

Risen, Ascended, Seated

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Date: 14 June 2026

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[0 : 00] And we're going to recite two-thirds of the Nicene Creed together. So please stand with me. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of the same essence as the Father.

Through Him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, He came down from heaven. He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made human. He was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And on the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead and His kingdom will never end.

Okay, thank you very much. Please do take a seat. There's also a sermon outline in your bulletin that might help you to follow along.

[1 : 44] Some of you might like to take notes that might help you to concentrate as well. But most importantly is to keep your Bibles and your hearts open. Let me begin by praying once again to our Heavenly Father.

Heavenly Father, your Son has ascended far above all heavens. And yet by your Spirit, you have promised to be near to all who seek you.

And so Lord, we ask that you draw near to us now as we open your Word. Where our understanding is shallow, deepen it. Where our faith is dim, brighten it.

And grant that what we hear this morning will take root in our hearts and bear fruit in the way we live, pray, and hope. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now imagine someone asking you what the most significant events of Christ's life are. What would you say? Most likely we will recall His birth.

[2 : 52] We will remember the angelic announcement, the humble circumstances in which He appeared as a baby, and the visit of the Magi. And of course we will mention His death.

After all, did we not say last week that the cross stands at the absolute center of our faith? It is how we are rescued. And we will also include His resurrection.

The tomb is empty, death is defeated, hope has won. And that is reflected in our calendar, isn't it? After all, what are our major Christian festivals?

Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter. Birth, death, and resurrection. But I suspect once we've done that, we often stop.

Surely we've covered everything, right? If there's anything else, it will be about what Jesus will do in the future. To come back a second time and clean everything up once and for all.

[4 : 00] But let us reread the Nicene Creed again. Did we miss anything? Let's have a look. So there is, He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.

So we have Christmas there. And then there is, He was crucified, suffered, and was buried. So we have Good Friday there.

And then there is, on the third day, He rose again. So there is Easter. Okay, all done, right? Next up is, He will come again with glory.

Oh, wait a minute. There is something we missed. There's still one more thing before that. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Oh, whoops. Now, at this point you might go, but Pastor, did we really miss anything? Isn't that just part of His resurrection?

[5 : 05] Well, in one sense, yes. If Christ had not risen, He could never have ascended. The resurrection comes first. But if so, why didn't the authors of the Nicene Creed just jump straight

from, He rose again to, He will come again?

Why did they deliberately slow down and add that extra line? And why did all the later Protestant confessions basically do the same thing as the Nicene Creed?

Because the ascension isn't simply an afterthought. It isn't just a final scene before the credits roll. Rather, it tells us something important about Jesus.

Whereas the resurrection answers the question, Did Jesus conquer death? The ascension answers the question, Where is Jesus now?

And we need to know the answer to both. Indeed, a quick scan through the New Testament will reveal the ascension is stressed just as much as the resurrection.

[6 : 21] At first glance, it might not seem that way, since there are only seven verses in total that describe the actual event. We read three of them earlier, in Acts 1 verse 9 to 11.

But if we take a closer look, we'll soon realize references to the ascension are all over the place. Here is one of them from our other Bible reading this morning, Ephesians 1 verse 20.

It should be on the screen. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead.

So there's reference to the resurrection. And seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. So there is reference to his ascension.

Or here is Jesus making explicit reference to it when rebuking his grumbling disciples, John 6 verse 62. Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?

[7 : 29] Or here is Peter in his speech to the Jewish council after being arrested, Acts 5 verse 30 to 31. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead, whom you killed by hanging him on a cross.

So there's resurrection once more. God exalted him to his own right hand as prince and saviour, that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.

So there is ascension. God exalting Jesus to his right hand. And interestingly, do you know what is the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament?

It isn't Psalm 23. It isn't Isaiah 53. It is Psalm 110, which is all about the exalted Messiah seated at God's right hand.

And once more, the ascension is alluded to. Okay, pastor, I hear you say, glad you are so excited by that, but why should I care?

[8 : 39] In fact, isn't Jesus' ascension actually something bad? After all, isn't the ascension essentially abandonment, if we are being honest here?

I mean, here we are in need of our star player, and he just walks off the court, leaving us behind. Isn't that just cold-hearted?

