

JESUS: HIS GLORIOUS ASCENSION

Loving Our Magnificent, Invincible Savior

The Ascension of Jesus Christ carries tremendous consequences for us and also provides an important focus for our faith-vision of our amazing Lord. These truths from behind the veil of heaven can work wonders by giving us confidence to access to God's abundant grace. Our Risen Savior has been raised all the way to heaven. Jesus is seated there at the Father's right hand, ever living to make intercession for us! Furthermore, we know we can approach the Throne of Grace with boldness, because our High Priest fully sympathizes with our weaknesses since He was tempted in every way just as we are.



As Jesus ascended to receive His inheritance, the Father poured out an inheritance upon us. Through our ascended Lord we can now receive His righteousness as our covering, the covering our nakedness needs. Now that the agony of crucifixion is over, we are free to enter His everlasting joy, the joy that was set before Him, strengthening Him to embrace the cross. In addition, when God the Father raised Jesus, He gave Him a Name above every name. By this Name we also conquer! With this Name we are equipped and authorized to take on the dark powers that surround us. These are but a few of the Ascension gifts and they are wonderful to receive. Beyond this are mysteries which enhance our wonder and lift our hearts to praise.

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For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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CHAPTER ONE

HIS GLORIOUS ASCENSION

This one gets overlooked. It seems almost like an afterthought, appended to the earth-shaking events of death and resurrection. A lovely way for the Lord to make an exit. Don't underestimate how important it is that Jesus ascended! Suppose He had stayed down here? Wouldn't you? Why didn't He? There is something crucial in this to know; even more, it is vital that we learn to live by it. His Glorious Ascension was for our sake as well as His.

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. Luke 24:50-51 ESV

What Might Have Been

The Ascension of Jesus Christ carries tremendous consequences for us and also provides an important focus for our faith-vision of our Risen Lord. Because it is recorded in the Bible, it is readily accepted by believers, but suppose (for a minute) that God's plan for our salvation didn't include raising Jesus all the way to heaven. Suppose the Father only raised Jesus "above ground" so to speak, by restoring Him to life on earth. That's a genuine resurrection too. What difference would that have made?

His Deity

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead would have lost much, if not all, of its life-transforming power for us without the Ascension following it up. Lazarus was raised from the dead, too. So was the widow of Nain's son. So were several people in the Old Testament. Come to think of it, so were multitudes in Jerusalem following the earthquake that took place during the crucifixion of Jesus. What would the resurrection of Jesus to life "above ground" have proved, had He not been raised visibly all the way to heaven?

There were elements about Jesus' resurrection appearances and His resurrection Body that differed in the details from others who have been restored to life. He could pass through walls and show up unexpectedly even when great distances had to be covered.

Nevertheless, the conclusive proof, even in Peter's Pentecost sermon, that Jesus' resurrection carried unprecedented significance was in His visible and astounding ascension. All Israel was to "know for certain" that Jesus is Lord and Christ because God raised Him from death "into the heavens" where He sits at the right hand of God.



This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The



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Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.' Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Acts 2:32-36 ESV

Just as we know from the scriptures that the “fame” of Jesus spread quickly around Galilee as His ministry increased, so too we can safely assume that the “rumor mill” in ancient Jerusalem thrived on gossip about the Messiah, any messiah. Those who listened to Peter, no doubt, had previously heard the many rumors about this presumed messiah’s death, resurrection and ascension. Since the Ascension took place on the Mount of Olives in plain view of the Temple Mount, it is possible, even likely, that more people than His inner circle saw Jesus ascend “into the heavens.” Now, Peter is telling them that the rumors are true! He and the others on whom the Holy Spirit had just been so generously (and loudly) poured out are eye witnesses of it all

His Work

His glorious ascension proves more than Jesus' deity as “Lord and Christ.” It inevitably points to the uniqueness of His death as a sacrifice for our sins. Because the Ascension showed the disciples that Jesus is both “Lord and Christ,” they further studied the scriptures to learn more about His divine assignment as Messiah (Christ). Remember that even up to His Ascension the disciples were still stuck on thinking that Jesus had come as Messiah to establish an earthly kingdom.

Those persistent presuppositions were forever shattered when He left them behind without accomplishing what they expected their Messiah to do. Why then had He come? Casting about to understand their error, the sin-bearing passages in Isaiah about God’s suffering Servant would have taken on new meaning for them as they do for us.

Our Need

Because Jesus ascended, we are all on a level playing field. Had He remained on earth, He could have launched the early church under His direct, visible leadership. That would have been a tremendous benefit, right? Not necessarily. Assuming that He would have died later (or been murdered by His enemies all over again), then all Christians who came later would feel at a great disadvantage from the first century believers who would have all known Jesus “in the flesh” and who would have been taught directly by Him. This would have crippled all succeeding generations of the church from pressing in to recover or go beyond the gains of the first century believers. We would all-too-easily make the mistake of thinking it was better or easier for them because they knew Jesus in the flesh. That’s not what Jesus believed!

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. John 16:7 ESV

OK, but what if He didn’t die? What if He remained alive on earth and was still visibly present here directing all our operations personally? Wouldn’t that be better? In no way! Even setting aside the impossible problem this would have created for world evangelism, it would have been counter-productive in terms of our own life and growth. Please see [The Indwelling Presence](#) for more on this intriguing question.



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What Ascension Means

1) The Holy Spirit's Descent

You can almost hear how urgent this was to the Lord in the passage quoted above. Jesus knew He had to ascend so that the Holy Spirit could descend. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit wasn't already active upon the earth—He is the Giver and Sustainer of life to all creatures on the planet, including us. Nevertheless, faith-conversion opens the way for the Holy Spirit to “descend” into our hearts (the deepest, darkest place in the world) and upon our lives (see [New Life in the Power of the Spirit](#)).

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come." John 16:4-13 ESV

Jesus said that He must go so that the Spirit of truth can come—to lead us into all truth. There are “many things” Jesus has to say to us, but He can only do it by the Spirit who speaks uniquely and individually into our depths. What Jesus has to reveal to each of us includes who we are apart from Him and who we are united to Him. He comes by His Spirit to reveal ourselves to ourselves as well as to reveal God to us. This cannot be done in a classroom setting—it evidently takes the Holy Spirit speaking to us in the hidden depths of our hearts.

2) Jesus' Intercession

In being raised to the Father's right hand, Jesus is in the perfect position to intercede for us. This must be immensely important for it is mentioned several times in scripture. Our conversation, whether of prayer, petition or praise can be instantaneous. He gives us a standing invitation to “come boldly” to the throne of grace and receive mercy and help anytime we need it.

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Romans 8:34 ESV

3) Jesus' Presence

From heaven He can be with all of us by His Spirit. We don't have to go looking Him for in Timbuktu or wait for Him to come our way from His latest visit to Siberia. We are even in some real, though mysterious, sense “seated with Him in the heavenlies.” This means that He is always dwelling in us on earth by His Spirit and we are always dwelling with Him through our spiritual “ascent” into the heavenlies. At the very least that should assure us that we are well connected to our Source of life and grace.

4) Jesus' Preparations

From heaven, He can prepare the earth for His final coming. His return, however, will stop the salvation clock. No one will have any time left to make a decision. Therefore, Jesus remaining in heaven (for the time being) ensures that everyone down here has the



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opportunity to be drawn to faith if they are willing. It also ensures that He has plenty of time on His Hands to do what He told the disciples He was heading Home to do: prepare a place for us.

5) Our Faith-Vision

Because our hearts hold images so powerfully, it makes a difference if our heart reflexively looks to Jesus as dying on the cross, or as being “back there” still walking through the pages of scripture in ancient Israel. No! He is Alive! He has ascended far beyond the cross. He is not primarily suffering for us right now, He is rejoicing over us and putting plans in place for each moment coming up and arranging a place in heaven for our ultimate arrival there—among many other things. You and I need to fix our eyes on an ascended, fully glorified Lord, the One who has power in every instant to come to our aid: Jesus Christ!

6) Jesus’ Glorification

It is only right that after doing so terrible and noble a Work at His request that the Father would unhesitatingly want to raise Jesus all the way to the highest position of Glory and enthronement. Such is the Father’s desire to reward His Only Begotten Son.

According to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:19-23 ESV



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CHAPTER TWO

OUR RIGHTEOUS COVERING

Joseph had a dream about a magnificent “coat of many colors” which got him into a lot of trouble by stirring up his brothers’ jealousy, since he seemed to be claiming special favor with their father Jacob. You, too, dear Christian have been given a magnificent robe to wear which would certainly stir up the envy of the world around you, if only they knew. Sadly, we believers often act as if we don’t know how wonderfully our Father has clothed us in the righteousness of His Son. We walk around grieved or guilt-ridden at the sight of our “filthy rags,” never once realizing that our spiritual nakedness before God couldn’t be more gloriously covered!

