

Ascension and Glorifying of the Lord Jesus

by T. Austin-Sparks

The ascension and glorifying of the Lord Jesus mark a new beginning, a turning-point in the dispensation, where the focal point of everything is now in Heaven, and the Church is a heavenly body, seated with Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 47:5, Matthew 28:20, Luke 24:52, John 3:13, John 14:2, Acts 1:1-2, Ephesians 1:3, Ephesians 2:6, Philippians 2:9, Hebrews 2:9

Topics: "Ascension of Christ", "Heavenly Identity"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the ascension of Jesus, arguing that it is a pivotal moment in the redemptive work of God, often overlooked compared to His birth and resurrection. He highlights how the ascension marked a new beginning for the Church, shifting the focus from earthly to heavenly realms, where Christ now reigns in glory. The joy of the disciples at His departure reflects their understanding that His ascension was not a loss but a gain, as it opened the way for a new dispensation centered in Heaven. Sparks encourages believers to recognize their identity as a heavenly people, seated with Christ, and to draw strength from His exaltation amidst earthly struggles. Ultimately, he reassures that Christ's ascension signifies His victory and the assurance of final triumph for the Church.

Transcript

"The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which He was received up, after that He had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom He had chosen" (Acts 1:1-2).

"We behold Him Who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2:9).

"Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9).

We have not attached sufficient importance to the ascension. We make much of the birth of the Lord Jesus; a great deal is made of His resurrection; something is made of Pentecost: but the ascension, while mentioned, is given very little attention, almost passed over. Yet it has immense significance: it is, in fact, one of the major features in the scale of redemption's work. Drop it out, and the scale is not complete.

We have been speaking about the octave, the rising scale. Sound, as we know, is caused by vibrations in the air, but it is discerned by a wonderful mechanism in the ear. In the human ear there is a minute structure, like a little harp, which has no fewer than 10,000 chords. When a sound reaches it, a chord corresponding to that sound vibrates, and the vibration is transmitted to, and interpreted by, the brain, so that we are able to distinguish different sounds and recognize their origin. Now in the scale, or the octave, the higher we go, the more vibrations we get. There are only comparatively few vibrations on the lower notes. But the higher we go, the more vibrations there are, and the more alive and attune the ear needs to be. There are some sounds that are so high that the human ear cannot hear them.

My point is just this: that the higher we get in spiritual things, the more sensitive we have to be in order to discern. Perhaps the Lord had that in mind when He said: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear"(Matt. 11:15, etc.). There needs to be a corresponding response to what is being said. And when we come to the ascension, we are getting well up on the scale. Here is something of very great importance in the whole octave of redemption. It is a great turning-point, upon which everything revolves. We have to try now to answer in some small way the question: Why the ascension and glorifying?

The Disciples' Joy

It is surely one of the strongest arguments for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that the disciples, and those who had been with Him during His earthly life, were so glad at last to let Him go. As we pointed out before, whenever He had referred to His coming departure, the idea of it had struck terror and consternation into their hearts. Indeed, those words of His recorded at the beginning of John 14--"Let not your heart be troubled"--were uttered because of that very thing. He was speaking about His going, and they were filled with perplexity and dismay. If He went, they saw no hope, no future: everything for them simply disintegrated. They could not bear to think of His departure. How much of His time, in those last days with them, was occupied with this matter of His going, and with His efforts to allay their fears and to reassure them! They could not accept it. It was a dark shadow on their horizon.

But here, when it came to the actual departure, what a change! No sign of gloom whatsoever. He lifts up His hands and blesses them, and, as He does so, is received up into Heaven, out of their sight. There is no suggestion of terror, or even of loss. If we can rightly discern the atmosphere, that moment was anything but one of sadness. Something had happened to make them realize that all that He had said about it was true. This was no change for the worse, but a change for the infinitely better. They "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:52). Something has happened. I repeat: I think the fact that such a change should take place in them is one of the strongest arguments for the resurrection. And I feel that you and I, and all the Lord's people today, need to catch something of that which was in their hearts. We need to capture something of that joy--that the Lord has "gone up" (Ps. 47:5)! We have not lost Him; rather by His going up to the Father have we greatly gained. Our gain in His going up is something upon which to dwell.