But come with me to the end of Luke 24. That's the other place in the New Testament where this event is described. And what happens after Jesus ascends?

Luke 24 verses 52 and 53. Then they worship him and return to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

The disciples worship and celebrate. They certainly didn't think Jesus was abandoning them. On the contrary, they seem to have treated it as good news.

[9 : 47] Why? Because, as I hope to show you this morning, the ascension tells us what the reason Jesus is presently doing as a result of who he is.

And when we know that, we too will worship and celebrate. So my aim in today's sermon is simple. I want to pay attention to the somewhat neglected doctrine of the ascension.

I want to show us what it's all about and why it's significant. And there are three things in particular I want you to see. So let's jump straight in.

And the first thing I want to show you about the ascension today is that it is about Jesus' arrival as man. Jesus' arrival as man.

Let me read Acts 1 verse 9 once again. Now, if we only had this verse, it would look very much like a departure story.

[11 : 03] After all, that's what the disciples see. They watch Jesus rise. A cloud hides him from their sight. And that's it. From their perspective, Jesus is leaving.

But here's the thing. Acts gives us the view from earth. It tells us what the disciples saw. But scripture actually gives us another perspective as well.

It tells us also what heaven saw. And we need to turn back some 600 years to the prophet Daniel if we want to see that point of view.

So come with me now to Daniel 7 verse 13 to 14, where we're given a glimpse of a vision. It should appear on the screen. In my vision at night, I look.

And there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.

[12:07] He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worship him. So at this point in the vision, the camera is zooming in on this majestic figure known as the son of man.

Of course, we now know this is Jesus. And just like Acts 1, he is on the clouds. But notice the direction of approach.

The son of man isn't coming down from heaven. He is going to the Ancient of Days. In other words, viewed from the earthly camera, yes, Jesus is leaving.

But viewed from the heavenly camera, Jesus is arriving. He is approaching God's throne.

But you might ask, so what? If Jesus arrived before the Father in his throne room, what exactly is so significant about that?

[13:17] After all, we are simply talking about Jesus moving from one location to another. Is that really such a big deal? Good question. Ascension. And it all depends on whether we conceive of the ascension merely in physical, spatial terms, or as something more than that.

You see, as Tim Keller points out, even in English, the word ascend can carry a deeper meaning. When we speak, for example, of someone ascending the throne, we don't merely mean that they climb a few steps to sit on a very nice chair.

Although they do literally do that. We mean their status has changed. Their relationship to an entire kingdom has changed. They've been crowned.

And the same is true here. When we say Jesus ascended, we do not simply mean that he got on a heavenly escalator and relocated to a higher part of the universe.

Although it is true that, again, he literally did rise. Rather, we mean that he entered into God's very presence to claim the kingdom that is his.

[14:38] That's what Daniel 7 verse 14 makes clear. And from this position, he now relates to the entire universe in an entirely new way, as I will show later on in the sermon.

But all we are saying for now is simply this. Jesus' ascension isn't so much a physical relocation as it is a status recalibration.

But before we talk about status and rank, I want us to spend a couple of minutes thinking about something even more staggering first. You see, when Jesus first came to earth, what did he come as?

The Creed tells us. He became incarnate. He became human. But this is just as important. When Jesus returned to heaven, what did he return as?

He went back as a man too. You see, the eternal son became what he had never been before.

[15:59] A human being. And when he returned home to the Father, he did not cease to be what he had become.

He did not simply lay aside his humanity once his earthly work was finished. He did not wear humanity like a costume and remove it the moment his mission was over.

How do we know that? Well, come back with me to Acts chapter 1. And did you notice how Jesus goes up to heaven? He ascends visibly in the presence of many eyewitnesses and bodily.

That is, he didn't just disappear like a ghost. In other words, he ascends as the Jesus whom the disciples know and love.

And then notice what the angels say in verse 11. Man of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

[17:15] Now notice the emphasis. This same Jesus. Not a different Jesus. Not a less human Jesus.

But the incarnate Jesus. The crucified Jesus. The risen Jesus. The Jesus who ate with them. The Jesus whose wounds they touch.

The Jesus who walked and talked with them after the resurrection. This same Jesus will return.

Which means that right now, at this very moment, the risen Lord Jesus Christ remains fully human

in heaven.

