The ascension of Christ

Hello my name is Anthony Fontaine. I’m one of the pastors here at City Church. Over the last several weeks we’ve been working our way through the Apostles Creed and getting a better understanding of what early church fathers agreed upon as key tenets to faith in Jesus Christ. If you’ve been here for all of them you have already heard from several of our pastors and this morning you’ll be hearing from me.

I must say this if I had it to do all over again when we were deciding who would preach what and when. I probably would choose a different Sunday morning. I did not realize that this was spring forward Sunday when I signed up for this one. But were here now so we might as well just roll with it.

We’ll start by reading the Apostle’s creed together.

***I believe in God, the Father almighty,
      Maker of heaven and earth.***

***And in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,
      who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
      born of the virgin Mary.
      suffered under Pontius Pilate,
      was crucified, died, and was buried.***

 ***He descended to the dead.
      On the third day he rose again from the dead.
      He ascended into heaven
      He is seated at the right hand of the Father.
      and will come to judge the living and the dead.***

***I believe in the Holy Spirit,
      the holy catholic\* church,
      the communion of saints,
      the forgiveness of sins,
      the resurrection of the body,
      and the life everlasting. Amen.***

I grew up watching Saturday Morning cartoons. Show of hands if you consider watching Saturday morning cartoons a crucial aspect of your childhood. (PAUSE) This is something that was a major ritual of my childhood. It is a ritual that my children will never understand. For one they don’t watch near the amount of television that I did growing up. And two they are growing up with Netflix and Amazon Prime. They could have cartoons at their fingertips at all times of the day if we were to let them. More importantly they don’t have to watch the commercials.

I’ll always remember one of the early times they were at their granddaddy’s house for a family gathering and experienced a commercial interruption during the episode of PJ Mask they were watching. My youngest one was livid. He was like, “Hey who changed the channel?” Where is PJ Mask? Put it back on! We had to explain to a three or four year old what a commercial was. They rarely have to watch anything with commercial interruptions. While I distinctly remember having to watch GI Joe be interrupted for the hourly commercial for Cookie Crisps or Fruity Pebbles.

I also distinctly remember having cartoons shape my early views on Heaven. I remember Heavenly scenes from the like of the Smurfs, Chipmunks, and Looney tunes. Looking back on them they are often lacking in what I would call theological accuracy. But as a seven year old, I wasn’t much of a Theologian.

For what they often lacked in theological accuracy, I mean Tom from Tom and Jerry rode an escalator to Heaven, like that is even biblical, they do point us to an embedded longing to connect with Heaven some how.

This morning we are going to look at a little of what our church fathers believed and we should believe about heaven and how we are connected to Heaven through Jesus Christ.

To start us off today we’re going to read the narrative of Jesus Christ’s ascension. It can be found in several places throughout scripture, for our purposes this morning we will look to the beginning of Acts.

Acts was written by, a doctor, by the name of Luke. This is the same Luke who wrote the gospel of Luke. Luke’s Gospel recounts Jesus’ time with the disciples including his death and resurrection. While Acts serves a basically our earliest church history book, describing how Christianity spread throughout the early first century. The ascension of Christ is the thread that ties them together. As it can be found at the end of Luke and it is how Acts starts. For the same author to mention it in the two books of the Bible that he wrote it must be important.

 Acts 1:1-11

I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach **2**until the day he was taken up, after he had given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. **3**After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

**4**While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father’s promise. “Which,” he said, “you have heard me speak about; **5**for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days.”

**6**So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?”

**7**He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. **8**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

**9**After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. **10**While he was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. **11**They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven.”

Jesus went away into heaven. The scripture says that he was taken and while they watched a cloud took him out of their sight. Jesus had spent 40 days after his resurrection teaching his disciples and preparing them for what He had called them to do.

We see this at the end of Luke when Jesus appears to the disciples that Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures in a better more holistic way. He was teaching them and showing them that Moses had written about Him, the Prophets were foretelling of Him, and that the psalms that they grew up singing were songs about him.

At the end of all of this he is letting them know that they have a job to do they are supposed to teach these things to the world. They’re supposed to take this back to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the rest of the world. He’s given them the Cliff’s Notes. For my millennial brother’s and sisters these were little books with summaries and explanations for all the major literary works. It’s what we were stuck with before the World Wide Web was so easily accessible. Those Jesus cliffs notes were probably way better than the cliffs notes I had to use just to have a fighting chance at understanding Shakespeare or Canterbury Tales.

Jesus told the disciples to be missionaries. He tells us to do that too. For the disciples, that started in Jerusalem. It started at home. That’s were it starts for us too. We need to make disciples in our homes. We need to make disciples in our city. But we don’t need to stop there. The call of Jesus is to make disciples throughout the world.