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. Isaiah 61:10 ESV

At the very beginning of our Fall from grace, the Lord God demonstrated that we need two kinds of coverings: one to cover our disastrous and deadly separation from Him by sin; the other to cover the extreme humiliation of our “nakedness” in our own eyes. Since these two vital coverings are interwoven, however, it is easy to lose sight that they are separate issues which need separate solutions. If we were going to be saved, the Lord first had to provide a covering for our wretched exposure as fallen creatures. He had to make a way for our sins to be covered. However, sin itself was not the only element working to destroy us. The Fall radically demolished our standing before God, leaving us “bare” before His eyes (as well as our own).



Having been created to reflect the Lord God’s magnificent Image, Adam and Eve were clothed in His glory. They needed no other covering: They were nude, but not “naked.” Grace and glory covered them with innocence and purity. Their position in God’s eyes and their own was vastly different from what it immediately became once sin entered in. If this is hard to picture, simply look at your cat or dog. They are truly “nude,” yet in their created innocence they look beautiful to our eyes and absolutely “normal” in their own. They would look ridiculous wearing clothes! So, it was with us. In the beginning...

Why Do We Need a Covering?

We all know instinctively that we need a covering. Most of us would feel ashamed to go around naked. We carefully cover ourselves with clothing, especially our most intimate parts. Not only that, we all hate to have our wrong-doing exposed. Unless (or until) we are caught red-handed, there is a nearly universal tendency to cover-up our misdeeds so no one else can find out about them. But it goes deeper still. We seriously don’t want others to know key things about ourselves, especially the wrongness and weaknesses we harbor on the inside. We don’t even like the sight of it! We certainly don’t want others to see it. So, from an early age we learn to keep this inward “nakedness” covered up. This has a long history.



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The Great Coverup goes back to the Garden. When Adam and Eve sinned, they fell from their created state of perfect union with God. Before the Fall, everything about them was innocent and pure. Both their outward ways and their innermost thoughts flowed in the “ancient ways” of the Lord. His ways are paths of peace, love, joy and righteousness. Not only did they live in perfect union with God, they experienced joyful, fully transparent intimacy with each other. Nothing about them needed to be covered over or covered up. They were nude, but they didn’t feel naked.

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Genesis 2:25
ESV

The Paradise Lost that Was Lost

This is the true paradise that was lost when they fell into sin – the loss of purity of relationship with God, with each other and within themselves. Later, they would be exiled from the Garden with no way of return allowed. That exile is usually what we think of as “Paradise Lost,” but it actually began with the invasion of innocence as the sin nature (of the Enemy) came into both Adam and Eve, destroying their perfect communion with God and each other. Immediately, our first parents realized that something was wrong.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Genesis 3:7-8 ESV

As their eyes “were opened” they began to see from the new perspective of their fallenness, judging right and wrong based on their own understanding, rather than on the Lord’s. What they saw made them want to cover up. Without delay, they gathered fig leaves and sewed them into what seemed to them to be a suitable covering. From whom were they hiding their newfound nakedness? At this point it is from each other! Only later, when they “heard the sound” of the Lord’s approach, did they try to hide from God -- by using the trees for cover, not the fig leaf loincloths.

This often gets overlooked, yet it is telling of the way we live. We begin life trying to hide our nakedness from each other, once we leave the innocence of infancy behind. First, it’s our body’s nakedness, then it’s our soul’s. Just like Adam and Eve, we sew together all kinds of fig leaves in a vain attempt to hide the truth of how impure and imperfect we are inside. We naturally feel ashamed of the “world of iniquity” we see inside our hearts. We are also understandably embarrassed by our weaknesses, ignorance and foolishness. So, we cover it over by pretending it’s not there, or with excuses, or by striving to be perfect, or by trying to please everyone, or by... you name what it’s been for you.

God Gives Two Solutions

None of this is God’s solution. Seeing their predicament, the Lord God responded in several unexpected ways. Two are relevant here. First, He asked Adam why He was hiding. Of course, the Lord knew everything Adam was thinking and why, but He wanted to get Adam looking deeper than his own understanding. Adam said, “I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid



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myself" (Genesis 3:10). To this the Lord replied, "Who told you?" This is crucial. Adam was being shown that his feelings and thoughts were coming from a source other than himself, which was also not from God. If we are ever to break free of the tyrannical hold our nakedness has over us, we will need to discover and fully believe in God's solution.

After dealing with their excuses and dealing out their consequences, the Lord took a drastic step. Rather than killing them (which is what Adam feared), He slaughtered an animal instead. Is this the first-ever animal sacrifice made as an atonement for sin? It would appear so. Later, an array of specific instructions would be given at Sinai, launching the Old Testament sacrificial system. Animal sacrifice formed the core, because only blood can atone for sin, since sin produces death. Here, we see it here in embryonic form. Adam and Eve are "covered" by the blood of the sacrifice – atonement means covering – while their nakedness is covered by the animal's skin.

And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. Genesis 3:21 ESV

Our Problem with God's Solution

This brings us to more familiar territory. Most Christians are well-schooled in the correct truth that our sins have been fully and completely atoned for (covered) by the Blood of Jesus. He is our Lamb of sacrifice, slain from the foundation of the world. By faith we can receive His Blood as both a covering and a cleansing. We receive His Blood atonement as full covering for our sins and sinfulness the moment we are born again. At that time His Blood also cleanses us from our sins. Going forward, whenever we may step into sin and repent, we can ask to be cleansed by the Blood once again. But the Blood always keeps us covered during the whole process of our growth in Christ (also known as sanctification). This is a fantastic covering!

Nevertheless, there is a genuine problem here. However, it is definitely not with the Blood. We couldn't hope for a better covering than the Blood of Jesus. Watchman Nee wrote that if we only knew what the Blood of Jesus means to the Father, we would never have an anxious moment at the sight of our sins and sinfulness, ever again. We would know with exuberant faith that our sins – past, present and future – are totally and gloriously covered in the eyes of our Heavenly Father. He is fully satisfied with that covering! But are we?

That our specific sins of thought, word and deed are covered and cleansed by the Blood of Jesus alone is hard enough to believe. It is good deal harder to believe that the deep and desperate wrongness about us – our sinfulness – is also covered by the Blood. This is a stretch for many Christians, who see the "world of iniquity" within and fear that God also sees it and holds it against them. He doesn't. He chooses to see the Blood covering instead. The problem is on our side and it is a faith problem. We may believe it well enough with our heads, but our deep heart can be left unconvinced.

The problem doesn't end here. We evidently need something more than a sin covering alone. We also need a nakedness covering. We need something like that skin covering the Lord God first prepared for Adam and Eve so long ago. The issue of shame that we have isn't just a matter of sin guilt, as tremendous as that is. Yes, that has to be dealt with first, just as it was in the Garden. Death came to a substitute. The atoning blood of an animal was shed. But then the skins were given. In conversion, God applies the Blood as our covering and cleansing from sin. This has to come first. Then, however, He also covers us with a second "garment of salvation" --



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with a robe of Righteousness taken from our sin-bearer, Jesus. We are clothed in His Righteousness!

Two Intertwined Gifts of Grace

This is truly praise-worthy! The Father takes off the “filthy garments” of our own attempts to be righteous and replaces them with the Righteousness of His Son as our new garment of salvation. In His eyes we are already the fully upright, fully matured, entirely holy, sons and daughters that we will one day be in heaven. He sees us as if Christ is fully formed in us, because we are clothed in Christ’s own righteousness. This doesn’t mean that He can’t also see us as we are (for He certainly still works to correct our wrong ways). But it does mean that He is always relating to us just as if His work of [sanctifying](#) us is already completed.

And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. Philippians 3:9 ESV

Another way to describe this incredible gift of grace is by the word [justification](#). In justification, God so thoroughly cancels our sins by the Blood of Jesus that He looks upon us just as if we had never sinned. The difference is that justification speaks of the Blood covering for our sins. The Robe of Righteousness speaks of a salvation garment that covers our nakedness. These two conditions – sin and nakedness – are intertwined, but not identical. That’s why two different kinds of coverings are given to us. Our Father knows that the sight of our sinfulness needs to be covered before His eyes, and before our own. He also knows that our pitiful, exposed nakedness also needs to be covered before His eyes, and before our own.

The problem (once again) is with our faith. The Father sees this new dual reality covering us and is satisfied. We can only see it by faith. For us to gain eyes to see with confidence what the Father sees, our faith has to grow beyond head knowledge to deep heart conviction. Otherwise, we will be an easy prey to accusations from the enemy’s camp exposing our sinfulness or our weaknesses to us.

Easy to Receive; Hard to Believe

These two gifts, the blood covering and the robe of righteousness, are easy to receive. Every Christian receives them at the moment of new birth. But they are very hard to believe in sufficiently to receive the true benefit. As mentioned earlier, many Christians walk about with little confidence before God, believing that there is something wrong with them due to the sinfulness they keep seeing inside. That inner sinfulness is wrong, but it’s already covered. Nevertheless, they have a hard time believing in the Blood covering. It is arguably even harder to believe that an invisible robe of righteousness covers our nakedness! What? Don’t we still see so much weakness, ignorance and foolishness within? These aren’t issues of sin. They are issues of nakedness. You can cleanse us of our sins all day long. The nakedness still remains.