For he can only return as what he now is. Now isn't that astonishing?

You see, isn't it true that the eternal Son has always been in the presence of the Father? That is not new. But what is new is that he is now in his presence as a human being.

[18:31] Or as Tim Chester so aptly puts it, One of the greatest wonders of the ascension is that a human being is now in the presence of God.

Human flesh is now with God. And that tells us something profound about God's purposes. Think about it.

By assuming a real human nature, dying and then rising again in a physical body, Jesus showed us that being human was never something he wanted to escape from.

And he confirmed that by choosing to remain our brother forever, even after he returned to heaven.

In other words, my friends, our humanity matters eternally to God.

Our bodies matter to him. This physical world matters to him. The ascension demonstrates that. It shows that God is not interested so much in rescuing us from creation as in rescuing creation itself from the curse of sin.

[19:46] And that means the Christian faith can never be reduced to some private, inward, spiritual experience that has nothing to do with our bodies or the world around us.

Because if the ascended Jesus still possesses a glorified human body, then our embodied lives are not an afterthought in God's purposes.

The way you use your hands in your work. The way you share a meal with your neighbor. The way you sit with a grieving friend.

The way you care for your aging parents. None are unimportant. All are profoundly human.

Because our humanity has entered heaven in Jesus Christ, there is nothing about your embodied earthly life that lies outside God's loving concern.

So our humanity is eternally dignified. All because Jesus has ascended to heaven as a human being.

[21:01] But here's our next question. What is he doing there? The Creed tells us he is seated at the right hand of the Father.

So we might think, oh, is he having an eternal holiday? You know, just lazing around on the couch? No. Because actually, where Jesus sits is all important.

And that brings us to our second point this morning. The ascension is about Jesus seated as king. Jesus seated as king.

You see, when the Creed says Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, it's not getting us to imagine heaven as though it were a giant throne room with two enormous sofas next to each other. It is simply echoing the Bible's own royal language. In the ancient world, to sit at the king's right hand was to occupy the highest place of honour, authority and privilege in the kingdom.

[22:14] Indeed, it was to share in his rule. And according to Ephesians 1, that is exactly what Jesus is doing. Listen again to verses 20 and 21.

God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.

So notice Paul's emphasis. Jesus hasn't simply returned home to heaven to put up his feet and rest. Rather, he has gone home to ascend to the throne.

So that means, my friends, there is no authority anywhere that stands above Jesus Christ. Every king, every prime minister, every president, every judge, every general, every CEO, every angel, every demon, even Satan himself, must bend the knee to him.

Every throne is beneath his throne. Every authority is beneath his throne. Every crown is beneath his crown. When Jesus sat at the Father's right hand, every other ruler in the universe is instantly outranked.

[23:42] But here's what makes this even more remarkable. My brothers and sisters, did you know, a man now reigns over God's creation?

Because Jesus is not just fully God, but still fully human. Remember? And that takes us all the way back to the opening pages of the Bible.

Do you remember what Adam was created to do? Genesis tells us that humanity was created in God's image to rule over God's world on God's behalf.

And he was to extend the blessing of God's gracious rule throughout the earth. But Adam failed. Instead of ruling faithfully, he rebelled.

Instead of extending blessing, he brought the curse. Instead of leading creation towards life, he plunged it into death. But where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded.

[24 : 52] He obeyed where? Adam disobeyed. He remained faithful where Adam fell. And now, as Paul says in Ephesians 1 verse 22, God has placed all things under his feet.

That language is not accidental. Paul is deliberately echoing Psalm 8, where all things were placed under humanity's feet.

In other words, Jesus has accomplished what Adam never could. The true human king is finally on the throne. The one ruling the universe today is exactly the kind of human being God intended humanity to be from the very beginning.

And that is wonderfully good news. For one thing, it means that finally, there is a human being who can bring blessing to all the world.

for another, it means that the human story is not over. Again, think about it. Ever since Genesis 3, it has looked as though the human project has failed.

[26 : 09] Every human attempt to rule ended up being twisted by sin, with humans grappling for power, exploiting rather than serving.

But now, there is a man on the throne who got there not by grasping, but by giving. Not by seizing power, but by laying down his life.

And so, if you've ever looked at the state of this world and thought, is this really all there is? Is it always going to be this way? the ascension says, no.