A New Beginning

Let us come to our question again: Why the Ascension and Glorifying? To begin with, it was a turning-point in the dispensation; it marked a new beginning of things. We catch a glimpse of what was happening from some of the Psalms. Psalm 22: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"; Psalm 24 (which is surely a prophetic psalm): "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors: and the King of glory shall come in" (v. 7; A.S.V.). It is all of a piece. And if that Psalm 24 begins, as

it does: "The earth is the Lord's...", and continues: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" (v. 3), we look back for the answer to Psalm 23. It is the Shepherd of the sheep--such a Shepherd--Who will "dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (v. 6). It is He Who ascends into the hill of the Lord, Who has 'clean hands and a pure heart, not having lifted up His soul unto vanity' (24:4). This is He. And now the "everlasting doors" are waiting for Him.

So we can catch the picture. It is as though Heaven is in suspense, and earth is silent. There is a pause. Psalm 22 has all been enacted--the awful Cross, the terrible forsakenness, the desolation. He has been laid in the tomb. And now God has raised Him from the dead. But Heaven is waiting for something. And then the cry goes up: He is coming! The angels and the heavenly hosts break forth: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors: and the King of glory shall come in." 'He is on the way, He is coming: open the gates for Him!' It is the picture of His ascension, His exaltation, of His return to Heaven. The point is that everything was waiting for that. Nothing more could happen until that took place. Yes, the preparation has been made down there on the earth; all that work has been done by the Cross; everything is ready. But in Heaven the mood is: 'We are waiting--we cannot go on until He is back here, until He is in His place, His rightful place.' All waits for that. Everything is in suspense until that happens. This ascension, this exaltation, this glorifying of the Lord Jesus is something momentous. It must therefore have some very great meaning for us.

Everything Now Centred In Heaven

I was saying that it is a new beginning, for which all the preparation has been made in the Cross. What is the new beginning? Well, a tremendous change has taken place in the character, the nature of the dispensation. In the old dispensation, under the old covenant, everything was centred in a spot on this earth and in a nation amongst the nations: Jerusalem the focal point, Palestine the country, the Jews the nation. All centred there; it focused upon something earthly, something temporal and something transient--something, indeed, that was capable of completely breaking down, as it has done. Now the whole thing is taken away from the earth, and the focal point of everything is in Heaven. Heaven holds the centre of all Divine interests, the source of, and resources for, all Divine activities. Heaven is the place now--for He Himself is there! The new dispensation is marked by this: but oh, that the Church had neither forgotten it, nor failed to see it! The centre, the headquarters, the seat of government is now in Heaven, beyond the reach and the touch of time and earth and change and the possibility of breakdown! Are we too familiar with the teaching to be reminded that the Church is now a heavenly people and not an earthly, and that all our spiritual blessings are in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3)? But that does have some very valuable practical meanings.

Consider this about the Lord Jesus, for instance. When He was here on this earth, He was, in a manner of speaking, at the mercy of men and things; He was governed very largely by earthly conditions. Men could treat Him as they would--and they did. It is a truly amazing thing, is it not, that they should have treated God incarnate as they did? And at length they ushered Him to His death. That is how they treated Him, how they handled Him--speaking from the standpoint of the world and men. But no one can do that now: no one can touch Him now, no one can in any way handle Him now. He is right above all such conditions and possibilities. Does it not bring tremendous rest, satisfaction, comfort to our hearts to know that? He is outside the reach of all these things that are against Him. He is beyond the touch of all the antagonistic forces set upon His destruction. He is right above them all, above all rule and authority and principality and power (Eph. 1:21), absolutely safe, and we need never have one moment's fear for Him, never have a moment's unrest.