Remember that Adam and Eve first tried to hide their nakedness from each other? That meant that they had the same shame on the inside that we have. It wasn’t sin guilt alone that they were feeling. They were experiencing what it was like to see their “naked” dependence upon God so embarrassingly revealed to their own eyes. They had no wisdom of their own. No strength apart from what they could receive. Before the Fall, their lives were a seamless web of grace-given strength and wisdom, clothed in the glory of the Lord. The grace-giving nature of God was all



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the covering they needed. Without that, after the Fall, they were immediately ashamed at the sight of how weak, vulnerable and foolish they found themselves to be apart from God. This is what they tried to hide from each other, along with the sin guilt. This shameful sense of nakedness passed down the generation line along with the guilt of original sin. We, too, try to hide from ourselves and from each other the nakedness we feel.

The Paradise to Come

The Robe of Righteousness is God's way of re-covering us. It is not the same glory once conveyed to us as created beings, crowned with purity and innocence. Nevertheless, it is a true glory. It is woven from the glorious nature and merits of our Savior, Jesus Christ. His righteousness now covers those who believe. If we can see this, truly see this by faith, then we lose all fear of letting others see how weak and vulnerable we are, or how lacking in any righteousness of our own.

This new-found, grace-given ability to be "buck-naked" before God and totally transparent before others is absolutely liberating! We can easily and happily show the Lord any whacky or wicked thing going off inside of us, and then ask for His help. We can also "unveil" our own inner goofiness to others in ways that bless and liberate them. This is not a license to sin, but a wholly different way of dealing with sin. Rather, than fighting to hide how messed up we are, we make our inner sinfulness a lively, unembarrassed part of our conversation with the Lord as we seek His help in overcoming its impulses. Why hide anything from our divine Helper when all we have to do is step out of the woods and show ourselves, knowing that we are fully covered in His sight? Likewise, why hide from others the help we may need from them or the encouragement we may be to them? Nothing liberates like full disclosure! This enables us to re-enter the glorious liberty of the children of God, a true state of paradise on earth.

For the creation was not willingly subjected to vanity, but because of Him who subjected it on hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Romans 8:20-21 MKJV

There is still no going back to the Garden, so don't throw your clothes away! There is no going back to original innocence and purity here on earth. And don't think that we'll enter some kind of nudist colony in the sky when we die. We will all be fully clothed in heaven. Whatever the original plan was, our bodies will remain clothed into eternity. What will change is that all the fig leaves covering our soul will be entirely stripped away. We will all "know" each other -- not in the Biblical sexual sense, but in the intimate personal sense. Our lives will be open and transparent to everyone we meet up there, as theirs will be to us. Don't believe me? Check the contract. It's in the fine print.

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall fully know even as I also am fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12 MKJV



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CHAPTER THREE

THE JOY OF THE LORD

Without a doubt, the joy of the Lord is our strength. Why else would the enemy be so dead set on robbing us of it? With this joy we have an inner confidence which enables us to “leap over walls” (sail over the obstacles of life). With this joy we feel invincible even in the midst of troubles. And—get this!—we have 3 tremendous ways of entering into the joy of the Lord!

Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Nehemiah 8:10 ESV

His Endless Joy

While on earth Jesus so thoroughly identified with our suffering (culminating in the cross) that Isaiah could rightly say about Him that He was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” You cannot say that now! Yes, He still grieves when we grieve, He still shares in our sorrows, but He is light years beyond us when it comes to joy. He is on the other side of the cross—the resurrection side—and He has fully [Ascended](#) into glorious joy.



That's great, good news for us, because it means that He has an infinite overflow of joy to share. Aren't you glad? Well, if you aren't lighting up like a Christmas tree, don't be dismayed. It is His joy to help us enter into His joy and He's serious about getting us to rejoice with Him. It was for the “joy set before Him” that He embraced the cross. We, too, will sometimes have to pass through suffering and sorrow in order to arrive at the joy on the other side of our crosses.

Joy is costly in a sin-stained world. It doesn't always drop in on us like the dews of heaven, but that doesn't mean it isn't readily available. Joy is freely given to us in the Beloved. We simply have to learn how to access it. This isn't about merit. None of us will ever deserve the endless delight that our Father has prepared for those who love His Son. This is about receiving by faith what grace desires to give. If we want to live in His joy, we will have to learn how to position ourselves to receive it and enter more deeply into it. That's where it can get costly. The price to “pay” is losing yourself in Him.

Like many things in life the entry points to His joy are easy enough at first. Mastering the lessons, however, requires “faith and patience,” but it is doable. So, let's turn to consider the three main ways the Lord has given us for entering into His joy, beginning with the easiest one first.

1) The Joy of His Blessings

This is so closely akin to happiness that the two are often confused. Our English word happiness comes from a root word (Middle English hap) that indicates chance or good luck.



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When good things “happen,” it makes us happy. Piece of cake! There is nothing wrong with this as long as we are talking about legitimately good things. God is the secret Giver of all good gifts and even unbelievers can feel overjoyed with happiness—at those “Zip-a-dee-doo-dah” times when everything is going their way. Our Father evidently delights in causing happiness to abound and doesn’t care if we don’t know Him to thank Him for it. Just look at the great, good time little children are having.

There are (unhappily) several significant problems with happiness. First, it never lasts. Something always interrupts it and spoils the mood. Second, the feeling of being happy can be notoriously hard to recover. Some never again feel the idyllic happiness of their lost childhood and don’t know where to go to find a replacement. Third, as problems mount up it takes more and more “good things” to make one happy (on balance). Fourth, the effort to “pursue happiness” robs us of happiness along the way. We get so fixated on what we imagine will produce happiness that all else gets steamrolled. Last, but not least, with happiness you have no one to thank!

That’s where the Joy of His Blessing shows its superior quality. From beginning to end, if you have a faith relationship with the Living God through Jesus Christ, then you know that the good things that are making you happy are actually “love gifts” from heaven. We didn’t just get lucky; we were blessed intentionally by our Father in heaven. The same gift, which in an unbeliever produces happiness, in a believer produces a love message that lifts us into the Joy of the Lord. We have a double joy—the “happiness” caused by the good thing happening and the joy of realizing that it is a blessing from our God.

Not only that, but when the sense of joy in His blessings gets interrupted, we can relax better, knowing that it will return, because our Best Friend is dedicated to blessing us. In addition, there are joys unique to our relationship with Jesus which unbelievers can know nothing of: taking delight in His word, in the pleasure of sharing faith with other believers, in recognizing His Hand upon nature and the events of the world around us, etc. On top of all this, when we count our blessings, we don’t have to arrive at a total that shifts the balance as unbelievers do, we simply have to count our blessings until we remember that we have Someone who is sending them. Then the joy of the Lord lifts us all the way up!

You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. Psalms 4:7 ESV

Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore, "Great is the Lord, who delights in the welfare of his servant!" Psalms 35:27 ESV

Now, get ready for one of the most amazing facts about the joy of His blessings. He has placed us in charge of them! Don’t worry, God fully intends to keep dropping all kinds of good things into our lives “out of the blue”—without regard for our merits but has set before all of us the ability to choose “life or death, blessing or cursing.” We are in the driver’s seat. If we freely choose to lean into Jesus for wisdom, guidance and strength to walk in a way that pleases Him, the flow of blessings will dramatically increase. This is especially true of those blessings we call the fruit of the Spirit. Peace, love, joy, confidence and inner freedom all immediately show up inside of us whenever we trust Jesus with what He allows and are willing to follow Him in whatever He may ask of us. That’s something you can learn to do every day!



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2) The Joy of His Salvation

The joy of His blessings is tremendously uplifting in those times when you're going down the road of life doing reasonably well. You'll need something far sturdier when you've driving your spiritual car into the ditch. This is the joy David reached for when he was confessing how badly he blew it in Psalm 51. You don't have to be a believer to take joy in what you can do to rescue your life from one problem to the next. Any heathen can do that. But you do have to be a believer in Jesus to take joy in what He is doing to rescue you!

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Psalms 51:12 ESV

Best of all, this joy is not based on anything you are doing. That's a real bonus because on close examination none of us are hitting the mark. In fact, what mostly gets us down is the sight of how badly we seem to be doing in one area or another. Ironically, that's where this joy gets ignited. The dismal sight of our sins and failures "makes us" turn to see that we have an all-purpose Savior in Jesus, who not only wants to get us to heaven, He is willing to rescue us in any situation right now. What do you need? Mercy or help? He's got both!

Your sins and failures can push you into the joy of His salvation better than anything. They will get you saying, "Thank God, at least You're still rescuing me from the hell I deserve. Thank God, at least You're going to get me to heaven, anyway. Wow!" Now, you've got your joy back! The very thing that the enemy uses to rob us of our joy—our sins and failures—becomes a God-graced way of restoring us to the joy of HIS salvation. You don't even have to crash and burn to get this joy back. Just have a lively sense of your sin potential and it will push you into fresh gratitude and joy any moment of the day.

