

BISHOP BONGANI SKIET

SERMON ON ASCENSION DAY 09 MAY 2024 IN SWEETWATERS

INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to overstate the importance of Good Friday, when Jesus died for our sins, and Easter Sunday, when he was raised from the dead — but Jesus's earthly ministry did not stop there.

After the resurrection, Jesus taught his disciples about God's kingdom for forty days (Acts 1:3) and then he was "taken up" to heaven (Acts 1:2, 11). The cross and empty tomb are at the very heart of the gospel message proclaimed by Jesus's followers throughout history (see 1 Corinthians 15:1–4). However, for many evangelical Christians and churches, Jesus's ascension is simply an afterthought to Easter and Good Friday.

Here I want to highlight six aspects of Jesus's ascension or exaltation, in hopes that this significant and climactic event in Jesus's life will no longer be an afterthought for you.

1. Jesus continues to work after the ascension / Uyaqhuba awumanga.

In Acts 1:1–2 we read, "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up..." The small but important word began signals that Jesus's ascension does not mark the cessation but the continuation of his work as Lord and Messiah. That's what Luke's second book is all about, the "Acts of the risen Lord Jesus," which he works from heaven, through his people, by the Holy Spirit, for the accomplishment of God's purposes.

2. The ascended Lord Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to his people.

After his resurrection Jesus told his followers, "I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. **But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high**" (Luke 24:49).² In his Pentecost sermon Peter explains, "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" (Acts 2:33). God promised in Joel 2:28, "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh," and this promise is fulfilled by the exalted heavenly Lord Jesus. The ascended Lord sent the Spirit to be present with his people (John 14:16), to empower them for worldwide mission (Acts 1:8; 4:31), and to transform believers to live new lives reflecting their king (Romans 8:9–11; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

3. Jesus's ascension is his heavenly enthronement as King.

At Jesus's ascension he is installed as the true king of the world. According to the Apostles' Creed, he "ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." Jesus is taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9–11), and Stephen declares that he sees the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). These texts suggest that Jesus's ascension fulfils the important prophecy of Daniel 7:13–14:3

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Jesus's kingdom cannot be destroyed and will not pass away! According to Revelation 3:21 Jesus conquered and sat down with his Father on his throne, where he receives unending praise (Revelation 5:6–13). Jesus will reign at God's right hand until all enemies are subdued under his feet (Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:34–35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:13). Thus God's kingdom has been inaugurated through the enthronement of Jesus, who now sits on heaven's throne and will return to consummate his kingdom on earth as in heaven.

4. Jesus's ascension is his return to his Father.

Before and after his death and resurrection Jesus declares that he was sent by his Father and must return to his Father:

I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father. (John 16:28; cf. 13:1, 3)

Jesus said to Mary, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (John 20:17)

5. The ascended Lord Jesus is our heavenly mediator and high priest.

Jesus is the unique mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). His death and resurrection secure our forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation with God (Romans 4:25–5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:18–21). Note also that the exalted Lord Jesus is now in heaven interceding for his people as our true high priest and advocate (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 1:3; 7:25; 8:1; 1 John 2:1). During his earthly ministry Jesus's work was

geographically limited — he didn't teach in Ethiopia while healing in China. But now he is at work everywhere and able to hear and respond to his people's prayers no matter the time or place. He sympathizes with our struggles and promises to do whatever we ask in his name (John 14:13–14; Hebrews 4:15–16).

6. The ascended Lord Jesus will return as King and Judge.

In Acts 1:11 two angels explain to the disciples, "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Jesus's heavenly reign will one day be fully realized on earth (Revelation 11:15; 19:10–16; 22:3). This is the very thing we ask for when we pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). At his return, the Lord Jesus will execute divine judgment, vindicating his downtrodden people and judging his enemies.⁴

Conclusion

What It Means for Our Lives

To sum up: Though often overlooked, the ascension completes Jesus's earthly mission and signifies his enthronement as heavenly king. Jesus has completed his Father's mission, and he now rules with all authority and intercedes with all sympathy as our mediator and high priest. I close with four implications of Jesus's ascension for our lives.

Remember that Jesus is presently reigning as king and remains active and engaged in our world and our lives.

Therefore, live boldly, confidently, and strategically as servants of the exalted king of heaven. Know that your labors in the Lord Jesus are not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Sufferers, take heart that Jesus is not indifferent to your struggle. He has endured great suffering and is thus the most merciful and sympathetic counselor and mediator. Take your cares to your ascended Lord who hears your prayers and can respond with all heaven's authority.

Finally hope in a glorious future. The ascended Lord will return as judge and king. He will abolish injustice, end suffering, and destroy death and set up his kingdom of truth, righteousness and love. Best of all, we will be with our king forever.

***Bishop Bongani Skiet
Sweetwaters
09 May 2024 @ 18h00***