the New Testament's most quoted passage from the Old Testament. Psalm 110: "The Lord said to my lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet. The Lord will stretch forth your strong scepter from Zion saying, 'rule in the midst of your enemies'" God speaks to Jesus and tells him he must sit on His right hand until all his enemies are conquered. The last enemy to be abolished is death.