

The Call to the Great Community!

Lesson #4: “Join in the Eternal Conversation of God!”

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Right now, Jesus is at the right hand of God, in the throne room of Heaven, praying for you! Romans 8:34b teaches, “Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” Ascension Day, which was on Thursday, forty days after Easter, is the crowning event of the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ but is often hidden in the shadow of our proclamation of His crucifixion and resurrection.

We skip over the triumphant reality of Jesus’ ascension to the right hand of the Father, yet we declare His imminent return in the second coming of Jesus Christ. We leave the “where is He now” and “what is He doing in this present age” kind of ambiguous. Let’s be clear, right now, at the right hand of God, Jesus is praying for you! Amazing, the Holy Spirit, who dwells in you, and Jesus, who is at the right of the Father in Heaven, are speaking with one another and with the Father about you. God exists in a perfect relationship with perfect communication for His glory and our good, for eternity.

Today, I want to teach you the importance of Jesus’ ascension so that you can live with even greater confidence in your daily prayer life as a member of His body. We are held together by prayer because prayer is one of the few things we do that will stand for eternity. Revelation 8:3-4 teaches us this truth, “Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand.”

This is what the scripture reading was about from Acts 1:1-11. That is not the only place we saw the ascension recorded. Listen to the following passages:

- Luke 24:50-53, “And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.”
- Mark 16:19, “So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.” We also hear it recorded in the ancient creeds of the Bible.
- 1 Timothy 3:16, “By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”

On the fortieth day after Easter, concluding the church calendar season of Eastertide, Jesus ascended (bodily rose, “taken up in glory”) to heaven before His disciples’ eyes. Jesus did not leave behind his physical body, resurrected in the flesh, glorified in the Spirit, so that He could

take His place at the right hand of the Father. No, very importantly, giving us hope for the New Heaven and New Earth, Jesus in His glorified and resurrected body, is now at the right hand of God, praying for us!

The ascension is filled with theological significance and practical implications for our faith and practice. **First**, for our faith in Jesus and His Kingdom rule, Jesus' ascension demonstrates the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy – Jesus' rule will never end. Listen to the ancient prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14, "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

Furthermore, Hebrews 1:1-4 affirms Jesus' fulfillment of this prophecy, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they."

What does it mean that Jesus "sat down at the right hand"? It means that Jesus has the respect and authority of the Sovereign! To be at the right hand is to be the trusted agent of the will of the King. Heaven is the control room of creation from which the Sovereign Creator rules over all things in heaven and earth. Do you know the awesome news? God's control room is one day coming to earth in the New Heaven & Earth.

Jesus has the authority of Heaven in earthly and heavenly affairs. From 1 Peter 3:22, Peter declares that Jesus "is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him" (cf. Ephesians 1:18-23; Philippians 2:9-11).

Jesus declared this authority before His ascension as He gave the Church the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Our relationship with God and our work for Jesus in His Church rest in His rightful authority, not in the authority of any man or denomination. Living and working under rightful authority (headship) is an essential reality and one that God cares very deeply about—not just for His Son, but for all of His children and all of creation, for all time. *Are you living under the authority of Jesus Christ and His Word? How far reaching are the implications to your answer?*

Second, Jesus' ascension to the right hand of God is a guarantee of our own bodily resurrection. Our hope is not simply in this life, but for eternal life; Jesus' resurrection and

ascension are essential to our hope and critical to our understanding of this body and its future, along with all creation, in the New Heaven & Earth.

All who are in Christ Jesus are promised participants in His ascension. Paul states this in Ephesians 2:4-7, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

This event in Jesus’ ministry invites us to live faithfully and to keep our focus on Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Paul taught us this in Colossians 3:1-2, “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Our work in this life is now informed by the promises of God and His rightful rule over all creation.

We are no longer bound to this earth, our place in Heaven is already being prepared for us. Speaking of His own future ascension in John 14:1-3, Jesus taught us how this is important for all those who follow Him, “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

These are the comforting words of Jesus Christ, made possible through His ascension. We can share these words with others because we know Jesus is alive, ascended to the right hand of God, in a place of authority.

Third, Jesus’ ascension means that the One who rules with such great authority from Heaven, prays for us based on His firsthand human experience of temptation and suffering upon the earth. We don’t have a distant God, but a personal One. The Bible teaches us this in Hebrews 4:14-16, “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Jesus prays for us continually and His prayers are effective, not only because of Jesus’ authority, but also because of the intimate knowledge of Jesus’ experiences as a person who walked on the earth! So don’t feel guilty and heavy-burdened if your prayer life is lacking, just remember to never stop starting in your conversation with Jesus, who is already praying for you.

What a powerful truth that fuels my prayer life with desire to be with this God who loves me and gave Himself for me. In fact, our very prayer lives are empowered by the presence of God in us, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are joining in the conversation between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Prayer is sharing in God’s eternal community; this is what it means to be called to the Great Community – you have joined the eternal conversation of God!

Paul teaches us about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:26-27, “In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

In conclusion and in preparation for next Sunday’s celebration of Pentecost Sunday, with the ascension of Jesus Christ, the stage is set for the miracle of Pentecost, when the power of the risen Christ comes upon the disciples of Jesus to birth His church, through the fulfillment of the promise of the Helper, the Holy Spirit. Jesus is keeping His promise to His followers that He will always be with us. Jesus’ ascension does not leave us alone in this world, but leads to the fulfillment of His prayer for His body in John 17:20-26, “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

God is with us, and He will never leave us nor forsake us – He will see us through to the completion of His Plan A! God is with us through His presence and power living in us! May God be exalted in and through you – a fellow member of the Great Community where the eternal conversation of God is bearing good fruit in our everyday lives. Join the conversation and pray John 17 every day, continue to pray through the Psalms each and every day, joining with Jesus under His headship so that we, each and every one of us, may walk in the unity of the Spirit, so that the world may see us as one mature body, in synch with God and coordinated together. We can do more together than we can do apart.