

Ascension Day

One of the great things about kids is their sense of imagination. When they play, they play the parts of kings and queens, princes and princesses, giant monsters, pro athletes, you name it. One of my favorite things in the world when I was about five years old was a huge cardboard refrigerator box that my parents let me have. With some markers and a pair of scissors it became the Bat Cave, the headquarters of my crime-fighting operations. Children think about possibilities, and the sky is the limit.

But as we get older, reality starts to kick in. Maybe I'm not going to be president after all. The odds that I'm going to play for the Cavs, Indians, or Browns looks pretty slim. My opening night on Broadway looks less and less likely.

You climb the professional ladder, and then one day you realize you've gone as high as you're going to get, and after that you do your best just to hang on. Same goes for health. You grow for a while in height and strength, but then it becomes a matter of maintenance, and you start looking good "for your age." So the further along you get in life, the less you think about success and the more you gear yourself for survival.

Now, not all of this is bad. With age and time comes wisdom. Along the way, people find out that becoming king of the hill is not like you thought it would be. You come to see the best things in life are simple gifts—family, friends, church, the good news about Jesus. There's no need for a lavish feast or multiple mansions; a simple meal with loved ones will do just fine.

But I do not want to give the wrong impression. That good news about Jesus does not teach you to expect less out of life. The good news about Jesus actually restores adventure and wonder to world-weary hearts. The good news about Jesus opens your eyes to the opportunities all around you. There's no reason to think your best days are behind you. A bright future is truly ahead. Doors are opening all around us. Better things are on the way. How do I know that? The Bible tells me so.

That same Bible won't let us be foolish or naïve. It tells us that human nature is never going to improve, no matter how many laws we pass. When I look at myself in the mirror of God's Word, not to mention my own conscience, I am painfully aware that sin is real and it lives in me. I want to do good. I don't. The evil I don't want to do, I end up doing. It's frustrating. But there is hope. There is confidence and innocence and reason to expect that the best is yet to come. Why? Because Jesus has ascended. He has ascended into heaven. He has ascended to the throne of God. He has been crowned King of Kings and Lord of all. Do you understand what a big deal this is?

Jesus is God, yes. Jesus is King, yes. And at the very same time, he is one of us. Our Brother, a man from Nazareth, has been promoted. A member of your family has ascended straight to the top! Someone who knows your sorrows, your frustrations, your

temptations, is now the chief executive of heaven and earth, and that bodes very well for your future.

It's better than working for working for the company owned by your uncle. It's better than being the daughter of the coach. The one person who rules all things happens to be your best friend. He's made it to the top and has every intention of bringing you along with him.

The author C.S. Lewis tried to paint a picture of this in his book "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe." Using the language of fantasy and fairy tale, he presents the story of salvation. The ruler of Narnia, a majestic lion, lays down his life to break the dark magic. When he rises to life, Narnia is restored, and four children are crowned and seated on thrones of the kingdom.

We are those children. If you dare to accept it, this is your future. As it says in 2 Timothy 2: "If we have died with [Jesus], we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him." If it's true that what you believe about your future changes your present, then this is jet fuel for living life. When you were baptized, you received a royal garment—a garment designed and woven by the perfect life, sacrificial death, and comeback victory of Jesus. This robe of rightness with God, created by your Savior, covers you and counts for you. As you wear this clothing and live in it, it signals to everyone who you are—you are part of the royal family. And when you truly think about how much it cost Jesus to give you this attire, it makes you want to live up to that royal status. What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we're called children of God! That's who we really are (1 John 3, MSG).

So go ahead and embrace the future. Consider the possibilities. Walk through the doors that are opening. Your friend Jesus has ascended to the throne of his Father, and is now in charge of all things, and is ruling with you in mind. And since he wore a crown of thorns, you will wear a crown of life.