This time with resurrected Jesus, and the teaching that they received was preparing them to continue with Jesus work. At the time of Jesus’ death the disciples had scattered but once Jesus was there in his resurrected form it was as if they were finally truly beginning to believe that Jesus is who he said he was and that he was going to do the things he said he would do.

Now when Jesus ascends to Heaven he is doing so for a very important reason. Jesus Ascends to Heaven so that He can send his Holy Spirit to his followers. Now if you thought that those Jesus Cliffs notes were something. Here Jesus is turning it up a notch with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is like the Heavenly Cheat sheet. It’s got all of the answers we need. The Holy Spirit is how we will fulfill the mission that God is calling us to.

Pastor Trevor referred to the keys last week that Jesus received when he conquered Hades for us. That was conquering death, opening up the kingdom of Heaven to us, and giving us the vehicle to get there. The Holy Spirit is like the GPS. It has the directions for where we need to go and what he need to do. That is if we will actually listen and be led by the spirit. If we’re led by the Holy Spirit that will tell us how we are going to accomplish the mission that Jesus has given us.

Not only has Jesus returned to give a greater explanation of himself and the scriptures he is promising to send a heavenly helper to help to fill us up where we are deficient.

After Jesus ascends to Heaven its like the apostles are somewhat dumbstruck at what they’ve just seen. I don’t really blame them either. It’s like He was just here and now he floats off and disappears. They’re standing there gazing at the sky and then two Angels show up and they’re like “What ya’ll doing? This man Jesus he’s going to come back the same way that he left when he returns.”

Something inside of me thinks that Jesus went off and God put the veil back over him so that he could not be seen but he was looking down like, “didn’t I tell them what they are supposed to be doing?“ “Why are they just staring at the clouds now?” “Who’s the two closest angels I got?” “Gabriel, Michael go down there and break up the cloud gazing and send them back to Jerusalem.”

So, the angels go to the apostles and tell them look he’s coming back the way he left so go on and get to work. He’s back where he belongs. Now what was it again he told you that you were supposed to be doing?

The ascension also has some other meaningful ties for us. As one of the early church fathers Irenaeus put it because Jesus has ascended we also “ascend through the spirit to the son and through the Son to the father.” Because Jesus is the same nature as us, Our nature, Human nature has taken up residence in the presence of God, through Jesus Christ.

The ascension of Christ demonstrates that God places a human being at the helm of the Universe. Jesus, fully God yet fully human in all the mystery that He is, represents Humankind and the dominion that we have or will have over creation. Bringing us back to the mandate that was given to Adam and Eve in the garden.

**1. Real, resurrected, physical Jesus ascended to a real place called Heaven. (Acts 1:1-11)-(Christ Ascension)**

Where Jesus is now with believers who have died already is what can be referred to as “Present Heaven” or “Intermediate Heaven.” It is called this because it is temporary. This seems to be different than where we as believers will be eternally Scripture shows us in Revelation 21 that Jesus will usher Heaven into the new earth. When Jesus comes back four our resurrection. To resurrect our bodies, He will be bringing Heaven down to earth and restoring us and this earth to a better and perfect form, how we were originally created to be. This will be the localization of Heaven, The new Earth.

In scripture it seems that God gives us some glimpses of this intermediate Heaven. I can’t be exactly certain how this works but I have a couple of good theories.

Stephen when he was facing his death at the hands of an angry mob in Acts gives us one of these glimpses.

(Acts 7:55-56)**55**Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. **56**He said, “Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

Here it almost seems that the present heaven might be like a neighboring universe/or spiritual dimension. Think of it like in stranger things they have the upside down which is the decaying or dying dimension. Well, the present Heaven could be like that instead of death and decay it would be more vibrant and filled with abundant life. The earth in its present state is actually more like the Upside down version of the Earth. This is not referred in scripture that this is a vision or a dream that Stephen had but that he saw it. Like God was peeling back the curtain to show him a peek.

We also see this when, Elisha, the Prophet, Not the college pastor, asked God to give one of his servants, Gehazi a glimpse into the spiritual realm. (2 Kings 6:17) Then Elisha prayed, “Lord, please open his eyes and let him see.” So the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he saw that the mountain was covered with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. Is it that these horses and chariots, basically an army of angels exists beside us normally in our universe and we are unaware because we are normally blinded to them? Or is it a neighboring universe that opens up so that these types of beings are able to move between our universe and theirs? Sound like it may be one or the other.

