

Theme: Essential Ascension

Text: Ephesians 1:16-23 (EHV)

¹⁶ I never stop giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, will give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowing Christ fully. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know the hope to which he has called you, just how rich his glorious inheritance among the saints is, ¹⁹ and just how surpassingly great his power is for us who believe. ²⁰ It is as great as the working of his mighty strength, which God worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, and above every name that is given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² God also placed all things under his feet and made him head over everything for the church. ²³ The church is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

It has become somewhat of a pastime for some people in our country, and around the world, to make up some unusual and obscure holidays. Whether they are just silly, ironic, or to raise awareness about something, people love to have a reason to celebrate a holiday. You can find lists of these obscure holidays in various places on the internet and you can probably find an obscure holiday to celebrate for just about every day of the year. Some examples that I found that I may or may not be adding to my calendar: January 3rd – Fruitcake Toss Day. April 18th – National High Five Day. We just missed out on celebrating No Socks Day (May 8th), and Lost Sock Memorial Day which takes place the very next day (May 9th). September 19th – International Talk Like a Pirate Day (good thing that one only comes around once a “yarrrrr” ☺). And March 26th – Make Up Your Own Holiday Day. You have to wonder, “Who made these up?” and “Does anyone actually celebrate them?”

One “holiday” that might land in the category of “obscure” when it comes to church festivals is the one we are celebrating today: The Ascension of Jesus. It is the festival that celebrates Jesus ascension into heaven 40 days after He rose on Easter Sunday (so Ascension Day was actually this past Thursday, May 18th). We might even wonder why we celebrate it? Commemorate it, yes, but what’s with all the joyful Ascension hymns and celebratory tone for this festival? Wasn’t this Jesus’ “good bye?” Shouldn’t this be a sad day? And is it really all that important?

Jesus’ Ascension may not be one of the most popular or well-understood church festivals or “holidays,” but it is important—in fact, it is an *essential* part of Christ’s work for our salvation. And so, it is good for us to take some time each year around this time to learn more about Christ’s Ascension and what it means for us *today* and yes, even to celebrate it! After all, that’s what the people did on the very first Ascension Day! Remember the words from our Gospel reading? **“And while he [Jesus] was blessing them, he parted from them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² So they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ They were continually in the temple courts, praising and blessing God” (Luke 24:51-53 EHV).**

In our text for this morning Paul speaks about Jesus’ Ascension into heaven and its meaning and significance for us. Paul prays that God would give his readers—his original readers as well as us and all Christians who read his inspired words—**“the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowing Christ fully” (v. 17).** **“Knowing Christ fully”** comes through a closer, personal relationship with Him by listening to Him speak to us through His Word, the Bible. When we get to know Jesus better through His Word we will realize and understand more about what great things He’s done for us. That includes all that He has done for us through His Ascension into heaven. Paul prays that all of us would realize this too. He wants all of us to know the hope and joy of Christ’s Ascension.

In our text the Apostle Paul prays that we would recognize three great blessings from God in particular. He writes, **“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know...**

- 1) the hope to which he has called you,**
- 2) just how rich his glorious inheritance among the saints is,**
- 3) and just how surpassingly great his power is for us who believe” (v. 18-19).**

First of all, what is that **“hope to which [God] has called you” (v. 18)?** Well, as you might know, when we read the word **“hope”** in the Bible we should not think of this word in the way we usually use it, as some sort of fond wish. No, when Paul uses this word **“hope”** he is speaking of a *joyful expectation*; something that we look forward to with *certainty*! So, the **“hope to which [God] has called you” (v. 18)** is **“his glorious inheritance among the saints” (v. 18b)** as he says in that very same verse. He’s talking about heaven! How can we be sure God will give us this **“inheritance,”** this incredible gift? Paul prays that our hearts may be enlightened to see **“just how surpassingly great his [God’s] power is for us who believe” (v. 19).** Knowing about God’s **“surpassingly great”** power is one of the reasons we know we can trust that God can and will keep His Word!

What does this have to do with Christ’s Ascension? Paul continues with these incredible words, **“It [His power –v. 19] is as great as the working of his mighty strength, which God worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places” (v. 20).** What Paul is saying is that the power of God that is working for us believers is like the **“power”** that God used to raise Jesus from the dead and restore Him to His rightful throne in heaven at His Ascension!

From that throne, our text goes on to say, Christ is **“far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, and above every name that is given, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”** ²² **God also placed all things under his feet and made him head over everything for the church.” (v. 21-22).** Did you catch that? Christ’s supreme authority and power; the authority and power of God Himself is used by Him for one purpose: **“for the church!” (v. 22).** That is, for the benefit and blessings of all His believers—you and me! If that doesn’t make us joyful about Christ’s Ascension, I don’t know what will!

Do you understand what all of this means? It means that we have no reason to fear. Christ is now ruling—He’s in control—**“over everything for the church!” (v. 22).** We’ve got no reason to doubt or be apprehensive. We have the assurance of His **“surpassingly great...power...for us who believe” (v. 19).** No earthly rulers or governments, no political force or policy is greater than the authority of Christ, the Ascended King of heaven and earth. No spiritual force of Satan, no evil or temptation can withstand the almighty power of the Ascended, ruling Christ who has **“all things under His feet!” (v. 22).**

Paul reminds us that Christ’s relationship with us as our ruler and King is not the same type of dominating authority and power He exerts over all things. Rather, our text reminds us that it is a *relationship*; a connection as close as the one the head shares with the members of its body. Paul reminds us that Christ’s relationship with us is so close and His love for us is so great that **“The church is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (v. 23).** That is one of the most mind-blowing and amazing phrases in all of Scripture, and it’s somewhat of a *paradox*!

What Paul is saying is that Christ, **“who fills everything in every way”** and is completely self-sufficient and full by Himself, calls us, His church, His **“fullness!”** How is that possible?! Because Christ *chooses* to be unfulfilled and incomplete without His church! Why? Simply because He loves us so much; because of His *grace*! God determined from eternity that He would save us through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus, and He will not be truly **“filled”** until He has accomplished our eternal salvation and has us there safely with Him in the mansions He has prepared for us in heaven.

Christ's Ascension was part of that plan—an important and *essential* part of that plan!

- ✚ First of all, Christ's ascension was prophesied in the Old Testament so He had to ascend into heaven in order to fulfill all of the Old Testament prophecies (see for example **Psalm 68:18**, and the Apostle Paul's commentary on this verse in connection with Jesus' Ascension in **Ephesians 4:8-10**).
- ✚ It was the ultimate sign that His work here on earth was done, that His mission of earning our salvation was accomplished.
- ✚ It is an incredibly rock-solid proof that He is true God (After all, how many people do you know can "ascend" to heaven on their own power? Think of how many of His disciples witnessed it too!).
- ✚ His Ascension into heaven is also important for us, in part, because it assures us that after our resurrection from the grave we, the "body of Christ" will ascend, just like our "Head," Jesus.

Maybe Ascension Day will never be the most popular church festival. Maybe it will always be considered a bit of an "obscure holiday." However, we should celebrate it! We will celebrate it, when we recognize and know the **hope**—the *joyful and certain expectation*—of Christ's Ascension! Christ's Ascension means He's coming back again. Remember the words of the angels to the disciples on that first Ascension Day? **"This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11 EHV)**. Christ has ascended; so will we! Hallelujah! That truly will be a day worth celebrating! Amen.