The "mother lode" of our joy is the joy of His salvation. The great problem that everyone on earth has is sin and death. Death would be no problem if it weren't for sin. Even little sins separate us from God and deserve hell. He saves us from each sin that separates us from Him (as we confess and repent) and He saves us from eternal torment in hell (when we repented and believed the "good news"). Realize any one of these three in any moment: 1) that He covers your sinfulness (with the Blood and His mercy), 2) that He is ready and willing to forgive each sin you confess, 3) that He is saving you from the unimaginable torment in hell that you deserve—and voila! You have just received another heady dose of the joy of your salvation!

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. Isaiah 12:3 ESV

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Isaiah 35:10 ESV

3) The Joy of His Presence

This joy takes off once the other ones get you going. As you see (yet again) how good He is at blessing you, or forgiving you, or rescuing you, keep looking His way. Search deeper into the joy of discovering how good His love for you really is. Then keep looking to "see" how good He is in Himself—the joy-filled Lover of life. That's the joy that will fill us in eternity. Living with Him and in Him and for Him and through Him will be an endless delight! It starts now...

In some ways this is the easiest joy of all, because whenever we have a sense of His presence drawing near to us, our hearts either melt down or explode into joy—we need do nothing at all. No blessings to count, no calling on Him for rescue, and no faith needed to turn the access keys. Just being near Him produces joy automatically! Think of it this way. When the sun comes out in summer, everyone feels the heat. That's like the overpowering sense of Jesus' presence coming to you. But try to feel the sun's heat on a cold, rainy winter's day. That's an image describing what it means to seek the way to be drawn into His presence at all other times.

If you don't want to be "left out in the cold," then learning to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise is a must. We also have to practice deep surrender. Anything in us that resists yielding to the Lord on any point will keep us shut out from the full joy of His presence. That's not necessarily because He is holding our disobedience against us. Rather, our lack of surrender will keep us from getting "too close for comfort"—close enough to hear Him remind us of what He wants us to do. Try not to despair if you see inward resistance. Anything that gets in the way of getting closer to Him is something that we can call on Him to help us with.

At this point the joy of the Lord gets so intimate and personal that no one can coach you how to draw nearer. It takes the Holy Spirit within us to set our hearts on fire, to show us what we need to throw into the fire, and to help us find the way to yield our entire being into His Hands. Then we can be drawn ever closer. May you go deeper and be drawn closer than you ever imagined possible!

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalms 16:11 ESV

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions. Psalms 45:6-7 ESV

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NAME OF JESUS

What's in a name? Perhaps Shakespeare had it right that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but that's not the way the Bible sees it. Names in scripture are filled with prophetic revelation about a person's character and calling. To understand the hidden meaning of a person's name is to have insight into who they are and what they represent. Even place names are wellsprings of significance. How much more the name of Jesus! And would you believe it, dear Christian, your name, too, carries treasures of meaning waiting for you to discover. See and worship what God packed into His Son's name, then go explore your own.

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12

A Name Given Beforehand

Prophets heralded Jesus' birth long before He arrived. Their words conceived in Israel a faith expectation that the Lord God would send His promised Messiah to usher in His kingdom and deliver them from their enemies. As it turned out the people and their leaders mistook their own need and became "pregnant" with false expectations: More than deliverance from Rome, they needed rescue from themselves: The real enemy of God's chosen people were their own sins which kept carrying them away from Him. The angel who brought word to Mary of her coming pregnancy clarified this part of the prophetic message. The annunciation of her miraculous conception also contained a proclamation of the Messiah's Name and specific mission.



Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:18-21

There are only seven people in scripture who were named by God before their birth: Ishmael, Isaac, Solomon, Josiah, Cyrus, John the Baptist and Jesus. Though filled with significance about their role on earth, none of the other names can compare with the one given to our Lord. The Anglicized name Jesus goes back through Latin to the Greek name *Iêsous* or *Yesous* found in the New Testament, which is a rendition of the original Hebrew name *Yeshua*. *Yeshua* is a shortened form of the Hebrew name *Yehoshua* from which Joshua is also derived. Confused? Hold on, we're almost there.



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Yehosua is a compound name made first from *Yeho* which is an abbreviation of the four letter name *YHVH* (or *YHWH*) that God revealed to Moses at the burning bush—a name considered so sacred in Judaism that the rabbis taught that it should never be pronounced out loud. This name that cannot be named speaks of the absolute sovereignty and complete independence of God from His creation. It literally means “I Am Who I Am” and “I Will Be Who I Will Be.”

There is no more profound or higher title for God than this given in the whole of the Hebrew scriptures; it is also entirely unique to Judaism. To this matchless name of God is added the name *Yasha* which means to deliver, save or rescue. Hence, the angel could rightly say to Mary, “You will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” The child to be born is none other than the sovereign God, coming to save and deliver His own people! Curiously, the salvation He will accomplish will also have a profound effect upon His given name.

A Name Given Afterwards

Whenever someone among us accomplishes a great feat, they are often given a new title: Mohammed Ali, “World Heavyweight Champion”; Sir Edmund Hillary, “Conqueror of Everest”; George Washington, “Father of Our Country.” Naturally enough, after achieving His massive victory over sin and death, Jesus is showered with new titles: Savior of the World, Lord of the Resurrection, the Firstborn from the Dead, The Passover Lamb, the Author and Perfecter of Salvation, the High Priest, the Deliverer and Redeemer, just to name a few. These titles all in some way describe an important aspect of His great work for our appreciation and reverence. Scripture, however, goes even further. It records that Jesus was given, not only new titles, but a “new” name.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:8-11

It would appear by this that God the Father took the name Jesus had been given at birth, the name that went down into death with Him so to speak and raised both Jesus and His name to new heights! Whereas throughout His life, Jesus’ name spoke prophetically of His divine assignment and true, through hidden, nature, after the resurrection that same “resurrected” name is infused with immense authority and power. Now, at the proclaiming of His name, every being in the universe must “bend the knee” in submission to the One who has received “all authority” from the Father. All of us, whether angels or demons, lost or saved, will one day bow before Jesus and acknowledge that He is the rightful Lord of heaven and earth. We will either bow willingly and gladly, or under compulsion, filled with regret and resentments. That choice remains ours, but the compelling pressure of submission to His name is unalterably ordained.

Our Name of Power

The name of Jesus is, therefore, a name filled with immense power. As indicated in the opening quote, His name holds the power of salvation itself. Not only that, but we who believe have been given the name of Jesus with full authority to use it. His name is our name of power! This “raises” us even to the heights where we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies and empowers

us to engage the earth realm with “weapons” that are divinely powerful for bringing down strongholds.

Consider an analogy to law enforcement. Police are supplied guns—weapons of great power which they may need for their work, but this would hinder them as dead weight on their belts, if they were not also empowered to use them. Being authorized to use their weapons in certain authorized situations is what gives the police their true power. What is our authority and in what situations are we authorized to use the Name “that is above every name”?

Our authority comes directly from Jesus. He says that He chose us and appointed us “to go and bear fruit.” We did not thrust ourselves into a position that was intended for someone else; rather, we have been called by God into union with Christ to serve His purposes in the world. Through faith in Christ we have accepted our calling and with it came our commissioning. This doesn’t mean of course that we fully understand it! Even with the disciples we can see a progression in Jesus’ revelation to them of what they were receiving.

Commissioned with Authority

For instance, John shows us a comprehensive commissioning of the disciples in the Upper Room on the evening of the Resurrection. In the very moment in which He breathed into them new life—in this first instance of “born again” faith in the Resurrected Lord converting the hearts of His followers—Jesus conveyed His full authority to them. He equipped them with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and declared He was sending them just as He Himself had been sent. That’s as power-filled and as authorized as it gets!

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." John 20:21-22 ESV

Do you think the disciples “got it”? I doubt it. I believe they were too caught up in the wonder and excitement of seeing Jesus resurrected in their midst, to really notice or unpack anything else. He was gloriously alive from the dead and that faith-realization was raising them into new life! How do you take in the “extras” in a moment like that?

Perhaps that’s partly why Jesus commissioned His disciples a second time. After His Resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples on the mountain and through them commissioned (authorized) all of us to be His agents upon the earth. We would all be acting under the full authority that He Himself had recently received.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20 ESV

How to Use His Name

Through faith-conversion we, too, received the Holy Spirit, were commissioned by Jesus to bear much fruit and are being sent out into the world, fully authorized to use His name. Even so we want to use His name the right way. You mean there’s a wrong way? Well, yes there is. You



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may remember the small matter of ten commandments carved in stone? The third of those commands is an admonition not to take the name of the Lord “in vain.” What did He mean by that?