The True Church Now With Christ In Heaven

Why am I saying that? Because it is of very great practical application and value. For the Church is a heavenly body, seated with Him (Eph. 2:6). We therefore need have no moment's worry about the true Church. Come down to the earth and see how men worry about their 'church', and their churches, and their 'things'. They have got to look after the 'thing': they have got to take care of it, they have got to keep it. They are the custodians of this thing, and they watch jealously and fiercely over it. What a lot of worry they have, and what a lot of trouble--just because it is something on the earth that has got to be looked after. What a grand thing it is, then, to be in the realm of the heavenly Church, where there is no need to worry about trying to preserve something and keep it going and see that it does not pass out! There is nothing of that at all about a work that is a heavenly work, that is united with Christ in Heaven. There is all the difference when you are on heavenly ground. You need not worry or fret to try and keep the thing going, lest it should break down, and you would be left without your 'pet', without the thing for which you spent all your time and your resources. A heavenly thing is in the custodianship of One Who--thank God--is above all these things, and at rest.

This is what the Lord said: "In My Father's house are many resting-places... I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). When you get on to heavenly ground you come to rest, just as He has come to rest. You need not to worry--only keep on that ground. If you are going to worry at all--if you must worry--worry lest you get down on to earthly ground, for that is the realm of worry. Keep above. Heavenly things are in safe keeping--in the keeping of the One Who is "far above all".

But it means more than that. "Every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ", and we seated there with Him. That heavenly union with Christ means such abundance, such fulness, that we need never worry about spiritual supplies. It is just marvellous what resources, what supplies will come, if only we get on to the right ground, into the right position. If you are spiritually down on this earth (a contradiction in terms!), you will have to worry over your supplies. If you are down on the natural level of ministry, just see how hard you have got to work in order to get something to pass on. But get up into the open heaven, on to heavenly ground, and every spiritual blessing, abundance, fulness, follows. These are no abstract things; these are realities. It is one of the miracles of heavenly sustenance--the never-ending supplies all the way along. You feel you have come to the end, and there is nothing more, and then there comes another fulness; and again you seem to have exhausted everything, you have not got another crumb--and yet another fulness is forthcoming. Every time He wants it and there is a need for it, it is like that. And so you go on through the years.

This is all a part of His being in Heaven and the Church being joined with Him in Heaven. This is a part of the answer to the question: Why the ascension and the glorification of our Lord Jesus?

God's Attestation To A Heavenly Victory

But further, His ascension and His glorifying are God's own attestation of His Person and work. That is what the Scriptures say. That is the meaning of such passages as: "No man hath ascended into heaven, but He That descended out of heaven, even the Son of Man, Which is in heaven" (John 3:13). This is the attestation of His Person. We have noticed Psalm 24 as following Psalm 22. Psalm 24 is the attestation of the One Who in Psalm 22 cried: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Heaven breaks forth in attesting that One and His work in the Cross. At the beginning of this chapter we read Philippians 2:9: "Wherefore"--through 'obedience unto death, the death of the Cross'--"God highly exalted Him". That is the

attestation of Him and His work. The same is true of the passage that we read from Hebrews 2:9: "We behold Him... because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour". His exaltation and His glorification proclaim His victory. "Who is this King of glory?" "The Lord mighty in battle" (Ps. 24:10,8). He enters in, He proclaims His victory.

Now, although we may be familiar with this, and it may be no new information to us, it is very necessary for us always to keep in mind that the real conflict and the real victory was in the heavenlies. The conflict was not with flesh and blood, it was not with Jewish rulers and leaders, it was not with Roman officials, or with the Roman Empire itself. Behind all these things was another, a spiritual empire, unseen, but very, very real, and we know it. It was in that realm that the real conflict took place. It was the encounter between two spiritual kingdoms and empires, and it was there that the real victory was won. It was a victory over those 'principalities and powers and world-rulers of this darkness and hosts of wicked spirits'. He went behind this outward world-system and dealt with everything lying behind what is here; it was in that realm that He established His victory.

