

When was the last time you thought about the ascension of Jesus? On one hand, it's so important that it's in our creeds. We say it all the time. “He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.”

On the other hand, there's no “day off” associated with Ascension, no cultural customs like gift-giving or getting the family together, so it tends to go unnoticed, or at least is not emphasized to the same degree as other actions Jesus undertook for us. And you know what? Our worries and fears reflect the fact that we don't concentrate on the ascension of Jesus nearly enough.

Augustine, the influential Algerian pastor whose ministry began in 396 A.D., had this to say about Ascension Day: *"This is that festival which confirms the grace of all the festivals together ... For unless the Savior had ascended into heaven, his Nativity would have come to nothing ... and his Passion would have borne no fruit for us, and his most holy Resurrection would have been useless."* That's a mighty big claim--but one that the Bible backs up. Jesus' ascension is an essential part of the message that saves. So then, let's look at the majesty and the ministry of the ascended Jesus.

First, the majesty of the ascended Jesus. We are told by Luke: "After saying this, he was taken up to heaven as they watched him, and a cloud hid him from their sight." (Acts 1:9). Again and again in the Bible, clouds indicate the presence of God. A cloud led the people of Israel in the wilderness; a cloud covered Mt Sinai; a cloud settled on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured. Jesus rising into this cloud means He who "humbled himself and became obedient unto death" is now the exalted Lord of all.

With this majesty there comes mastery. Again, week in and week out, we stand here and say, "He ascended to heaven and sits the right hand of God the Father Almighty." Do you realize what we're saying—what Scripture is saying? Jesus has all power and authority. He is ruling over all things for the sake of His Church. The mention of the right hand is a symbol of power—it's where the prime minister would sit. Paul talks about Jesus sitting at God's right hand, administering the kingdom, when he says,

“Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. ²² God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. ²³ And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.”

I want you to let those words sink in. Jesus is in charge. This is a present reality. He has no rival to his power. No matter what the world looks like on the surface, Jesus rules with power. When our prayers contain what seems like impossible problems, we are praying to a God for whom all things are possible.

That leads me to my second point – the ministry of Jesus. There is little point in having a God who is exalted and majestic, if he doesn't touch our lives in some way.

As Jesus was ascending to heaven we are told by Luke that "he raised his hands and blessed them (the disciples) (Luke 24:50,51). Scripture rarely refers to Jesus raising his arms in blessing, so this seems to be highly significant. He had just told the disciples that they were to be his witnesses of the things they had seen and heard. He told them to reach out to those who do not yet know about Savior of the world. Of course, he knew just how difficult this task was going to be. Matthew records the last words of Jesus. This is the blessing that Luke is referring to – "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...I will be with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). This is the blessing and the benediction we need. It raises our eyes to Jesus, who has all power and is always there for us.

When it seems that life has caved in around us – failing finances, the fear of disasters, the threat of disease and death, guilt that never seems to go away, relationships with others that don't get any better – Jesus is near. When it seems that we will never overcome our temptations, that sin is always getting the upper hand in our life, Jesus is present with forgiveness and grace. When it seems that all there is in the future is gloom, hopelessness, worry, and death, Jesus' words are – I am with you always. He is ready to help when we turn to him with sighs and cries of hopelessness. He is ready to use his power to answer our prayers. And He doesn't have just a little power, a little spark, a tiny drop of help—this is the person who said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." As such, He knows exactly what we need; when we need it; how to apply it. By His death, resurrection, and ascension, he is the most powerful figure there is—and you are the apple of his eye. He delights in you.

This is the ascension truth and it has potential to rearrange your thinking. It is the one fact that enables you to interpret everything in a different light. Jesus has all power, and is always using it for your good and the good of his kingdom. When I get worked up or anxious or consumed with worry, it's because I've forgotten that God has placed all things under the authority of Christ. When I remember in faith that Jesus is risen and ascended, I live in confidence and patience, accepting that His answers for me are always best.

And because he loves me and you, he has provided concrete ways to experience his presence. When we think of Jesus, we don't remember a person who used to be here—Jesus is with us in His Word, speaking. He is with us at the baptismal font, cleansing and claiming. He is with us at His Table, serving. He is with us in each other, sharing sorrow and joy. Jesus is not limited to one location, but is everywhere His people are; he fills all things everywhere with himself, because of the ascension. Jesus has all power and is always using it for your good. He is exalted, majestic, and in touch with you, the one He loves.