The commandment certainly means that we are not to use the name of Jesus as a swear word. Not knowing any better, the world curses using Jesus’ Name as an expletive, often including His great title (Christ) in the abuse. Unbelievers are wrong and ignorant in doing this, but why would any Christian want to do it? Yet, it goes further than this. Devout Jews in ancient Israel believed that saying the great name of God (for them it was YHWH described above) would evoke His presence. You’d better be sure that you want Him to show up, if you let His name slip through your lips! That’s an admirable approach. I believe that it does little to honor the Lord by repeatedly using His great name in casual conversation as a kind of interjection. I’m thinking of the way “Oh, Jesus!” gets tacked on to the end of something we say, even when it’s not really intended to start a prayer with Him. Consider how foolish this must seem to outsiders.

The fully authorized, entirely legitimate ways to use Jesus’ name are in prayers to the Father, in prayers to Jesus, in command of nature, in rebuke of spiritual darkness and in adoration of Jesus. There may be other ways, but probably they can fit comfortably under these headings.

1) In Prayer to the Father

Jesus told the disciples to use His name in their petitions to the Father. He evidently wants us to have every confidence that the Father will listen to us, just as He does to Jesus.

In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. John 16:23 ESV

2) In Prayer to Jesus

Although Jesus directed His disciples towards going to the Father with their petitions, He also assured them that they could continue to bring their requests to Him as well.

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. John 14:13 ESV

3) In Command to Nature

Just as Jesus commanded storms to be still, diseases to leave and healing to come, so too we can command nature. This is how Peter described it after commanding healing to come to the lame man by the Beautiful Gate of the Temple.

And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. Acts 3:16 ESV

4) In Rebuke of Spiritual Darkness

With this name and through faith in the One whom it identifies, we have authority over evil spirits, just as Paul did at Philippi.

And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. Acts 16:18
ESV

5) In Adoration of Him

Whether the praise is intimate on the inside or boisterous on the outside, His name is greatly to be praised, just as He Himself is greatly to be praised. Say His name with love to Him, lots of love. I doubt He ever gets tired of hearing it used in this way!

Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre! Psalms 149:1 ESV



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CHAPTER FIVE

OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Watching a priest offer blood sacrifices is not an event familiar to most moderns living within the reach of Christianity. What's more, we feel neither need or desire for it, but rather revulsion. Nevertheless, such things were once common features of life worldwide (and continue today through the dark arts and animistic religions). This lack of direct experience, perhaps, makes Jesus' role as our High Priest a bit harder for us to grasp in terms of its full significance. This would not have been the case of the early believers, as the writer to the Hebrews demonstrates. He devoted half his long letter to this fascinating subject and powerful aid to faith.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of, let us hold fast our confession. Hebrews 4:14 ESV

Why Sacrifice Animals?

There seems to be something instinctive in the heart of humanity which led people all over the world in seeking to gain favor from or access to their gods through blood sacrifice. Biblical Christianity draws from the ancient roots of the Jewish people and the Hebrew scriptures, who lived in a part of the world that was saturated with animal, even human, sacrifice. God could have chosen to lead His chosen people by an entirely different path. That's not what He did. Instead, the Lord took this impulse and purified it by bringing it under His own ordering and direction. For the Israelites, the sacrifices ordained by God provided the proper (holy) means of access to His presence and a pathway for receiving favor and blessing.



The father of our faith and of the Jewish nation, Abraham, offered animal sacrifice when God established a covenant with him. God's covenant with the Jewish nation, therefore, began with blood sacrifice and with Abraham functioning as a priest. Later, Abraham would also be instructed in circumcision as the sign of the covenant, a sign that included bloodshed. The Patriarchs continued these practices, but it was through Moses at Mount Sinai that God delivered what we know of as the Old Testament sacrificial system all in one piece. That system included a list and description for all required and voluntary sacrifices, the date or times for those sacrifices, instructions for the priesthood who would offer them (the tribe of Levi), and a detailed description for the tabernacle where all this would take place.

By the time Jesus entered Jerusalem, the Tabernacle of Moses had been replaced by the Tabernacle of David, then by the grand Temple of Solomon, then by the simpler Second Temple (constructed on the return from Babylon) and finally by the enormous temple complex built by Herod the Great. What had not changed through all these changes was the shedding of blood. In fact, it reached "industrial levels" as prosperity and the growing population put ever greater demands on the legion of priest to offer the necessary sacrifices. As we will see, all this was



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only a temporary measure, awaiting the one final sacrifice and the One everlasting priest. In the meantime, much blood was shed. Why?

Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Hebrews 9:22 ESV

If we take the Lord's Word on this (and we should), then the impulse to animal sacrifice is perfectly understandable, as are its limitations. The awareness of sin guilt and of separation from God because of it are the real engines driving this system. Sin is such a travesty of creation that it brings forth death. Always. The only way to avert it or diminish its effects is if/when death takes place. God gave animal sacrifice as a means for passing the sin guilt to the animal, so it could be lifted off the person who sinned. Then, the animal would die instead. Obviously, an animal is not a person and certainly not the person who sinned, so the whole system – based upon the Law -- could never achieve perfection.

But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Hebrews 10:3-4 ESV

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

This brief review of the history leads us now to Jesus. When He entered Jerusalem, the first thing He did, according to John's gospel, was cleanse the Temple. The primary focus of the Temple and its priesthood was animal sacrifice. Therefore, the courts of the Temple were used to facilitate the necessary trade in animals, for the convenience of "worshippers" who were there to purchase animals for slaughter. It just so happened that this was also a convenience for the priests and a boon to the "money changers", who profited from exchanging the people's secular coins for those that the Temple treasury would accept. Jesus would have none of it. He wanted the focus within the Temple shifted from merchandizing animals to prayer! Here's how He said it in Matthew's account:

He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." Matthew 21:13 ESV

Prayer, of course, is communication and communion with God. Through prayer we not only speak to God, we can be drawn closer to Him. That's what Jesus wanted to see happening in the temple compound. That's what the Temple was supposed to accomplish, as "worshippers" saw the chosen animal being sacrificed in place of themselves. Evidently, the system of sacrifice was failing to accomplish this primary purpose of the Temple, at least in Jesus' eyes (and, as we know, He had 20/20 spiritual vision). Jesus was looking for people to worship the Father in Spirit and truth, with the Temple being a "house of prayer" facilitating that divine exchange, instead of exchanging money for animals. Here, we catch a glimpse, a preview, of the coming Great High Priest. He is about to change the whole sacrificial system and bring in an entirely new Law.

Both Victim and Priest

The average Christian hears countless sermons about Jesus' death on the cross. This is perfectly correct and understandable. Our salvation hangs upon what Jesus did by dying for us as the atoning sacrifice that we needed. He became [the Perfect Victim](http://www.healingstreamsusa.org) – the Lamb that was slain -- whose Blood can cleanse each and every sin ever sinned. Thank God for that! This is



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the objective side of the Atonement – the actual covering of our sins which satisfied God’s requirement of justice and accomplished our reconciliation. As we know, however, the work that Jesus objectively did at the cross needs to be received by faith for it to bear the fruit of salvation in anyone.

Faith is the subjective side of salvation. By faith, we receive within ourselves – subjectively – the benefits of confidence in God, a clear conscience and the joy of knowing we are saved. Ok, it’s a bit more complicated than that. It is also true that from the first moment that we believe, we “objectively” receive the forgiveness of our sins, reconciliation and justification with God, and the gift of the Holy Spirit just to name a few concrete spiritual realities that come to us through conversion. (For more on this see [Saved by the Free Gift](#).) This is the “objective” side of saving faith which sets it apart from all other kinds of faith, since it is truly a God-given work of God. However, we all know within ourselves that our confidence, conscience and joy fluctuate day to day, even moment to moment.

The writer of Hebrews is concerned about this subjective side to our believing. He writes more than the other inspired authors about the need for believers to enter what he calls “the rest.” This rest is a confidence and trust so complete in God that there is a shedding of all sense of effort. Just as God rested from His work of creation, so believers can “rest” from all effort to save themselves or advance themselves. When faith is established, the believer enters God’s rest. Their work is finished. What is their work? We work at believing God until we perfectly trust what He is telling us about what He has done, is doing, or will do for us. Then, the peace of Christ floods our hearts and we are “at rest.” Interestingly, the writer of Hebrews ties this faith-ability to Jesus’ role as our High Priest.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:15-16 ESV

Access to Grace through the Priest

Priests provide access to God’s grace. Because God appointed the Levitical priesthood and instituted the sacrificial rites, the people could have confidence that God would do what they needed Him to do, which was to forgive their sins and restore them to full fellowship. All they had to do was bring the animal to be sacrificed. The priests and God did the rest. Then, the people could rest – be at peace – once they saw the blood of the sacrifice being shed as a covering for their sins. The priest, however, had to pass through all manner of qualifications to fulfill his assigned task. He was himself fully human with sins of his own, but to function as a priest he had to fulfill all the righteous demands of the Law in the days of his service. This included offering specific sacrifices for his own sins. All of this gave the people confidence.

