

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Randy Bloom's Message of August 23, 2009
"The Ascension of Jesus –
God's Commitment to Us"**

[The ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven receives little attention in the Christian church. Today's message explores what actually happened and what it means not just for Christians but also for all humanity.]

[Topics: Ascension; Incarnation; Glorified Body]

Excerpt: (Randy Bloom is the Director of Church Multiplication Ministries of our denomination – Grace Communion International.)

How much or how often have you thought about the ascension of Jesus? Probably not too much or too often. We probably haven't thought too much about its implications for us, as well. So let's look into the ascension of Jesus today and see what Scripture reveals.

First let's start by reading the Apostle's Creed.

We believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. We believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

That's interesting, isn't it? Many Christians read this every week in church services and yet only focus on the birth of Jesus, the crucifixion of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus. But very seldom do they focus on the ascension of Jesus. And yet we find the ascension almost dead center in the Apostle's Creed – the statement of orthodox Christianity.

The subject of Jesus' ascension has been a favorite topic for Randy Bloom. And he's received a lot of comments from church members when he mentions that Jesus ascended into heaven with his resurrected glorified bodily form as God and man as he was on earth. Now many people hadn't thought about it before and if they had, they assumed Jesus entered heaven as a "spirit" being and went into glory with the Father.

But most Christians haven't given much thought about the ascension of Jesus and what actually took place. Let's turn to **Acts 1:9**. It gives a brief description of Jesus' ascension. **"After he said this, he (Jesus) was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."**

Augustine, one of the early church's theologians, wrote: *The ascension festival is that festival, which confirms the grace of all the festival together without which the profitableness of every*

festival would have perished. For unless the Savior had ascended into heaven his nativity would have come to nothing and his passion would have born no fruit for us, and his most holy resurrection would have been useless.

It's a rather bold statement. What Jesus did in his atoning life for us, he did with all of his life. The atonement that occurred just didn't occur on the cross. It occurred when Jesus entered Mary's womb and was born as well. The atonement occurred every nanosecond of his life. It also includes his resurrection, his ascension and his sitting at the right hand of the Father and his functioning as our high priest in heaven, offering ongoing oblation for us as God and man presenting himself as Son of man on our behalf in our stead. You can't take anything out of this sequence. If you do, you don't have atonement. You have an incomplete work.

To understand and better appreciate the impact and relevance of the ascension for us, let's take a look at what Jesus did for us in his life. He came to restore us – all humanity to fellowship and have life with the triune God – Father, Son and Spirit.

Jesus did not just come to enable our sins to be forgiven. That was a critical and essential part of the package. His incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension were not a transaction. It was not a tit for tat between us and God. It was not an appeasement of a holy angry God, who was upset and alienated from us and needed to be satisfied for what we had done.

Yes, there was satisfaction, appeasement, and a number of analogies that are used to describe what Jesus did. But, the ultimate purpose was to bring us back into relationship, fellowship and life with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is what we were created for. This is what was intended for us all along.

Let's look at a couple of passages that talk about this. In **John 17:21**, Jesus was praying for us. He prayed, "**That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us.**"

God's intent and purpose for us was to be like how Jesus was in the Father and the Father was in Jesus – that closeness was intended for us. God wants us to be with and in him. Just as Jesus and the Father are one, that is what is intended for us. That's such an astounding thing. It's hard for us to comprehend how we can be in someone and yet be distinct. Language is so inadequate when you start describing God.

John 14:1-2 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; ... I am going there to prepare a place for you."

God has a place for us. Our place in the heart of God is always something that has been. This is what Jesus came to restore. He came to remove our darkness and alienation and to restore us to be with the Father.

To do this Jesus became human. He took on a physical form. He became in complete solidarity with you and me and everybody else. It's hard to describe to someone how God became one of us. It might be like us becoming an amoeba. Or like us becoming an insect or a dog or a cat. This is such an astounding thing to comprehend – God becoming flesh.

As the Apostle's Creed says that Jesus descended into death or hell, as it is sometimes rendered. Randy believes that occurred when the Word became human. His journey in and through hell began when he was conceived. His time in the womb was probably the best time in hell that he had. Jesus entered into our corruption and accompanied us in our disintegrating existence.

