

## New Hope sermon Christ's ascension

**Scripture: Acts 1:9-11:** <sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. <sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

I love this modern take on the ascension from Eugene Peterson:

"Ascension Day is the perfect church holiday because the world can't steal it. The culture around us has quite ruined Christmas and Easter. Of course, the world owned Christmas as its festival for the restoration of the sun before the early Christians used it to disguise their celebration of Christ's birth. ... But the world has now stolen it for its consumeristic purposes and has seized Easter for the same idolatry. In my teen years I played clarinet in the high school band for the town Christmas parade at which Santa Claus was flown in by helicopter. Later, I heard, they flew the bunny in for Easter. But the world hasn't got the foggiest notion what to do with someone flying out. *Marva J. Dawn and Eugene H. Peterson, The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call (Eerdmans, 2000), p. 140*

Similarly, this thought from Kevin Miller of Christianity Today:

"When Jesus Christ accomplished the greatest act of love and redemption of all time—when he went through the clouds and splashed down on heaven's shores—what a celebration he started! He had done it! Jesus had just completed the most dangerous and most important mission of all time. He had faced every temptation but never gave into sin. He stood up to the intense hatred of people with only truth and love. He could have called legions of angels to rescue him, but he willingly obeyed God and fulfilled his mission of giving up his life as a sacrifice to bring people back to God. He defeated the Devil. He destroyed death. Now he's returned in victory. The Father welcomes Jesus home and seats him at his right hand, the place of highest honor. He gives all authority to Jesus.

Why do we celebrate the Ascension? Because all heaven celebrates the victorious return of the Son, the Lamb who was slain, the Lion who conquered, the one who says in joy and power: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*" *Kevin Miller, executive vice president, Christianity Today*

That's the power behind the Ascension. Jesus Christ now has all power and authority, His is the name above every name in heaven and on earth and under the earth. He is now the proclaimed Lord and King of the universe. Think of the implication of this, beloved. Paul tells the Colossians that Jesus Christ holds the universe together by the word of his power. The universe.

So what does this mean for our lives? Here's how a Sunday school teacher for Tim Keller framed it: The teacher said, "Let's assume the distance between the earth and the sun (92 million miles) was reduced to the thickness of this sheet of paper. If that is the case, then the distance between the earth and the nearest star would be a stack of papers 70 feet high. And the diameter of the galaxy would be a stack of papers 310 miles high."

Then Keller's teacher added, "The galaxy is just a speck of dust in the universe, yet Jesus holds the universe together by the word of his power."

Finally, the teacher asked her students, "Now, is this the kind of person you ask into your life **to be your assistant?**" *Timothy Keller, from the sermon "The Gospel and Your Self".*

The obvious implication is that if Jesus holds the universe together, he can hold each person who believes in him together. Hold us together emotionally, physically, and spiritually. And certainly hold circumstances in his hand and direct them according to God's sovereign will. That is very encouraging. This is what we are believing as Evan's R1 visa application for staying in the country has been submitted. This is absolutely NOT a shoe-in. We are dealing with the bureaucracy of the

government, an anti-immigrant push from President Trump and the Republicans, and the unlikelihood of a small house church being accepted as the viable supporter for Evan. BUT GOD. But God is able. Jesus now reigns over every authority and power in the universe – that includes all governments. He is able to accomplish His will and nothing can interfere with that. All the ways Satan would hold this process up, make the government believe a lie about our capability, distort the true meaning of our house church, you name it, Jesus has disarmed the powers and authorities and destroyed the works of evil and destruction of the devil. We rest our case in the authority and power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the ascension, Jesus Christ is now in the place of undisputed authority and reigns as King of the universe. This is what Paul told the Philippians: *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,*<sup>10</sup> *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*<sup>11</sup> *and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Phil. 2:9-11

And the amazing fact is that he has given all believers His authority – we see this in Christ’s final great Commission: <sup>6</sup> *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.* <sup>17</sup> *When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.* <sup>18</sup> *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* <sup>19</sup> *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* <sup>20</sup> *and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* And he was taken up to heaven right before their eyes. *All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore Go and make disciples,* Christ’s ascension is the basis of our authority as believers over all the evil spirits and authorities in the world. That is the basis on which we are sent out as His ambassadors.

For me, this is one of the most powerful aspects of the gospel. It would be suicide to send out his followers against all the evil of the world – that is stronger than they are – UNLESS Jesus had overcome the power of evil. And that’s what the cross, the resurrection and the ascension declare. Daily Light for May 10 dealt with this theme:

*The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work (I JN. 3:8).*

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Eph.6:12 – the battle is very real!*

*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil. (Notice that word destroy repeated here again). Heb. 2:14*

*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Col. 2:15*

*Thanks be to God! He give the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. I Cor. 15:57*

It’s the basis on which we go with faith and confidence. It’s the basis on which we see God release people from the power of evil in their lives.

