

“PREACHING THE ASCENSION TO OURSELVES.”

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Scripture Texts: Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:25; 10:12-13

Prayer: Holy Father, humanly speaking the task before me is impossible. Rule and over rule now; like a stream of water direct all our hearts and minds to the truth of your Word and its application to our lives. Come, Holy Spirit, hear and help, for the sake of Jesus, in whose name we are bold to make all our requests. Amen.

Introduction.

We are continuing to learn how to preach the truth of the Gospel to ourselves in the on-going battle with our flesh and the voices in our heads and the lies of Satan and the world around us.

We have before us two opportunities to fine tune our preaching in two specific areas of the Gospel that have much to say to us, the Ascension of Jesus and the Pentecost of the Holy Spirit which is in two weeks. This morning we will focus on the ascension of our Lord.

Scripture reading

Imagine a Memorial Day in the Christian Church. Imagine that Jesus died and wasn't raised from the dead, or imagine that Jesus died, was raised from the dead, but then years later died like all the other people raised from the dead.

Imagine a great memorial place in Israel somewhere that you can visit and linger and pray and pay your respects to a great fallen hero and warrior. Imagine a dead Jesus.

That's why the ascension is so important. Jesus wanted to make it very clear to the disciples and to all who follow Him that He is no longer here, His body cannot be found on earth. He has ascended back to heaven where He came from and now He sits on the throne at the right hand of the Father and from there He rules and reigns in power and authority. We worship a risen Savior and Lord and ascended king.

Hebrews 4:14-16.

Under the old covenant once a year on the Day of Atonement the people of Israel would gather at the tabernacle and later the temple and watch as a single mortal man, a Levite, a man chosen from all the other priests to be the high priest, would solemnly, no doubt with some fear and trembling, enter into the sacred Holy of Holies and take blood from a sacrifice and sprinkle it on the mercy seat for the sins of the people and offer prayers to reconcile the people to God.

One of their own, a man like them, flesh and blood, would go in and render this sacred service. Only the high priest and only once a year and only under the strictest of specific instructions.

I say this to help us realize how staggering this invitation in Hebrews 4 sounded to the Jewish ears that heard it. Draw near to the throne of grace? Approach the throne of the living God, come into His very presence? Are you serious? How is this possible?

Because another man, a man like us, a great high priest took the blood not of bulls and goats, but His own blood and sprinkled the mercy seat atoning for our sin, securing our eternal redemption and by His torn flesh, torn the veil and invited us in.

Do you realize that when Jesus ascended back into heaven, back into His previous glory, He didn't shake the dust off His feet, He didn't cast off His flesh and bones, He didn't get rid of His human name, Jesus.

There is a human being who has passed from the earth into heaven who is one of us, like us in every way. We are of the same family, He has suffered with us.

He bears the scars and marks in glory. When we are going through the worst pain or affliction or heartache, we know He felt the very same thing. He knows the deepest emotions of our soul. He understands what we are going through, He completely sympathizes with all our weaknesses and infirmities, our trials and temptations. He is for us, not against us.

You don't have to hid your weakness, your failures, your mistakes, your messes you have made. He knows them. He knows that even when you are at your very best, when your faith is the strongest, it is still mixed with unbelief. And at your very worst, you are still invited to come, invited to approach the throne of grace and mercy and there you will find plenty of grace and mercy.

He has completely identified with us in every way but sin. So when you are feeling alone, isolated, cast off, without hope or help, talk back to your self and tell

your self, that's not true, you are not alone, you are not the only one who feels like you do. You have one in heaven who is like us in everyway and has experienced and gone through what we are.

Hebrews 2:17-18 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

There is nobody Jesus can't or doesn't understand and there is nobody He cannot help. Whatever our circumstance, whatever we have done and no matter how often we have done it, to the one who truly seeks Him, He is ready and available to hear and answer and help.

Do we realize how significant this invitation is? We are allowed to do something the OT never imagined. Because of the high priestly ministry and work of Jesus, now we all have immediate access to God and freedom to come as often as we want. And we have assurance that when we come we will have acceptance because of Jesus.

God is radically committed to giving us access to Him in prayer, radically committed to removing every hindrance and barrier, radically committed to making it possible for unholy sinners like us to come into His holy presence and stand before Him.

Consider the painful lengths God has gone to to make it possible for us to pray to Him. How can we resist or neglect so great a gift?

When we see the kind of high priest we have, we should be all the more quick to come, one who understands, who sympathizes, who empathizes, one who is united with us and identifies with us.

Don't let your own lack of faith or sense of unworthiness hinder you. Don't come relying on yourself, come relying on Christ alone. This is why when we pray, we pray in Jesus' name.

Hebrews 7:25.

This is surely one of the greatest promises in all the Bible.

One of the main functions of the OT priesthood was to speak to God on behalf of the people that the people might have favor with God. But their ministry was

limited. First, they died so their ministry was interrupted, always changing. Second, they had to speak on their own behalf as well as others since they too were sinful.

Jesus is our permanent, ever-living intercessor. His ability to come before the Father on our behalf is unlimited. He is profoundly and permanently identified with us and involved in our lives, and this motivates His prayers for us. He has an unceasing concern for us, an uninterrupted availability to us.