It is true that difficulties arise in our minds when we see things going badly--a James killed, a Stephen martyred, thousands cast into the Roman arena and butchered; when, as today, we see countless homes and families broken up, and servants and people of God cast into prison. It is not difficult to wonder--Is He on the throne? Is it true that He is over all? But this Kingdom of His is a 'long-term' thing, if we may use the expression. Perhaps you have watched a race of track runners in which there is one outstanding famous athlete. They start off on the race, and he seems to be the most indifferent of them all. He lets them all get ahead of him, and as they pass him there is not the slightest trace of anxiety on his face. He lets them get on with it. Everybody thinks that they are winning and he is beaten. But--wait until the end. He has such a store of energy that, at the last minute, when they are all spent, he calls upon his reserves and takes the race quite easily. It is the tremendous victory of competence and reserve.

The Lord Jesus is like that. That is exactly what is happening today. It looks as though His rival is having it his way, is getting ahead, and it does not seem that the Lord is very worried about it. We can discover no trace of anxiety or fret or feverish concern in the Lord. It is not that He is indifferent, but He knows what His reserves are--He knows what He can do. And again and again it has proved like that. In the end He has come in first--He has taken the race. He did it over the Roman Empire at the beginning, and He has done it repeatedly since. He has just let the enemy get ahead, seeming to have it all his own way, and then in the end, with His infinite reserves and competence, He has got it in His hand--He has collected all the prizes.

The Assurance Of Final Victory

It is like that for the Church. We may feel today that the enemy is having things a good deal his own way. It seems sometimes as though the Lord is a long way behind the enemy. But wait! He said to His disciples, as the last word: "I am with you... unto the consummation of the age" (Matt. 28:20): 'I will be there at the end.' The Lord Jesus will not be out of it at the end, He will be there. It will be the enemy who will be out.

In a day such as ours, I think that we need to gather something of the strength and consolation and help of this. We could easily be oppressed. A few years ago we heard, from the Far East, of the arrest and imprisonment all over the country of over a thousand brothers and sisters and leading workers, who had so faithfully and fully served the Lord for many years. We may not be having the same story of actual physical suffering and imprisonment, but we are in the same battle, and the spiritual pressure is terrible.

The atmosphere is just full of antagonism. We need help, encouragement. And from where can we derive that help, more than from the fact that He, the Lord, has gone up on high, and is there on the throne?

That is only the first thing about it, but it is a mighty thing. This is presented to us in the record, out of the so manifest effect that it had upon those who were there. And we must remember that Luke was a very meticulous historian. He tells us that he took pains to look into and gather the data correctly, accurately. Luke would never have put this in his record if he had had any question or doubt about it. He had plenty of evidence for everything that he wrote in his book of the Acts. Here you have these men, under circumstances and conditions which would naturally have resulted in something so much the opposite, just like this--triumphant, positively triumphant! Their Lord has gone from them, He has been received up in a cloud out of their sight. He has gone: what ought they to feel like? But they are not in sorrow. They go triumphing, and to triumph, because He has gone up!

The exaltation of the Lord Jesus is here presented to our faith as a great note in the octave of redemption. The knowledge that the Lord is up there is intended to redeem us from fear and uncertainty, to redeem us from overwhelming depression and oppression in the day of apparent calamity. It is as though the Holy Spirit would seek to say, if not in words, in effect, in those who are thus suffering: 'It is all right--He is on the throne! Jesus reigns--He is on the throne--He has gone up on high!' I believe they will come through because of this truth. It is a great factor in redemption.