As we noted, the ultimate purpose for Jesus was to bring us back into relationship with the triune God. **1 Tim. 2:5, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."** Now the Greek word for "man" is anthropos, which means human being. If Paul wanted to use another word to describe Jesus he would have, but he didn't.

Now Jesus was resurrected as a man – a different kind of man. Jesus entered into a different dimension of being – something that we will share with him in the future when we, too, will have glorified bodies. Or as Paul refers to in 1 Cor. 15 as "spiritual bodies."

There are some hints in Scripture that after Jesus' resurrection he was still human. **Luke 24:39** talks about Jesus having "flesh and bones." In **Matt. 28:9**, the disciples came and "touched his feet." In **John 20:27**, Jesus extended his hands and told Thomas to touch him and to put his fingers in his side where Jesus was pierced on the cross. After his resurrection, Jesus ate and he drank and said he looked forward to the time to do this in the kingdom.

Now let's look at the impact and relevance of the Jesus' ascension for you and me. Jesus united us in his entire existence. Paul wrote this in Romans 6:3-5.

Rom. 6:3-5, "We were baptized into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptized into union with his death. By our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life. For since we have become one with him in dying as he did, in the same way we shall be one with him by being raised to life as he was." (Good News Translation)

Paul is saying that Jesus was resurrected so that we would be resurrected, too. So how was Jesus resurrected? By the power of the Father through the Holy Spirit. So we, too, will be resurrected by the power of the Spirit. And what was the nature of his resurrection? He was resurrected with a new glorified body. He was still God, he was still man, but he was a new kind of man. This was an entire new re-creation. Not just of people but of everything. Jesus came to make all things new. This was completed with Jesus' ascension.

Our future is tied up in what Jesus was and is, as a resurrected man-God. Jesus had a glorious body. And ours will be transformed like his in the future – a glorious body. **(Phil. 3:21, "Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.")**

Now just exactly what is a glorious body? We don't really know, but we will find out some day. We can see a few things about what a glorious body is like when we read about Jesus when he appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. Jesus was able to manifest physical substance and yet be able to leave that to be able to pass through doors and walls.

In **Col. 2:9** we read, "**For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.**" This bodily form is a different type of body as we've discussed. In Ephesians, we're told that in his ascension, Jesus took us with him. **Eph. 2:6, "...and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."**

Yes, our sins are forgiven and we are reconciled to God, but there's more – we are united with him. God doesn't remain up there or in some other dimension. Nor do we remain here in this existence in this dimension separated from him.

We are in union with Father, Son and Spirit, because we are in union with Jesus. He didn't just fly off to heaven and leave us here. We remain united with him, in union with him in his shared humanity. It's his humanity he shares with all of us.

Jesus took us with him! This is the reality God sees and understands. He has seated us with him in the heavenly places. As some theologians say – as the head ascended so the body did likewise in the Spirit in Christ.

Jesus has taken us where human flesh has never gone before. It's an astounding thing. A glorified human being, who now sits at the right hand of the Father, represents and stands in for all other human beings. For the very first time, there is a human in heaven. And because of that, the rest will follow.

We are seated in a place of honor. That's what it means to be seated at the right hand of the Father. Jesus reclaimed the glory that was intended for humanity that was lost in the Fall. We are no longer on our own; we are with him, because we are IN Christ. Jesus holds our humanity within his humanity.

Gregory Nazianzus, one of the early Church Fathers made a statement about Jesus. *He ascended that he may draw us to himself with the Father and the Spirit.* This is what Jesus has done. He hasn't left us here to our own devices but rather has drawn us into the very life of the Father, Son and Spirit.

Gerrit Scott Dawson made this comment: *Jesus presents us now as his trophies to the Father.* Jesus has told the Father. "It is finished. What we've intended from the beginning has now been taken care of."

The ascension teaches us some profound things as we think about it. Through the ascension, the incarnation of Jesus continues. And it continues forever. Jesus didn't rise above the clouds and entered heaven and say, "Oh, Father, I'm glad that's over with. You wouldn't believe what it was like to be one of those things. It's such a relief to leave that behind." That would have been a slam to us, if he had said that.