There is a human being on the throne of the universe who is truly good and gracious and he is making all things new.

And here is another implication. If Christ is king, then there must be a people who gladly acknowledge his kingship. That's what the church is.

[27 : 13] The church is not merely a gathering of religious people. It is the community over which King Jesus reigns by his word and by his spirit.

Or put another way, the church is meant to be a little colony of heaven. A place where God's will is increasingly done on earth as it is in heaven.

In fact, that's exactly where Paul goes next in Ephesians. Having told us that Christ reigns over all things, he goes on in Ephesians 2 to describe the church as God's new humanity.

A people who forgive instead of taking revenge, who love instead of hating, who welcome one another across every barrier of race, language, and social status.

In other words, the church is meant to give the world a foretaste of Christ's coming kingdom. Did you know that's what we're called to?

[28 : 18] We're not called to just show up once a week to sit passively for an hour and then drink some coffee afterwards. No. We're called to give a little glimpse of what humanity looks like when Jesus truly reigns.

That's what the church is. But all this raises another question. How can we be such people in a world that resists his reign?

After all, clearly not everyone accepts King Jesus. And the answer is found in the book of Acts. Notice, after Jesus ascends, what is the very next major event?

Answer, Pentecost. It is Jesus sending the Holy Spirit. And the two are connected. You see, if there is no ascension, there is no Pentecost.

Peter makes that clear. speaking about the risen Jesus, he says in Acts 2, verse 33, exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

[29 : 41] In other words, it is only as ascended King that Jesus can send the Spirit. So, Jesus ascended not because he was abandoning the church, but in order to equip his church.

He ascended so that through the Spirit, he can now be present with all of his people everywhere at all times. He can now empower them through the Spirit to be his witnesses, as Acts 1, verse 8 tells us.

And as his Spirit-empowered people boldly proclaim and live out his gospel, his reign will spread. That's why Jesus says at the end of Matthew, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations. Now, do you see the connection? The command to go is grounded in the declaration that Christ already reigns.

we do not go to make him king. We go because he is king. And our calling is to summon men and women everywhere to bow the knee to him and to discover that his rule is the best news they could ever hear.

[31 : 12] But Jesus did not just ascend to be seated as king, wonderful as that is. there is still more. For Jesus is also seated in such a way that speaks not only to his authority over the nations, but to his care for your soul.

And that brings us to our third and final point. Jesus is seated as priest. Jesus is seated as priest. Come with me to Hebrews 4 verse 14 for a moment.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Now, did you notice how Jesus is described here? Not merely as an ascended king, but as an ascended priest. For that is what he is.

That is what God has appointed him to be. But there is a big difference between him and the other human priests. Turn with me now to Hebrews 10 verse 11.

[32 : 27] Let me read it. Day after day, every priest stands and performs his religious duties. Again and again, he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

So, notice the posture of the old covenant priests. what are they doing? They are standing. Why? Because their work is never finished. Every day brought another sacrifice, another sinner, another offering. In fact, one of the things that people have noticed over the years is that if you look at all the finishings in the sanctuary, such as the altar and the basin and the lampstand and so on, there's one thing missing.

There is no chair. And that's because there would be no opportunity to sit on the job. They always had to be standing there making these sacrifices.

For the blood of bulls and goats ultimately are never quite adequate for the forgiveness of sins. But read on now to the next verse, Hebrews chapter 10 verse 12.

[33 : 49] But when this priest, that is Jesus, had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

And the same thing is also mentioned earlier in Hebrews 1 verse 3. He sat down. Why? What's the difference?

Because the work of atonement is complete. There is no more sacrifice to offer. You see, my friends, what is the tabernacle?

According to the book of Hebrews, it represents the cosmos. The most holy place corresponds to the highest heavens. So, when Jesus ascended, he is really entering the true tabernacle to which the earthly tabernacle pointed to.

That's what Hebrews 9 verse 24 tells us. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one.

[34 : 57] He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Now, in the Old Testament, the priests would have entered the tabernacle with their bodies and robes all already splattered with blood.

But here, via the ascension, it is Jesus who comes before the Father, covered in blood, presenting himself as the full and final atonement for sin.

