

Our Ascended Lord

Ephesians 4:7-10

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸ Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.” ⁹ (Now this, “He ascended” - what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)”

In our last study of this epistle we looked at the ***sevenfold unity*** of the church as presented verses 4-6, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” It was in these verses that we saw that God's purpose for the church was to present a unified front against the onslaught of Satan and as a witness to the world.

This week we are going to continue our study as we take a look at our ascended Lord. Look at what we have been told in verses 7-10, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says: When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. (Now this, He ascended - what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)”

As we come to the place of studying this passage of scripture, we must do so with humble hearts and open minds, seeking an understanding from the Holy Spirit.

One cannot study Ephesians 4:7-10 apart from the rest of the Word of God for the ascension of our blessed Lord is at the heart of the entire counsel of God. Therefore, with this thought in mind, look with me at Luke 24:50-51, “And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.”

Now look at Acts 1:8-11, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

It was no accident that Jesus ascended into heaven, for it was not only the *plan* of God, it was the *desire* of our Lord, seen in John 6:62, “What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?” And in John 7:33, “Then Jesus said to them, I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me.” And then in John 17:5 Jesus prayed this prayer, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

It is imperative for us to realize that we cannot speak of the ascension into heaven, without looking at our Lord's decension into the "lower parts of the earth." During the earthly ministry of Jesus, the world looked for a sign, and Jesus responded to their request in Matthew 12:39-40, “But He answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” **When Jesus died He descended into the Paradise side Hades (the Old Testament word is Sheol).** **Hades and Sheol** simply refer to “**the abode of the dead.**” At that time Hades was in the heart of this earth, and divided into two compartments; one included the torment side of Hades, and the other, the Paradise side of Hades.

This truth is seen in the Old Testament when Joseph was thought to have been slain by a wild beast, and we are told in Genesis 37:32-35, “Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son’s tunic or not? And he recognized it and said, It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces. Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, For I shall go down into the grave (the Hebrew word here is Sheol) to my son in mourning. Thus his father wept for him.” Another instance is found in the Book of Job, when he was so afflicted that he cried out to God in Job 14:13, “Oh, that You would hide me in the grave (again the Hebrew word here is Sheol), that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me!” Once more we turn to the New Testament, and we are told in Acts 2:25-27, “For David says concerning Him: I foresaw the LORD always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” And a scripture that we sometimes miss is found in Luke 23:43 as Jesus turned to one of the thieves and said, “And Jesus said to him, Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

When Jesus died, His spirit entered into the heart of this earth, and when He arose He brought all the spirits of the Old Testament saints out of the Paradise in the center of this earth, and carried them with Him to the Paradise far above the first and second heavens, all the way to the third heaven, or to the dwelling place of God himself. It is that very thought that Paul had in mind when he said in 2 Corinthians 12:2, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven.”

There is no doubt that when the child of God dies his spirit goes directly to God. In the Old Testament Ecclesiastes 12:7 says, “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” The New Testament also says this in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”

Look with me, first of all, as we study the ascension of our Lord from the standpoint of His exit. Verse 10 says, “He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.” He that *descended* is also He that *ascended* far above all heavens, the first heaven where the birds fly and the clouds float, the second heaven that you and I know as “outer space,” and into the third heaven, where God is. Go with me to the Mount of Olives, as recorded in Acts 1:9-10, “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel.” **From this point on the face of this earth, Jesus made His way back to heaven.** And so, the Bible declares that Jesus transcended the law of gravity, and began to rise up and up until (notice the wording right here) “a cloud received Him out of their sight.” The bible does not say “the clouds received out of their sight,” but “a cloud received him out of their sight.” The word “a” is singular, and I believe the “cloud” here was a chariot of deity, the Shekinah glory of God that went before the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament.

Verse 10 says, “Who also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” **The Greek here means they were stretching their eyes seeking to get one last look at their Lord.** These great men of God were awestricken, as they watched their wonderful Master vanish into the heavens. But then their minds were brought back to earth with the announcement in verse 11, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you

into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” This announcement set that band of followers of Jesus Christ afire, and they went forth with renewed determination to reach the world with the glorious gospel.

Second, look at the ascension of our Lord from the standpoint of a victorious entry. Look at verse 8 of our text, “Therefore He says: When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.” This verse is actually a quotation from Psalm 68:18, “You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive...” This Psalm speaks of a time when David had led his people to victory in battle, and therefore, he brought them back in triumph and reunited them with their homeland.

Surely this is what the Paul had in mind as he thought of the great triumphal victory that Jesus had over Satan, hell, and the grave. This must have been the truth of the prophecy of Psalm 24:7-8, “Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.”

Can you imagine how it must have looked that day in Glory? All the angels must have lined the streets, to wait and watch for the return of their victorious King, with all of the saints of the ages with Him. The author Gibbons reminds us that the “victory march” from battle was a Roman custom, and the most noted of these was that of the Roman General Oreland. **When Oreland would come back from battle after winning the victory, the Roman senators would lead the march, followed by twenty elephants, and those followed by four tigers.** And then there would come the chariot of Oreland having a captured slave holding the crown of the captured king. And chained on the wheels there would be those leaders and kings that had been captured in the battle. The people would run out to meet this great general and there would be rejoicing in the streets.

I want you to know that when Jesus went back to heaven He went back with the victory. I can imagine all the saints of old were marching in front of the great King, and I can imagine that Jesus must have had death, hell, and the grave chained to his loins when He walked through those heavenly gates. We have been given this insight in Colossians 2:15, “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.” Surely there was rejoicing in heaven that day.

Let me close our study tonight with this thought: The Jesus who came into this world as the Son of God went back to heaven as the Son of man. There is now a glorified humanity in glory, for He who came to this earth as the Godman, went back to heaven as the man God, as seen in 1 Timothy 2:5. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus."

My question tonight is this – Do you know this man who "God... has highly exalted...and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father"?

Someone has asked, “How do you know that Jesus ascended into heaven?” **Let me answer that question with a little story.** It seems as if there was a little boy outside flying his kite one day when it went behind the branches of a huge tree. The little boy just kept right on flying his kite. **It wasn't long before a passerby came along and inquired as to what the youngster was doing.** The boy quickly replied, “I'm flying my kite.” To which the man replied, “But how do you know it's still up there?” The boy smiled and answered, “Because I can feel the tug on the string.”

My friend, I know that my Lord is still in heaven, because I can feel Him tugging on the strings of my heart.