

*Christ is ascended!*

Didn't know what to do with that, huh? I have to admit, it felt odd to say it. Maybe it's odd because, in general, we don't know what to do with Christ's ascension. Yeah, it's part of the Creed, we confess it every week, but what is Christ's ascension all about?

Unbelievers look at Christ's ascension and say it's all about convenience. "You believe that this Jesus guy is God-in-the-flesh, who rose from the dead. Well, if he's alive, that's great. Where is he, so I can see for myself? What's that you say? He ascended into heaven, so I can't see him? How convenient!"

Sometimes, we look at Christ's ascension with similar skepticism. Our God is too far away to do us any good. He's not powerful enough.

Every day the headlines give you plenty of reasons to doubt that God has the power to rule the world. When you heard about Christians being murdered in Nashville two months ago, did you think, "Jesus has things taken care of"? When the next crisis enters your life, will you be comforted because you know where Jesus is right now?

Sometimes we worry as if God is too weak and too far away to do any good. The Apostle Paul has every reason to do that. When he writes Ephesians, he's in prison (Ephesians 3:1), been there for years. Why? For preaching the Word of God, for doing exactly what Jesus told him to do!

If ever there was anyone who had reason to believe that Christ's ascension put him too far away to do any good, it's Paul. But today Paul prays for us to know God's power, and Christ's ascension is the proof of it. In fact, Paul says that **Christ's ascension is all about power.**

**For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers (1:15-16).** Paul thanks God for the Ephesians, but he doesn't want their faith to become stagnant.

So he prays for them, but it's also a prayer for us: **I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better (1:17).** Here Paul makes the case that a Christian can never know God enough. Did you catch what he prays for? **That you may know him better (1:17).**

There are three things he wants us to know better. **I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe (1:18-19).** One, the hope God gives us; two, the inheritance God gives us; three, the power God uses for us. And that last one is what Paul draws our attention to.

Notice what he says about it – **his incomparably great power (1:19).** How do you describe God's power? Is it like nuclear power? Political power? Military power? No. God's power is incomparable.

Just think of God's resume of strength. He says, "Let there be," and the universe comes into being. He sends a wind, and the Red Sea splits in two. He guides all of human history to put the right people in the right place at the right time for his Son to be born! Our glorious Father has incomparable power.

We need to know that, better. Because your sinful nature works to replace your knowledge of God's power with sinful skepticism. And there is a lot at stake here.

What happens if you doubt the hope God calls you to? What happens if you don't value the inheritance you share with the saints in heaven? What happens if you never remember Christ's power?

You despair. You start to believe that God can't fix your life or forget your sin. You are convinced that your marriage will never get better. You worry about things you can't control. You believe your best days are gone. You think your life is pointless.

Forget God's power, and you can forget all else. Because all you're left with is yourself, and that way ends in hell (Proverbs 14:12). That's why Paul directs our attention to Jesus. Not only is he the way to heaven (John 14:6), he's also living proof of God's incomparably great power.

**That power is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup> he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead (1:19-20).** God worked his mighty strength on Easter when he raised Christ from the dead. With all our money, technology, and scientific progress, we still have not defeated death because we cannot defeat death. But God did. On Easter, Jesus steps out of the tomb alive, and death is defeated.

So is sin. Sin is an incomparably great burden on us, a problem we don't have the power to solve. Do you have the ability to go back in time and unsay what you said? Can you rewind and not get drunk, not lash back in your anger, not love your friends' will more than God's will?

You can't. You don't have the power to lift the weight of sin off yourself. No one does. Without divine help, that burden drags you straight to hell. But when the sun rises on Easter, God exerts his mighty strength, Christ is risen, and our sins are gone.

That is incomparably great power, and Paul has one more example of it: **And seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come (1:20-21).**

Here, finally, is Christ's ascension. It almost seems like an afterthought, but it's really a supreme example of God's mighty strength.

After all, where is Jesus after his ascension? At the right hand of God. Where's that? Well, God's right hand is not a place. It's a figure of speech for God's power and authority.

So Christ has authority over everything in the universe (Matthew 28:18). No king, no president, no person, no nothing has more power than the One seated at God's right hand: **And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (1:22-23).**

**Christ's ascension is all about power**, about putting everything under his feet. In the ancient world, when one king conquered another, he would put his foot on the defeated king's neck as a symbol of his complete domination (Joshua 10:24). That loser used to have power, but now he's just the conqueror's footstool.

Do you understand what this means? Will Wokeism conquer the church? It's under Jesus' feet. Will injustice go unpunished? It's under Jesus' feet. Will atheism extinguish the gospel? It's under Jesus' feet.

All things, no matter how outwardly unstoppable, are simply the place where King Jesus kicks up his feet; they're his footstool. They may seem to win battles from age to age, but Jesus has already won the war. He's in charge. **Christ's ascension is all about power** – power that he promises to use for you.

Paul says so twice: God's **incomparably great power for us who believe (1:19)**; God **appointed Christ head over everything for the church (1:22).**

This incomparably great power, this being head over everything, is for you who believe – for the church! Jesus has a lot invested in his church (Ephesians 5:25). He left his place in heaven for her, he kept the demands of God's law for her, and took her sins to the cross.

You can't get the two of them apart. Paul says that the church is Christ's body, and you can't have the body without the head. He also says that it is **the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (1:23)**. In other words, Christ and the church are inseparable.

Do you know what that means? Everything belongs to Christ: power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, praise (Revelation 5:12). You name it, he's got it. And since Christ and the church are inseparable, you've got it too.

The power that lifts him up from the earth, into the clouds, straight to the right hand of God – *that* is the power at work for you. The power behind your heavenly inheritance. The power that answers each petition of the Lord's Prayer every time that you pray it.

The power that infuses water and makes it a washing of rebirth and renewal (Titus 3:5), that makes bread and wine into the faith-sustaining meal of his body and blood. This is the power that rules the universe not for personal gain, but for you – his church. A power that is not far, but near.

Please don't miss that. Every day in your life, God is powerfully working. You see it every day, maybe you never realize it, but it's there. A prayer heard. A sin forgiven. A funeral with hope. A conscience freed. An apology offered. A devotion done.

Jesus is not too far away to do us any good, his power is everywhere and it is at work for us who believe, because Christ is ascended, he is ascended indeed! Alleluia and amen.