Confidence is what the writer of Hebrews wants us to have. He emphasizes that Jesus is our perfect High Priest who didn’t need to offer sacrifices for His own sins – He had none. So, we can have confidence that although He was “tempted as we are”, He was without sin and was qualified to function as a priest that day. Now, if the writer was speaking about Jesus as our Victim, His being without sin would have been presented differently. The emphasis would have been on the Blood shed by the sinless Victim: Jesus had to be the perfect, sinless sacrifice in order to atone for the rest of us. However, this is not the writer’s focus. He wants us to know that

because Jesus was tempted as we are “in every respect”, He can sympathize with us. This is Jesus’ role as our Priest, not our Victim. We see this emphasis also in this passage:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. Hebrews 9:11-12 ESV

Why is this important? Because we all struggle at times with the subjective side of our faith. We all have weaknesses, in addition to sins. In fact, one of our weaknesses is not always having the confident, robust faith that we need to have. So, whether we have weaknesses at believing, or weaknesses that make us prone to sin, we need Someone who can sympathize with us. The sight of Jesus at the cross can (ironically) be intimidating to hearts weak at believing. Not everyone struggles with this, but plenty do. That Jesus suffered so much for our sins can become a condemning reproach to the believer who is already feeling weakened. (The enemy is both an accuser and a deceiver.) Where can one look for confidence? To our faithful High Priest who knows what it is to suffer temptation, not just suffer for sins. Look to Him, dear Christian, and know that He fully sympathizes with your every weakness!

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. Hebrews 2:17 ESV

Our Priest Is Our Intercessor

Jesus as High Priest offers us a sympathetic, faith-encouraging means of access to God’s grace. According to the writer of Hebrews 4:15-16 quoted above, we can come boldly to the throne of grace in any moment and as soon as we get there “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” This is fantastic! God is saying through this inspired author, “No matter what kind of trouble you’re in, no matter how badly you may be failing, come instantly to your very sympathetic High Priest, Jesus. He is on a throne of grace, not judgment. He will immediately give you mercy for any sin you need to confess and then, He will give you grace-based help for any problem you have.” Isn’t that just what we all need? In truth, we could use this kind of help many times a day. Imagine what it could do for your confidence level by getting really good at taking the [“Hebrews 4:16 elevator.”](#) But it gets even better.

As our High Priest, sitting on that throne of grace, Jesus isn’t just waiting for us to come to Him. No, among His many divine assignments is one that is of special importance for us. His loving eyes are constantly on our lives (now that He is “restored” to being fully Omniscient He can see everywhere at once). If He sees our need for help with our weaknesses, if He sees we are in trouble, what does He do? He prays! As both our human brother-priest and as our divine Friend, Jesus prays. There is no more sympathetic or effective intercession in the universe than that. Best of all, it never ends. Let your heart take firm hold of this tremendous boost to our confidence. Because He “always lives to make intercession” for us, Jesus can save us “to the uttermost.” In other words, He is not going to call it quits until everything about us looks and feels saved.

But he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God



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through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. Hebrews 7:24-25
ESV

Remember where we began with Jesus entering Jerusalem and cleansing the Temple because it wasn't a "house of prayer"? This passage from Hebrews shows us that Jesus completely fulfilled that desire of His in one sense, by entering heaven and filling the tabernacle there with His own prayers. Just as the sanctuary of the tabernacle on earth contained a Mercy Seat, so does the tabernacle in heaven with this difference: heaven's Mercy Seat is the original and the earthly one is the copy. Jesus is seated on heaven's Mercy Seat at the right hand of the Father. His intercessions don't have far to travel! The only temple remaining to become a fully functioning "house of prayer" is the one inside each believer. Let Jesus be enthroned in your heart, and watch your life become flooded with prayer. In fact, it takes a good deal of prayer to yield our life and heart to Jesus and keep it yielded. Of course, He still knows how to cleanse a dirty temple...

Melchizedek and a Change of Law

There is simply too much about the priesthood of Jesus contained in the Book of Hebrews to put into one article. One more thing, however, must be mentioned. Reflecting that Jesus was not of the Levitical tribe, led the author into a fascinating comparison of Jesus with Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. The Levites were the tribal descendants of Jacob's son Levi. They had been chosen by God and set apart as priests for Israel, appointed by the Law given at Sinai which delineated their rights and duties, along with the whole of the sacrificial system. Jesus came from the tribe of Jacob's son Judah through the lineage of King David. He, therefore, had no need to follow Levitical procedures. But what gave Him the right as a priest to offer Himself? The answer lies in the mystery of Melchizedek.

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? Hebrews 7:11 ESV

This shadowy figure of whom very little is known plays a surprisingly large part in the understanding of the inspired author. Jesus is a priest in "the order of Melchizedek" who likewise carried the twin titles of "king of peace" and "king of righteousness." Many other similarities are drawn out, proving that Jesus stands in the priestly line of one to whom Abraham paid tithes and received blessing from. Melchizedek, therefore, was priest to Abraham, the father of the faithful, as Jesus now is priest to all of Abraham's faith descendants. The author conclusively demonstrates this by quoting from the prophetic word in the Psalms which applies to the Lord's Messiah.

The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Psalm 110:4 ESV

Some believe that the earthly priest-king Melchizedek, not only pre-figured Jesus, he was an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ in the Old Testament. Unquestionably, Jesus, the Eternal Son, appeared at times within His own creation to assist the people of Israel, long before His coming to earth as Jesus of Nazareth. So, this is an intriguing possibility. What can be said with certainty is that this "change in the priesthood" from the Levitical order to that of Melchizedek necessitated a "change in the law."



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For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. Hebrews 7:13 ESV

Was the Law Changed or Annulled?

This thought truly carries us into a wide-ranging discussion! Just what is meant by change? Is it the Law concerning the priesthood that changes, or a change from the Sinai Law into something different? The writer of Hebrews seems to insist on the latter. He writes that the Law made nothing perfect and was, therefore, annulled because of its “weakness and unprofitableness.” But his whole discussion of the law has been in connection to the sacrificial system established by the Law for enabling the Israelites to live with the Holy God who also gave them His moral law to live by. That law – the Levitical system of sacrifices – could never cleanse anyone’s conscience or give them true confidence. So, that law had to be annulled. In no way is he saying that the moral law had to be annulled!

What replaces the old law of Levitical sacrifices, is looking to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, the priest after the order of Melchizedek, who enables us to draw near with confidence because of His once-and-for-all sacrifice and His sympathetic priestly nature. Why on earth do we still need a priest and a sacrifice to look to? Because the moral Law is still in place! Because He has gone before us, we can boldly go to where He is on the throne of grace getting His help living within the moral boundaries and receiving His mercy when we don’t. Therefore, we have great reason for confidence and a great means of having our conscience cleansed.

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.
Hebrews 6:19-20 ESV



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CHAPTER SIX

THE ASCENSION GIFTS

When Jesus ascended, He went all out in the gifts He poured down upon us. On the road to Jerusalem and the cross that awaited Him there, Jesus told His disciples that it would be better for them if He went away. He wasn't kidding! In ascending to heaven to receive His inheritance, Jesus showered humanity with our inheritance. Because so much of our inheritance is given without fanfare, the only way to discover "what's coming to you" or what's already been given, is to dig into the Word. The Bible is our treasure map to a super-abundance of gifts.

Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." Ephesians 4:8 ESV

The Gifts from the Cross

The death and resurrection of Jesus showered us with tremendous gifts. Some are listed below, but it will take eternity to unwrap all the presents! Such largess staggers the mind and liberates the heart. Consider these spectacular gifts of love: All of our sins can now be forgiven. The way to heaven is now opened to us. By faith in Jesus' death and resurrection we can now be born again and live with confidence of our forgiven past and our eternal future.



This same conversion regenerates us on the inside, as God gives us a new heart and a new nature. To top it off the Holy Spirit is joined to the new spirit that we receive so that we have the presence and power of our Lord always with us. How can it get any better than this? In fact, Jesus said it would get better. Astonishingly, He said that it was "better" for us if He went away.

Let me assure you, it is better for you that I go away. I say this because when I go away I will send the Helper to you. But if I did not go, the Helper would not come.
John 16:7 ESV

The Gifts from the Ascension

By His death and resurrection, Jesus gained for us free access to every good thing that heaven provides. Some of those things, however, could only come to us once He ascended. If He had chosen to stay on earth, many good gifts could not have come our way. (see [His Glorious Ascension](#) for more on this.) This isn't speculation on our part. It is the obvious outcome of the truth that Jesus described. It really is better for us that Jesus ascended to heaven. We need Him there for more even than the one reason He gave – that unless He departed the Holy Spirit Would not come. Let's take some of them one by one.



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1. The Holy Spirit

The first coming of the Holy Spirit had already taken place 40 days before Jesus ascended. In the Upper Room on the evening of the resurrection as the disciple's eyes were opened, they received saving faith in the Risen Lord. Jesus was standing right in front of them! They had seen Him die. Now, they saw Him fully and miraculously alive. Can anyone deny that they were born again and filled with the Holy Spirit? We only get saving faith by, well, faith. They got it with eyes wide open. Indeed, John tells us that it was Jesus Himself who invited/commanded them to receive the Holy Spirit and who then breathed the Spirit into them. This is the Risen Lord infusing faith and the Holy Spirit into His disciples as the first order of business under the new conditions of spiritual life. You can't get more born again than that or more Holy Spirit indwelt.