See, God’s rules for Heaven don’t work the same as the rules he has for us here on earth. Jesus’ body, though. It has the same limitations as our human bodies. He was just now experiencing it in it’s perfected form, His resurrection body. God the Father had to be the one to initiate His ascension. The scripture doesn’t tell us that He’s able to apparate like Harry Potter or that God is beaming him up or down like Scotty and Captain Kirk. There are also examples in scripture of resurrected Jesus eating meals. Jesus’s body was subject to the same space and time limitations that we are used to.

I’m sure if he was here this morning Jesus would be like What in the world are you doing with this spring forward mess. That’s not how we designed it. I heard some of our state leaders had approved to stop that. See that right there is an example of how God is using human means to fix what is broken in our society. Now that’s political legislation that I can get behind. Can all the parents in the building say. Amen.

Jesus needed to ascend to be able to send us the spirit. The Holy Spirit is not limited physically like Jesus was. Christians now have the Holy Spirit. The work of spreading the gospel is more effective than if Jesus were to try to carry it physically to the world.

Sometimes it can be very difficult for us to wrap our heads around how all this works with God and the trinity. Just because we can’t see something or fully understand it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. Sometimes we must be like Tommy Callahan and Take the Butcher’s Word for it. Or for a more biblical reference Deuteronomy 29:29 says that the Hidden things belong to God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever; so that we may follow the words of the law. We have God’s word. We have the account of God’s witnesses. We need to study it and hide it into our hearts so that it can help us to trust in what truth we know has been revealed to us in scripture.

There are two key promises that I see in the ascension. The first is that Jesus Promises that the father will send a Helper. The Holy Spirit. The other is that He is coming back when He’s ready. These things are not only mentioned here. Jesus has been telling the disciples about them all along.

Jesus tried to reveal it to the disciples but they did not understand this leading up to his death.

John 14:2-3 says, ***2****In my Father’s house are many rooms; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you.****3****If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also*.

We Steph ad I were planning to move to Murfreesboro to help start this church. I had come down to interview for some jobs. I got a job offer and because of the time crunch we were in I had to find us a place to live by myself. My bride had to trust that her Bridegroom would find adequate housing for us. To add pressure to my task she was very pregnant and I had to take into account what she would need.

Church, Our bridegroom Jesus promises us that he will prepare a place for us, and that he will return to get us. We may not know all the detail about Heaven and eternity, but we do know that HE is coming back for us.

John 14:16*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+14%3A16&version=CSB#fen-CSB-26674a)*] to be with you forever.*

Through our union with Christ, if you are a believer here with me today we are unified with Christ and we share in His ascension. We share because he has take our humanity to Heaven with him. We share because He has sent the Holy Spirit to help us to carry out His mission. And we share because he has the ear of the Father. After all he’s sitting on his right hand. He’s not going anywhere.

Now that we know that Jesus is in this very real place called Heaven and the plan is that we will be there with him. What is he doing in the mean time?

Well the answer to that question leads me to my second point.

**2. Jesus took his seat at the right hand of God. (Acts 2:22-36)- (Christ’s Session)**

This is known as “Christ’s session” or his reign over the earth.

Later on in Acts two we see the Holy Spirit come down on the people of God at Pentecost. I’m not going to spend too much time on the Holy Spirit as there is another Sunday soon set aside for that. I wouldn’t want to steal Trevor’s thunder. But in Peter’s sermon at Pentecost we see the fruits of what Jesus accomplished in his time with the disciples after his resurrection. As Peter ties it together for us in Acts 2:22-36

***22****“Fellow Israelites, listen to these words: This Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through him, just as you yourselves know.****23****Though he was delivered up according to God’s determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him.****24****God raised him up, ending the pains of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by death.****25****For David says of him:*

***I saw the Lord ever before me;******because he is at my right hand,******I will not be shaken.******26Therefore my heart is glad******and my tongue rejoices.******Moreover, my flesh will rest in hope,******27because you will not abandon me in Hades******or allow your holy one to see decay.******28You have revealed the paths of life to me;******you will fill me with gladness******in your presence.***

***29****“Brothers and sisters, I can confidently speak to you about the patriarch David: He is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.****30****Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn an oath to him to seat one of his descendants on his throne.****31****Seeing what was to come, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah:****He******was not abandoned in Hades, and****his flesh****did not experience decay.***

***32****“God has raised this Jesus; we are all witnesses of this.****33****Therefore, since he has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out what you both see and hear.****34****For it was not David who ascended into the heavens, but he himself says:*

***The Lord declared to my Lord,******‘Sit at my right hand******35until I make your enemies your footstool.’***

***36****“Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”*

This is a portion of Peter’s sermon at the time of Pentecost which is when the spirit is first sent to God’s people. Peter is apparently using some of the “big facts” that Jesus had blessed his disciples with after his resurrection before his ascension. He explains by quoting Psalm 16 that David was prophesying about Jesus. This psalm is recognizing that David was a type of Christ. Kind of a preliminary shadow to help point to Christ. Meaning that it in some way this psalm was true about David, but its truer and richer fulfillment comes in Jesus Christ. The OT was showing us that Jesus would be on the Throne.