One of the ways we do that is through the power of believing prayer in Jesus’s name. That’s the basis of our authority. Wesley Duewel in his book *Mighty Prevailing Prayer* says:

“The prayer warrior stands between the authority and power of heaven and the darkness and power of hell, between the Lamb on the throne and Satan, the Great dragon. Christ has delegated to the prayer warrior his authority, the right to use His name and plead His blood (Rev. 12:11)... The prayer warrior is to enforce the victory of Calvary on the battlefield of earth... Prayer is a militant force that has the potential of defeating Satan, destroying his works and driving him out of places and lives he claims for his own . . . You must repeatedly call his bluff, reaffirm and insist on Calvary’s victory and force his vacating all he has so arrogantly usurped.” (Francis Asbury Press, 1990, pp235,233)

All this is possible because Christ has ascended. We sang the song “Majesty” today because the words to that simple praise song describe this reality. “Majesty, worship His majesty. Kingdom authority flow from His throne unto His own who His anthems raise.” Kingdom authority flows from Christ’s throne, where He is seated in the heavenly places. And it can flow into our lives as we praise and worship him. That’s a game changer, beloved.

Since Christ has won the victory over the powers of evil, we now fight from victory, not for victory. We have His authority to drive Satan out of places and people’s minds where his lies are trying to destroy them. Practically, this means when a person is suffering from depression or oppression or debilitating circumstances, we can speak to the evil spirits behind those situations and say NO – you have no right to be here, Satan. Jesus is our victory. Your power was defeated on the cross. So we proclaim His blood and victory through the word of our testimony (that our God reigns) and Satan must flee. (rev. 12:11)

Let me explain that more fully: “claiming the covering of the blood of Jesus protects believers from evil’s destructive power—much like the lamb’s blood on the doorposts of the Israelites in Egypt protected them from the angel of death. The word of a believer’s testimony can be a Scripture verse that is relevant in the particular battle s/he is facing. In the face of the accusation that “Suffering is the final word,” the testimony may be: “Our God, the God of all comfort, reigns” (2 Cor. 1:3-5, Rev. 19:6). When people fear abandonment, we pray Jesus’ promise, “Lo I am with you always to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). In times of financial distress we say: “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that you having all sufficiency in all things may abound in every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8). When there are cascading worries, the testimony can be “casting all your cares on Him for He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7, As the Holy Spirit brings the appropriate Scripture to mind, we claim that scripture as the word of God and standing on God’s victory.

But this isn’t a walk in the park – one word and Satan flees. No. The Apostle Paul likens his prayers of intercession to a wrestling match. He says, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12, KJV). If you watch wrestling, you know that usually it is a back and forth effort of who will pin whom. It takes perseverance and strength and confidence. Prevailing prayer is like that. It involves recognizing the reality of the forces of evil and claiming Christ’s victory over them. There will be times when we feel evil is winning. But we push back and stand on Christ’s authority, trusting Him for His victory. We “pray for the Lord to protect His people, prevent evil things from happening that Satan would cause, and deliver them from the enemy’s grip on them.” (Duewel, Idem.) That’s the kind of prayers we can have because of Christ’s authority, now available to us through His ascension.

The ascension of Jesus Christ has changed the whole course of history and we can live in that victory when we believe it and claim it and live it. That means when we hear God’s directives, we obey: “My son Caleb has been watching other children climb a tree, crawl out on a limb, and jump into the river 30 feet below. Now our Hawaii vacation would remain incomplete until he demonstrated his courage by conquering this obstacle. I watched him swim across the river, climb the tree, wait his turn, shimmy out to the end of the branch—and freeze. “It’s okay, sweetie,” my wife, Pam, called out. “You’re safe. Just jump.” No response. “I’m at the bottom, honey. It’ll be all right. Just let go.” But her female voice wasn’t working. Caleb started to crawl backward off the branch. In my heart, an alarm went off. The risk was slight, but the damage to his self-concept could last for years. So in my most authoritative voice, I called out, “Caleb!” He looked around, and I told him to climb back out. He did. “You’re thinking about this too much,” I told him. “You already know it’ll work, so I’m going to count to three, and you jump. Ready?” He nodded. “One. Two. Three.” Caleb took flight, splashed down, and surfaced triumphantly, whooping it up. He swam over to me and gave me a high five. I told him I was proud of him, and we hugged in celebration of his victory over fear. *Bill Farrell, Why Men and Women Act the Way They Do (Harvest House Publishers, 2003)*. Jesus has all authority. What is He calling you to do? Can you trust Him? Let us pray.