THE MEANING OF ASCENSION – JESUS RULES AS KING!

1. For us
2. For the church
3. For our futures

If I asked the average Christian to tell me what happened on Christmas and why it is so important, I think I would receive an immediate answer that would be 100% correct. It would be something like Christmas is the day Jesus was born. Only in this way could true God became true man so that he could be my Savior.

If I asked the same question regarding Good Friday or Easter or even Pentecost, I am sure that most Christians would be able to describe what happened on that day and adequately explain its significance. I am not so sure that the same could be said about the Festival of Christ’s Ascension. Ascension seems like such a minor observance to most Christians, barely worthy of note.

I am fairly certain that most people know that Jesus completed his earthly ministry some 40 days after his resurrection and then returned to heaven, rising into the skies in miraculous fashion. But I am not sure that most people could tell you why it is important, why it is significant to believers in Christ. I am sure that lack of awareness contributes to the fact that Ascension is not widely observed among us.

The words of Paul in our sermon text today help us understand The Meaning of the Ascension - for us, for the Church, for our futures.

In verses 18 and 19, Paul reveals his heartfelt prayer for every Christian: I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know the hope to which he has called you, just how rich his glorious inheritance among the saints is, and just how surpassingly great his power is for us who believe.

Paul is speaking to people who once lived in darkness, who once kept their eyes clenched shut when they looked in God’s direction. At one time, we could not see our Lord as he really is. We would not accept or even acknowledge the magnificent blessings he offers us. Paul’s prayer is that the Holy Spirit who now lives in our hearts, may open our eyes of faith so that we see more and more fully how loving he is to us!

He mentions just three evidences of his love: hope, riches, and power! From the gloomy and depressing darkness of sin, the Lord has called us into the exhilarating light of righteousness. He has called us out of the despair of unbelief into the joy of salvation found in Christ Jesus.

Whereas before, we faced the certainty of never-ending damnation in hell, we now have the Lord’s personal assurance that we’ll have eternal life with him in heaven. All this is referred to as hope, merely because it has not fully come to us as yet - not because it is in doubt. The fact that God makes this promise transforms hope into an iron-clad guarantee. We know that we have life with our Lord!

But this is part - only a part - of the rich inheritance that is ours as a saint, that is, someone made holy by the blood of Christ! Through our Baptism, we were made children of the heavenly Father and members of God’s family. As his children, we are heirs of everything the Father possesses. But that inheritance is not given to us upon his death or ours, as is the case here in this world.

We received the inheritance when Jesus died. It is his death that gives us access to
everything the Father has. The Lord our God is always with us with the riches of his power and wisdom, with the treasure of his love and devotion to us. He blesses us in every conceivable way. He even over-blesses us, giving us more material goods that we need, giving us opportunities to share the gospel in abundance, and enabling us to be his ambassadors to the world around us.

All of this comes to us because of his incomparably great power. You and I, literally and in every sense of the word, are miracles! As natural born human beings, the Bible describes us as spiritually dead, blind, and misguided. We had no power to come alive, we could not approach the Lord. We were not able to open our eyes and see the truth of our salvation.

Even if we had the power to do those things, we would not have done them. We would have stubbornly clung to our false notions of what it takes to become righteous in God's sight. Only the power of God’s love, operating in the power of the Holy Spirit, could overcome our refusals and rejections and bring us to saving faith.

We sometimes delude ourselves into thinking we played some role in coming to faith, as if we must have had at least consent in some way to the working of the Holy Spirit. But Paul blows that argument out of the water. Only the incomparably great power of God could bring it about such a change.

To help us see how much power that is, Paul compares it to another exhibition of God’s power: \textit{It is as great as the working of his mighty strength, which God worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, and above every name that is given, not only in this age but also in the one to come.}

Can you imagine the power it takes to raise a lifeless body back to life? Oh, we are familiar with the kind of procedure required to restart a heart’s beat. But that can only be done for a very short time after the heart has stopped. What must it take to restart life after a three day death? That is the kind of power it took to bring you to faith in Christ Jesus. That is much more than we possess. That is the kind of power only God has - the power needed to make us his own.

It is the kind of power now entrusted to Jesus. At his Ascension, Christ re-entered the full presence of God in heaven. The Son was then invited by the Father to sit at his right hand. This is the position of greatest power, trust, and authority in existence. This is the position Christ Jesus now occupies. From now until the end of time, God also placed all things under his feet and made him head over everything for the church. The church is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

It is in these words, my dear Christian friends, that we find the meaning of Ascension, our reason to celebrate today! Jesus now rules as King - King over his people as individuals, King over his people as members of the Holy Christian Church. The fact that Jesus has ascended into heaven and now sits at the Father’s right hand means that everything is under Jesus’ control.

As King, Jesus knows all things. He knows you and me inside and out. All our needs are crystal clear to him - both spiritual and physical. In a power that is only his, he can meet every one of those needs. There is no limit to his ability to help us, and in divine wisdom, he knows what is truly best for us and brings it to pass. Make no mistake about it, as King, Jesus can and does watch over you day and night - every day and night! There is no need for fear or apprehension in life - King Jesus is there to guide and protect you!
As King, Jesus is deeply concerned about his church on earth, just as a head is concerned with the rest of its body. He suffered and died to make the church a reality, to make it his own. From his place at the Father’s right hand, he is fully prepared to use all his power to protect his church from any enemy. He is there to bless the spread of the gospel into every nation on earth. He is there to keep it holy and pure in saving faith.

No deceit of Satan, no force in this world, can prevail against us, because he stands with us. Oh, the church may suffer like her Lord at times. But the ultimate victory is guaranteed. He will bring his people to himself in heaven and every opponent will be vanquished.

Today, we heard a lot about Jesus as King. He was promised as King. He was born as King. He was raised from the dead as King. He is forever glorified as King. But this is the meaning of his Ascension. Jesus rules as King. He rules for our good. He rules now and forever. Amen.

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