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." John 20:20-22 ESV

Why is this important? Jesus told the disciples that He must depart ("go away") for them to receive the Holy Spirit. Prior to His ascension, He hadn't departed. He was still with them, coming and going, just as He would be with us today had He chosen to stay down here, rather than depart. It was, therefore, only after the Ascension that the Holy Spirit could come in the way that Jesus said would be "better" for us. This happened at Pentecost, only ten days after Jesus ascended. This should alert us to the reality that the Holy Spirit didn't come at Pentecost to indwell believers, much less to convert the disciples. They had already been converted (born again) and Spirit-fulfilled by Jesus 50 days earlier.

What happened at Pentecost was the giving of the Holy Spirit as an outpouring – the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The sign of this outpouring upon a believer is exactly the same today as it was then: speaking in tongues. This baptism in the Spirit is not for conversion and infilling, though these could happen together. Rather, it is for "power from heaven" to do the supernatural aspects of Christian ministry and to, therefore, be effective witnesses throughout the world. Few students of history have tried to deny that what turned the Roman world "upside down" was not preaching alone, but the Word was confirmed by signs and wonders, healings and deliverance from evil spirits. This is still going on today, throughout the world, as the Spirit is poured out upon believers who seek this ascension gift.

"Remember that I will send you the one my Father promised. Stay in the city until you are given that power from heaven." Luke 24:49 ESV

2. A Name above Every Name

When Jesus ascended to His throne, He received a Name that is above every name. Names are extremely important in the Biblical revelation. They tell us a lot about people; they tell us even more about God. God not only gives us names, thereby revealing much about Himself (what He sees; what He honors or abhors). He also reveals Himself by Self-given names and, surprisingly, adopts names that we give Him. Names convey character and authority. We are told that it was because Jesus humbled Himself, even to



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the point of death on a cross, that God exalted Him and chose to give Him this Name. (Go here for more on the [Name of Jesus](#).)

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:8-11 ESV

Now, the timing of this is interesting. Jesus “earned” this Name (which is an exaltation of His birth name) by humbling Himself and going to the cross. It could not be given sooner. It took the full, final obedience of His death on the cross for this name to be given. It could not be otherwise, because only His atoning death could fulfill the divine meaning of His name: Jesus in Hebrew means “Yahweh saves.” Nevertheless, this name, so richly earned at the cross, was not given immediately. Only after He ascended to heaven and God “seated him at his right hand” would this name be given. The Father placed His beloved Son “far above” everything in creation and above “every name that is named.” It is at this point that His name, Jesus, is raised above the names of all other created beings “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

That he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:20-22 ESV

This holds meanings of tremendous importance for us. This name is not only given to Jesus; it is also given to us. We get to use [His Name](#)! In prayer or petition, in command of demons or of nature, we who are in Christ have full authority to use His Name. His inheritance – His Name -- is our inheritance. Rather than being lifted up by this, it should humble us. Jesus received His name by the path of self-sacrificial obedience. Only once He had completed that assignment did He receive the exaltation of His Name. So, it is with us. Unless we walk in the way of the cross, being faithful to die to self, we may in the end receive quite a different name than the one we have been given to use in the meantime. For to go the way of pride and self-exaltation would gain for us a name of opprobrium. May that never be our way!

3. The Joy of the Lord

Unquestionably, Jesus walked the earth in an abundance of joy. Scripture says that He was filled with joy beyond that of His companions. [\[v\]](#) He had every reason to be joyful. Jesus was the one and only person who ever chose to be born! Already from heaven, as the pre-incarnate Son of God, He desired to live among us as our Emmanuel. Or, perhaps better yet, as the kings of legend who disguised themselves in order to move freely among their people. Jesus loved being down here with us. After all, He created everything exactly to His liking, declaring it all “good” with mankind being “very good.” What’s not to like? Well, certainly the sight of our wretchedness would have grieved Him, the sight of oppression always angered Him, and the impending cross brought unspeakable agony to His soul.



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Despite these very real heartaches, Jesus knew how to cast His cares on God and unburden His Soul like no one else ever has. He walked in the ancient paths of humility, uprightness and wisdom which allowed Him to reap all the blessings that faithful steps bring.^[vi] He knew the love of the Father and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Of [the three great joys](#) that we are given, He excelled in all three: the joy of God's blessings; the joy of God's salvation; and the joy of God's presence. Nevertheless, there was one joy that could only come in heaven. One joy that required His death to receive. One joy that made dying a thing to be desired.

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2 ESV

What is this joy that was "set" before Jesus? For the sake of it, He "endured the cross" and despised its shame. It wasn't the other three joys that carried Him through that awful day. It was the hope of a joy that could only be gained by enduring what should never have had to be endured. This wasn't the joy of God's blessing. There was no blessing in being mocked, beaten and crucified. This wasn't the joy of the God's presence. His Father seemed absent as Jesus underwent the worst time of His life. It certainly wasn't the joy of the God's salvation. No one, not even God, would save Him from this dreadful hour.

Yet, there was joy there, nevertheless. There had to be. The joy of the Lord is our strength. Jesus needed strength for this ordeal like no other time in His life. Where did He get the joy that strengthen Him? He got it by looking through the cross to what lay on the other side. There was the joy of the liberation this would bring to all who believe. That's what was set before Him! That's why He could be made "perfect through suffering." For the love of us, He drew joy out of knowing (by faith) that the suffering He endured would bring salvation to "many sons" (and daughters).

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. Hebrews 2:10 ESV

This gives us quite a take-away, doesn't it? We, too, encounter painful, shameful trials even in daily life. And it is hard in the midst of those trials to find a blessing, hard even to find God's presence (though He never leaves us). And the joy of His salvation is necessarily still remote, or we wouldn't be praying so hard for deliverance! Nevertheless, there is still a joy we can reach for. We, too, can know by faith that there is always a redemptive purpose worth the pain of passage through life's unwanted crosses. We can know that into our life and that of the ones we love (hopefully all people) will come untold benefits and blessing -- if we remain faithful as Jesus did to bear the suffering and stay the course.

4. Our Great High Priest

Jesus fully embodies the three great roles of prophet, priest and king first introduced to us through the ancient nation of Israel. While on earth Jesus fulfilled the role of Prophet, giving us many powerful words about His Return and predicting accurately the judgment that would come to those in Israel who (unfortunately) rejected their Messiah. He also



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appeared to John on the Isle of Patmos and prophesied events of the Last Days which we are only now coming upon us. The entire Book of Revelation testifies to Jesus as Prophet.

Jesus also came as King of the Kingdom of God that He was inaugurating. He called everyone to repent for this kingdom (His Kingdom) was “at hand.” He said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” So, His Kingdom was in some sense here, and in other significant ways still distant. Even now, He reigns from heaven with all of creation placed “under His feet.” Nevertheless, it should be obvious that the fullness of His Kingship will have to await His Return. Only then, can His millennial Kingdom be established upon the earth. Only then, will our heavenly Lord live visibly among us as our King. So, Jesus is the Prophet who came and the King who is coming.

That leaves His role as Priest. Jesus isn’t our priest in the past or a priest to come. He is our priest fully in the present tense. This, too, is an ascension gift, both to Him and to us. It just may be one of the least understood or appreciated gifts of them all. In fact, right about now you may find yourself thinking, “But, I’m not an Old Testament believer. I don’t need a priest -- I’ve got Jesus!” That’s the point. You’ve got Jesus but look how you’ve got Him. With the Ascension, God our Father chose to present Jesus to us as a priest, and not just any priest, but “our great High Priest.”

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. Hebrews 4:14 ESV

The writer of the Book of Hebrews devoted several whole chapters to Jesus as priest (Chapters 5-10) and wove many verses such as this one throughout his letter. This gives us an idea of the importance of this role that Jesus currently (and forever) holds. Since we have little or no modern-day experience of priests, we need to look to the scriptures to understand their function. From the Old Testament we can see that under God’s direction a priest has two dual roles:

A priest represents the people to God and represents God to the people.
A priest presents the sacrifice to God and presents God’s response to them.

These are mediatorial roles. Simply put, it means that a priest is the “middle man” in every necessary way between God and us. As stated earlier this is first of all an Ascension gift to Jesus. Only the successful God-man Jesus of Nazareth could possibly qualify for this high title and position. And qualify He did! It cost Him everything, but through His sacrifice He gained so much more than He had before. He now has gained the divine right to be priest to us. That is our part of the Ascension gift! For more on what this means see “Jesus, Our Priest Forever.”