A Representative Man Has Reached The Goal

But I said it is only one part of the great truth. There is another large part which can only be hinted at at this time. "What... if ye should behold the Son of Man ascending where He was before?" (John 6:62). 'The Son of Man ascending...' That very title is indicative of a great and wonderful truth. It brings us right into the Letter to the Hebrews. "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? or the Son of Man, that Thou visitest Him? Thou... didst set Him over the works of Thy hands: Thou didst put all things in subjection under His feet... But now we see not yet all things subjected to Him" (Heb. 2:6-8). Man has not yet come to that for which he was made; it is not all realized yet. "But we behold Him Who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour" (v. 9). What does it all mean?

Here is the Son of Man, in Whom, as a First One, is realized all the Divine intention concerning man, His very creation. It would be profitable at this point to enter upon a detailed study of the Hebrew letter, especially in its first chapters. "For not unto angels did He subject the inhabited earth to come, whereof we are speaking. But one hath somewhere testified, saying, What is man...?" (2:5-6). The subjecting to man of the future inhabited earth is what is in view. We do not yet see all things in subjection under man; but we see his Representative in Heaven, with all things in subjection under Him, for man. It is secured for man in the representative Man in Heaven.

The writer continues: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partners of the heavenly calling..." (3:1). It is all of a piece, you see. The "heavenly calling"--what is it? To be in fellowship with Him, in partnership with Him--"For both He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of One: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren..." (2:11-12). 'Wherefore, holy brethren, partners with Him and with one another in the heavenly calling...' What is it? To have dominion over the inhabited earth to come. He is there, having secured that purpose of God in His Own Person, representing the people, the 'many sons' whom He is 'bringing to glory' (2:10). That is why He has

"ascended up on high" (Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:8). It signifies a Man installed, in full possession of the eternal intention of God concerning man; installed there as a First One of the many sons being brought to glory.

Perhaps you ask: What is the difference between the heavenly rule and government now, and that in the old dispensation? For the heavens did rule then. In the days of Daniel the heavens were ruling (Dan. 4:26; cf. vv. 17,25,32). Yes, they were ruling in the old dispensation. But what is the difference? That question throws open an immense door, and this whole Letter to the Hebrews will answer it. It is the great difference between a purely earthly and temporal dispensation, and one that is eternal and heavenly and spiritual. It comprises all the differences that are mentioned in this very letter--the letter of the "better" things. In the heavenly government of the Son of Man you come into something so much better than the general sovereignty of God in the old dispensation. That is far too big a matter for us to consider here, but it all centres in the question of why He is there in the glory--why He has gone up, why He has ascended and is glorified. It implies some very great and challenging things that Jesus is in Heaven.

Practical Testing

Now let me close with this. It is one thing for us to know the truth about the Church being a heavenly body, a heavenly people; to know what the Word says about being 'seated together with Him in the heavenlies', and being 'blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies'; perhaps even to be able to give Bible readings on it; and a very, very different thing to be in the good of it! Remember that it is a law throughout the Bible that you are always tested right up to the hilt, to the last degree, on every position that you take. Your testing corresponds to the position that you have taken and declared. So that, if you say, 'I take my heavenly position', you are going to be tested right up to the hilt on your heavenly position. You will have nothing down here on this earth to support you; you will have to get all your support from Heaven. You will have nothing here to protect you; you will have to get all your protection from Heaven. You will have nothing here to champion you; you will have to get all you championing from Heaven. You will be tested on your position. But, praise God, that position is an eternal, impregnable one. It is a position that can stand the test.

This whole matter is very searching. The disciples came into the joy of it at the beginning, and much of that joy remained throughout; but it is clear that sometimes they had a real battle on this question. They had to fight to hold that ground--the ground that Jesus is Lord. Conditions demanded a very strong affirmation of it, a digging of the heels in and saying, in spite of everything: 'He is Lord!' This is no romantic kind of thing--this is desperate. So the Apostle says: 'Stand... withstand... having done all, stand!' Where? "Our wrestling" is "in the heavenlies": stand there with Him!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/ascension-and-glorifying-of-the-lord-jesus/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net