You see, although Christ's sacrifice was finished on the cross, the presentation of that finished sacrifice before the Father is still necessary.

And that is what the ascension accomplishes. And once he has fulfilled his role as the ascended priest, our salvation is secure.

As Tim Chester says, our presence before God is now as secure as Christ's presence before God. My brothers and sisters, do you know why you can still come before God as your heavenly father to confess and repent, even when you've messed up?

[36 : 14] Because Jesus is seated as your heavenly priest. Do you know why even when you feel unworthy to pray, or when you believe you have exhausted his patience, God will still pick up your call?

because Jesus is seated as your ascended priest. And did you know that Jesus' priestly work in heaven still continues?

Look at Hebrews 8 verse 1 to 2. Now the main point of what we are saying is this. We do have such a high priest who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

So you can see that although he sits, he still serves. But what is he doing? The Bible's answer is this.

He is praying for us. His ministry of sacrifice is done, but his ministry of intercession continues. That's what Hebrews 7 verse 25 urges us of.

[37 : 33] Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them. My brothers and sisters, do you ever struggle with your security as a Christian?

Do you ever wonder if you are going to continue to stay in the faith? Do you ever find yourself tempted and failing even to pray to resist such temptation?

Do you want to know what your comfort is in such moments? Here is the answer. Christ, your ascended priest, is praying for you.

And certainly that is what kept Peter going. Do you remember what happened to Peter? Jesus turns to him and says, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat.

Satan wanted Peter shaken and scattered. And sure enough, when the pressure came, Peter failed. He denied his Lord three times.

[38 : 47] But though Peter blew it, his faith did not finally fail. You know why? Because this is what Jesus said. I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.

You see, my friends, Christ prayed for him and Christ prays for us. He prays we will be protected from evil, that we would grow in holiness, that the Father would finish the work he began in us.

In heaven, Christ hasn't forgotten you. Rather, he is your faithful prayer partner.

So this morning, we have seen three things about the ascension. Jesus has arrived in heaven as a man. Our humanity is now in God's presence.

He is seated as king, reigning over all things and extending his kingdom through his spirit and his people. And he is seated as priest, his sacrifice complete, his intercession unceasing.

[40 : 00] But I want to close by showing you one final reason the ascension is such good news. Let me read to you, first of all, Ephesians 2, 4, 5.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions, it is by grace you have been saved.

So far, so familiar, right? But listen to how Paul continues, verses 6 and 7. And God raises up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Now, my brothers and sisters, just as God raised Christ and seated him in the heavenly realms, did you know God has done the same for you?

if you trust Christ, he has already seated you in the heavenly realms. Now, you might say, Pastor, I know the new chairs that we're seated on are more comfortable than our old ones, but I wouldn't call them heavenly.

[41 : 25] What on earth are you talking about? But that is what Ephesians 2, verse 6 tells us. Notice, it's describing present reality, not a future one.

Right now, we are seated in the heavenly realms. How can that be? Well, the key phrase is with Christ.

It appears three times in verses 5 and 6. And that phrase points us to this glorious truth. Because we are joined to Jesus, we share in his life, his righteousness, his resurrection, and yes, even his seat in heaven.

Or as the early church father Augustine puts it, we cannot be in heaven as he is on earth by divinity, but in him we can be there by love.

earth. Now, my friends, being seated in heaven doesn't mean you stop living here on earth. You still have to walk the streets of Kuching.

[42 : 41] You still have to face the struggles. But it does mean the control room for your life is in God's throne room. You live from heaven's perspective.

death. And that's what the ascension means for you too. And one day, as the Nicene Creed goes on to say, when Christ comes again in glory, you will share in his glory as well.

That's why we treasure this truth. So let's pray to God now to let that all sink in and to worship him anew.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I pray now that as we just consider your ascension, the fact that you are now seated in heaven, exalted to God's right hand.

Father, help us to continue to ponder the wonder and the implications of all that. And I pray, Lord, that today we will be assured that you are indeed reigning over heaven and earth and you are there not just as our king, but as our priest king, who is atoned for all our sin.

[44 : 02] And Lord, we pray, Lord, that we would indeed be people who live as if you are our king, that we would obey your commands, obey your rules, and seek to extend your reign across all the earth.

We pray all this in the name of Christ. Amen.