The Secret Work of Heaven Unveiled

When Jesus came to earth there was so much going on behind the scenes that it took a vast company of angels, specific angelic visitations, numerous dreams and extraordinary occurrences to “clue in” the key participants to what God was doing. They certainly needed the help. The Incarnation was something that never had happened before. An unthinkable and stupendous event seemed like a natural occurrence, the birth of a little baby boy. And yet,



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through the conception and birth of Jesus, God became Man. The High and Holy One descended to inhabit human flesh as one of us. No wonder Mary said, "How can this happen? (Luke 1:34)"

Fast forward through all the mysteries and miracles of His life, death and resurrection. The final act of this divine drama is no less amazing. It will require fully half the Book of Hebrews to lift the veil upon God's secret working. As at the beginning, so now at the closing, an unthinkable and stupendous event occurs. It occurs somewhat in reverse. This resurrected Man, Jesus of Nazareth, ascends to become God in all the fullness of the Three-in-One! that, too, had never happened before. The Man Jesus of Nazareth now sits upon the Throne of Grace, ruling with the Father and the Holy Spirit over all of creation. Just to be clear, Jesus never ceased to be fully God in His nature, but He chose to set His divine fullness aside during His time on earth. See [His Miraculous Birth](#) for more on Jesus' Self-emptying, but by all means, follow the trail of discovery to explore more about [The Ascension Mysteries](#).

Ascension Gifts for New Life

Many and varied are the gifts that have come to us from our risen and ascended Savior. As you look over the following (partial) list, try to see which ones come to us because Jesus rose from the dead. Then, look for those which we could not have received without His ascension to heaven. Every part of the redemptive work of God is necessary for our full and final salvation. Simple faith is good for receiving it all. Nevertheless, a heart of devotion seeks to understand (as well as one can) all the fascinating parts of this incredible, life-giving mystery. And give Him glory for each one of them!



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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ASCENSION MYSTERIES

Great mysteries surround the Ascension. Whenever we are speaking of Father, Son and Holy Spirit all roads lead inevitably into mystery. You can't you can't get away from this and, really, why would you want to? The endlessly inviting mysteries draw us ever deeper into the great quest of knowing our God. This ensures that we can remain childlike in wonder and fascination all our days on earth and even in heaven to come. Still, some Mysteries seem bigger than others, like the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Three-in-One and this one.

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. 1 Timothy 3:16

The Mystery of Restoration

When Jesus ascended something shifted. While he was on Earth, He was fully God, but he was (if we could say it this way) primarily human. Jesus had to set the God side apart and keep it apart. How He did that is anyone's guess, but Paul assures us that this is exactly what He did, and He did it not just at birth, but throughout His time on earth. (See [His Miraculous Birth](#) for more on this.)

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. Philippians 2:5-7 ESV

This is truly, shockingly, amazing: Jesus "emptied Himself." He never stopped being God in his nature, but he certainly stopped being able to access His Godward side in His abilities or knowledge. At the very least, this means that He was not omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), or omnipresent (all everywhere) while He walked the earth. For that He had to depend upon the Father and the Holy Spirit just the same as the rest of us. Had He not done it this way, He would never have been able to be our substitute -- the perfect human at the cross. On the third day, the Father raised Jesus from the dead. Then comes the Ascension and He is somehow marvelously restored to being fully God. How?



The magnitude of this is something like a reversal of the Incarnation. The God who became human, now becomes God again. But without ever not being God when He was fully human, and without being less than human now that He is fully God! If that dazzle's your mind (and it should), consider this: How is it even possible for a human being -- even in a glorified body -- to be everywhere at once? How is it possible to remain a Jewish Man and still process the



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unlimited God-filled understanding coursing through Him now? When Jesus was on Earth, certainly His latent divinity never put a drag on His humanity, but now that He has been raised and fully restored to all His God abilities would not His humanity put a drag on His divinity? Evidently not! Nevertheless, there is a mystery here.

The Mystery of the Moment

Another mystery is when did all of this happen? While Jesus remained on Earth before his Ascension, did He remain fully human with the divine side still set aside? Remember that He hadn't ascended yet to acquire, or rather re-acquire, His God-ward abilities. If this is so, then He was a resurrected, fully human person same as we will be one day. Remember that Jesus on the cross committed His Spirit to God. His divine Spirit went to God. It was not His divine side that died, but His human side. We are speaking of mysteries here, but it would seem that it was the Man, Jesus of Nazareth, who died at the cross, not the Divine Son. This was the death that was needed – the death of a fully human substitute on whom the sins of all humanity could be placed.

Significantly, it is to this Man that the keys were given -- not to Jesus as God, but to Jesus as Man. After all it was Jesus as Man who did the work and won the victory. Furthermore, He seems to have indicated that He held the keys while still with His disciples on the mountain in Galilee -- before the Ascension. Is He not referring here to the keys of “death and hades”? How else could He have received “all authority?”

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Matthew 28:18 ESV

Adam lost the keys. The second, or “last” Adam, Jesus regained them. Then comes the Ascension. At some point upon arrival in heaven, Jesus is raised above every name, restored to full Divinity and seated above all creation as its One and only Lord. It's a perfectly lovely picture of an extraordinary and mysterious Reality. Catch a glimpse in wonder, before it fades again into Mystery...

The Mystery of the Two Altars

Then, stay a bit longer to ponder the related mystery of His elevation as our High Priest. While on earth Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice through the terrible ordeal of Good Friday. At the cross, Jesus became both Priest and Victim. This means of course that it was as a fully human priest that Jesus offered Himself as a fully human victim. Only in this way could humanity be fully restored to God.

And indeed every priest stands daily ministering and offering often the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right of God, from then on expecting until His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified. Hebrews 10:11-14 ESV

Because Jesus was the perfect sinless sacrifice, His one offering of Himself will never need to be repeated. Notice that the language is not just about His role as our Victim, but as our Priest who makes the sacrificial offering. That offering was made on earth, but the full exercise of His priesthood didn't end there. He ascended to heaven, entering that “more perfect tent” which no



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priest before Him could have entered by his own merits and no blood before Him could have cleansed. Jesus entered "by means of his own blood" and cleansed the altar there with His Blood. This is the reality of which the Levitical priesthood expressed the earthly copy.

Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Hebrews 9:23-24 ESV

Just as an earthly priest would slay the lamb, then pour its blood upon the altar, so Jesus having been slain on earth, ascended to pour His Blood upon heaven's altar. We see this pattern even more clearly through the ritual required for the Jewish Day of Atonement. On that one day, the priest, having been thoroughly cleansed, would enter the Tabernacle or Temple carrying the blood of the sacrificial victim. He would then enter the holiest part of the Sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, and apply the blood to the Mercy Seat. By this means alone, atonement was made for the sins of all Israel, at least in temporary form. Jesus fulfilled this Old Testament sign when He entered heaven's most holy place and placed the Blood of everlasting atonement there.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. Hebrews 9:11-12 ESV

What a high, holy and glorious moment that must have been! A son of Adam (who was also the Son of God) cleansed heaven's altar. Jesus' sinless life enabled Him to make the only offering of Blood that could possibly remove the stain of humanity's sins. Was it at this moment that our earthly priest "after the order of Melchizedek" was elevated to become our priest "forever"? Was it because of this perfect offering that the Father swore His oath, establishing Jesus in His eternal destiny?

So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." Hebrews 5:5-6 ESV

So far, we have been attempting to lift the veil and peer into mysteries of heaven, mysteries concerning the ascension of the One True God-Man, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. These are genuine spiritual realities and life-giving. There are, however, darker mysteries of ascending abroad in the land. These counterfeit ascension mysteries need to be mentioned next.

A Counterfeit Ascension Mystery

Unquestionably, Jesus is the Master who ascended into heaven. Jesus is the only human who ever lived before being born on earth. He lived as the Eternal Son of God. He freely chose to become one of us through the miracle of the virgin birth, which joined His divine nature to that of ours and united His soul to a body like ours. This God-Man absolutely mastered the art of holy (sinless) living in full submission to the Holy God. He mastered full scriptural knowledge and understanding of divine things. He mastered the miraculous. He did all things well. No one has



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ever been able to find fault with His life or teachings. He died, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven. This we know by faith and by the testimony of scripture.

Watch out! Many have come and are coming who claim to be “ascended masters.” Have nothing to do with them. This is a deception that the devil (who seeks to deceive “the whole world”) has been brewing for a very long time. In eastern religions, through the New Age movement and Wicca practitioners, and as a tenant of the occult teachings there is a spurious claim that if one gets enlightened enough, then that “holy” person can ascend to become a god. This is the lie of the Garden! This lie – that you can become god – is often also combined with another lie, the lie of reincarnation. Supposedly, one’s past lives may have been preparing them for this ascension.

In the Ascended Master Teachings, Ascended Masters are believed to be spiritually enlightened beings who in past incarnations were ordinary humans, but who have undergone a series of spiritual transformations originally called initiations.

Dear reader, there is only One Person who is an ascended master and He didn’t get there by a process of enlightenment. Humanity doesn’t need enlightenment; we need atonement. That’s what Jesus provided as our high Priest and that’s why God raised Jesus to the highest place. All others are pretenders and counterfeits. Jesus is the One and Only Ascended Master!



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