Can you imagine what Jesus' prayers are like? Have you ever been prayed for by someone who really understands what you are going through, one who has been through the very same thing? They get it. Nothing trite, no platitudes.

When Jesus prays for us, it's filled with understanding, compassion, totally gets us and our situation. Can you imagine how effective Jesus' prayers are? They are completely spot on. He nails it every time. He has suffered what we suffer.

When those voices in your head start taking you down and leading you to lies about you or about God, tell yourself what Jesus is doing for you right now. He is praying for me, He is not against me. Even what I am experiencing and going through right now is under His sovereign gaze.

Quote Romans 8:34 to yourself over and over.

Romans 8:34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Jesus didn't ascend to heaven to condemn you. There is no condemnation for those in Christ. Chase that thought away with the truth.

So if Jesus is praying for us all the time, then why are we having hard times? Well, Jesus doesn't pray like us. We pray, "Jesus, fix this, make it go away, get me out of this, make everything all better again."

Jesus prays for our sanctification, for our growth in righteousness, for the strengthening of our faith, for our spiritual blessing and benefit, for afflictions that will prepare us for an eternal weight of glory, for our humbling, for our being able to comfort others, for our increased dependence on God, for our weaknesses that become a demonstration of His power.

So what do we do when we get some crushing news? We can pray, “Jesus, this is bad news to us, this is a hard providence, and our hearts are broken. But we know you are praying and this has happened because you are praying. You are for us, you have already proved that over and over. So give us your strength, your courage, your grace and mercy, your wisdom in the face of this. Glorify yourself and work it for our good and our eternal salvation.”

We don't know what the future holds but we do know who holds the future.

The ascension of Jesus changes our picture of suffering and helps us see that heaven is a place that's not indifferent to human suffering. He is sovereign over it.

Hebrews 10:12-13.

These verses draw another contrast between earthly priests and Jesus our great high priest.

Those of you reading through the OT this year read about all the details of building the tabernacle. And soon we will be reading through the details of the building of the temple. There is something missing in all those detail you probably never noticed and never even thought about. There are no seats, no chairs, no benches.

In the OT the priests offered sacrifices on behalf of the people and themselves. When they finished with the sin offerings and the peace offerings and the guilt offerings and the burnt offerings, what did they do then? Did they sit down and rest? No there were no seats in the tabernacle and temple. What did they do? They started over. Their work was never finished. The sacrifices never ceased.

No priest ever sat down in the presence of God in the earthly temple. They stand, Jesus sits.

This is why Jesus is the superior priest, the great high priest. His offering, His sacrifice was perfect and complete and sufficient. When He said it is finished, it was finished.

Now Jesus has sat down in heaven on the throne of grace where He does one thing over and over again, make intercession for all the saints on earth, advocating for us before the Father.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, all the OT temple sacrifices were rendered superfluous, redundant, unnecessary. When Jesus rose from the dead He

put thousands of priests out of a job. They had no more value before God. This is why there is no need for priests, altars or sacrifices in the NT church.

Notice the assurance that all the enemies of Christ will be conquered. Rest in this truth, assure your anxious soul of this promise. Sin, death, evil, Satan, this world, all godless rulers and nations, all will be defeated.

If He has authority over Satan, sin and death, what can there be that He doesn't have authority and power and dominion and sovereignty over? What do you fear, what do you doubt, what are you anxious about? Why?

It's like the ship captain in the midst of a storm. If he isn't anxious or sweating then why are you? Do you think Jesus is nervous or worried or anxious or wringing His hands over what's going on in the world right now, or in your little world right now? Keep your eyes on Him, you can start to worry when He does, but not until then.

When the one who is praying for you also has all power and authority to accomplish all He wants to accomplish, what can happen to you apart from what He deems best?

What is your self preaching to you? What are you preaching to yourself?

The point of the ascension of Christ was not just as a means of getting Jesus back into heaven where He came from, but to also bring us to God.

Knowing the benefits and blessings of the ascension serves to increase our confidence in the Gospel, that we can put our faith in it without hesitation or reservation.

The ascension shows us how much Christ cares for us and continues to care for us. We are not orphaned, left alone, ignored. Jesus has not moved on to bigger and better things.

When your sin and guilt and failures cause you to feel insecure and unworthy, remember the blood of Jesus and His finished work and the throne of grace and mercy He invites you to.

Stop listening to yourself and start preaching to yourself. When your doubts, worries, fears, anxiety, paranoia, get the best of you, when your self says God is against you, when your self starts grumbling, complaining, murmuring, telling lies, remember who is sitting on the throne and what He is doing there.

Rest in His sovereign goodness. Let His perfect love cast out all your fear.
Remember Jesus is the reigning King of the universe, He is very much active and engaged in our world and in our lives, He is for you, so who can be against you?

Live and pray more boldly, more confidently. And above all hope in your glorious future. He is coming back the way He left and when He does He will put an end to all suffering and death and we will reign with Him as our king forever.

His kingdom cannot fail, He rules o'er earth and heav'n;
The keys of death and hell to Christ the Lord are given,
Lift up your heart, Lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!