Christ took the keys to Hades and freed those who were there. And yet he also freed himself. He defeated death for us and for himself.

Peter is saying we know where David is he buried over there, our ancestors have told you about where they laid David the great king that he was. And he is also saying you all saw Jesus walking around. We witnessed it and you know where he is because God took him. We saw him taken beyond the clouds.

In the ascension Jesus is exalted to God’s right hand and is invested with divine authority. Christ received Glory and honor that had not been his while he was here on earth. Jesus was exalted at the right Hand of God, Jesus is given back the authority that he voluntarily abandoned to come to Earth and to sacrifice himself for our sins. What was stripped from him voluntarily was given back to him. Jesus was taken in to heaven to take control over the universe. He received the Authority to pour out the Holy spirit on the church. Which enables us to continue in doing the work of Christ.

Hebrews 1:3 *The Son is the radianceof God’s glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins,he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*

Jesus completed his work of redemption on the cross and in his resurrection defeated death and just like you sit down after completing the task of mowing the lawn and enjoy that refreshing beverage showing that you have dominion and authority over your lawn. Jesus sitting at God’s right hand also indicates that he received authority over the universe.

We as believers share in this authority that has been given to Christ. We share in the reign of Christ by virtue of our union with Him. Like our Baptism represents that we die, are buried, and are resurrected with Christ. Our union with Christ gives us responsibility to rule with him as well. We are united with Jesus in his death, resurrection and exultation.

Our union with Christ give us the responsibility to continue doing the work he was calling the disciples to do. To go to their City, Country and world to tell others about the Gospel. God gives us the power through the Holy Spirit and the Authority through Jesus Christ to point others to him.

We are already enthroned with Christ. Eph 2:6*He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus,*

We are on the throne because Our Man is on the Throne.

Now because we are with Christ we are on the throne too. The prospect of reigning on the throne as joint heirs with Jesus should spark a deep desire within us to live lives that are worthy of our calling.

Some of us are not doing a good job of that. Myself included. We can’t expect to look like we reign on the throne with Jesus if Greed, Pride, Anger, Sexual Immorality, and Idolatry is what people see when they look at our lives. If that is what they see in us rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Then Church, We’re doing it wrong.

 Colossians 3:1-4 ***3****So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.****2****Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.****3****For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.****4****When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory*.

We cannot realistically have our minds set on Heavenly things when we are letting everything else around us take control of our minds. We must diminish the distractions around us and we must make time for Scripture and meditation.

It can be hard for us to remember that Jesus is on the Throne right now. I mean I get it. When you or you love ones are surrounded by things in this world that make us sad it can be difficult to remember that Jesus is on the throne. We have to remember that the world right now is groaning because it is not how it should be. We feel the brokenness of this world in the suffering that we see around us but we have to remember that He is there.

Jesus is there and He serves as our high priest even from his heavenly throne. As our high priest Jesus serves a mediator between Humanity and God. His death finally fully atoned for our sins. Through him we have access to God. He is the way that our prayers are heard. He is interceding to god the Father on our behalf. Jesus’ ascension and session give us bold confidence and security that God’s door is open and unlocked and we have access.

In Michael Bird’s Book “What Christians ought to Believe” He says this of the intercession of Jesus Christ,

“This intercession should not be conceived of as Jesus constantly requesting a reluctant father to be merciful. Rather, it is more like Jesus presenting his brothers and sisters to the Father, pleading their prayers for them, and turning his father’s gaze upon them. And when the father looks down at his churchly children, He sees them as one with his beloved son who is seated beside him.” Michael F. Bird- *What Christians Ought to Believe*

Jesus pulls us up there with him. He Vouches for Me and You.

I don’t know where everyone is in this room with what they believe about Heaven and Jesus. But, if you’re here and the spirit has begun to move in you and you are beginning to believe and trust in Him please ask to talk to someone more deeply about it. That may be a friend you are sitting with who seems like they are trusting in Jesus. Talk to them. If you aren’t sitting with a friend or you think my friend may not even truly know Jesus then come see me I’ll be at the front of the stage after the service or find anyone you’ve seen on stage today or wearing on of those cool name tags or serving in our church in any way. These are all people we trust can talk to you or get you to some one who can tell you more about what it means to follow Jesus.

Let me pray for us. Lord I thank you for Jesus reigning on the throne. I pray that you help us to remember that He is on the throne and I pray that we would live lives that point others to Jesus on the throne. Be with us as we leave this place and through your spirit give us strength to do that. In your name we pray. Amen.