Knowing that Jesus took on human form is such a validation to us. But when he stayed that way when he went back should makes us realize our worth and our value as never before. Our humanity is so validated, because Jesus didn't decide to drop us when he returned to heaven. His incarnation continues. The gulf between humanity and God has been bridged and bridged for forever – never to be torn down. Jesus is not UN-human. Our union with God is permanent because of Jesus' humanity. We belong to God and that will not change.

Gerrit Scott Dawson, wrote (in his book, *Jesus Ascended*), *If Jesus did not go up as a man, he cannot come again as a man. The judge would not be our brother, not the one tempted in all ways as we are, not the man with the nail-scarred hands He might be God in that case, but he would not be human. And we would be lost.*

That's absolutely right. To do that, he would have to be incarnated all over again. If Jesus didn't remain in his incarnated state, what was the point of becoming that in the first place? Without being human, what offering could Jesus make as high priest in heaven on our behalf? What he has to offer is our humanity. You and I can't offer ourselves to God. Who are we to do that? It takes the perfect man-God to do this for us on our behalf. This is what Jesus does for us continually.

Other implications of this? Our salvation depends upon our continuing union with Jesus. If Jesus dropped his humanity, he would have dropped us. It would be the UNDOING. We would be LEFT BEHIND. That's really being left behind.

We would be unable to enter behind the veil unless we enter with Jesus – in our union with him. If he did not take us with him, we would still be down here lost. Jesus came to be with us forever.

If Jesus were no longer that man that the disciples knew, who was he? There is not another Jesus that we need to get to know. He is the same Jesus. He is the Jesus, who, when was here in the flesh, was the perfect representation of God. By looking at and listening to Jesus, we could get to know God. His continuing humanity enables us to know that this is the same Jesus that his disciples knew.

We don't have to guess what Jesus and the Father are like. We don't have to wonder what Jesus is like because he has remained the same as when he walked this earth.

The ascension of Jesus as man-God has tremendous implications for ministry. We minister in the ministry of Jesus in our union with him. We don't minister on our own. We're united with Jesus in his entire work. So what we do in ministry, we do in and through our union with Jesus. We simply can't do anything on our own.

And the ascension also teaches us how much God loves us. The Word was willing to come down here and be one of us. He suffered, died, was resurrected and then ascended to heaven so that we might be with him forever. God just loves us so much. Humans are still God's main concern. And he will never, never let us go. He'll never give up on us.

He has woven everything that we're made of into the being of God, because of the incarnation. Most are at a loss of words when they begin to understand the significance of this. We need to remember not only who Jesus was but also who Jesus is. He cares enough for us to cleave to us for all eternity.

So let's conclude with the ascension of Jesus as recorded in **Acts 1:10-11**. **"They still had their eyes fixed on the sky as he went away, when two men dressed in white suddenly stood beside them and said, "Galileans, why are you standing there looking up at the sky? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way that you saw him go to heaven."**

The angles said – this Jesus, this same Jesus, who the disciples had been with for three plus years, this same Jesus they had walked the dusty roads with, this same Jesus they ate with, and drank with.

This same Jesus, not another Jesus, this same Jesus, whom you've come to know, this same Jesus who became a real man in every sense of the word, including taking on our corrupt human nature without sinning, this same Jesus, in whom you have your hope and trust, WILL come back and take us home into a new dimension, which he experiences as glorified man.

Perhaps this is the time for us to take a moment to praise God and to take a moment of awe.

General Group Question: What is the significance that Jesus ascended to heaven in his glorified body and sits at the right hand of the Father?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. We know that Jesus' sacrifice enabled our sins to be forgiven. What else was accomplished by his death, resurrection and ascension?
2. When Jesus was resurrected, how does Scripture describe what he was like?
3. What will be the end result of the transformation of our lowly bodies as described in Phil. 3:21?
4. How is it possible that Christians already sit in heavenly places?
5. What is the significance of Jesus being our High Priest in heaven?
6. How was the Word forever changed when he became God incarnate?
7. What does the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus teach us about God's love for us?