

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

**And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."
(Luk 13:23-24)**

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The Ascension of Christ

May 17, 2026

Sermon Text: Acts 1:6-11

Scripture Reading: Matthew 24:1-31

Today is, on the church calendar, Ascension Sunday (the actual day is on the previous Thursday) on which we remember Christ's ascension back to heaven 40 days after His resurrection.

The event and doctrine of Christ's ascension is one which is typically given little attention, at least in evangelical churches (as you heard

Robert Godfrey note in our first class this morning). Reformed churches generally observe the church calendar more than Bible churches or Baptist – the typical churches we call evangelical.

But this neglect is a great error because the ascension of Christ is a very, very important doctrine which is essential to our salvation. So let's move in on Scripture for a closer look.

First, let's note that the ascension is mentioned many times in the New Testament:

So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received

up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. (Mar 16:19)

"And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. (Luk 24:49-51)

But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? "What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? (Joh 6:61-62)

Therefore Jesus said, "For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me. (Joh 7:33)

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself,

that where I am, there you may be also. (Joh 14:1-3)

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. (Joh 16:7)

Jesus *said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" (Joh 20:17)

"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. (Act 3:19-21)

Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." (Now this

expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) (Eph 4:8-10)

By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory. (1Ti 3:16)

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (Heb 4:14)

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (Heb 6:19-20)

For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere

copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; (Heb 9:24)

...who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. (1Pe 3:22)

You can easily see in just a cursory reading of these verses that the ascension of Christ is a very important and deep doctrine than you may have thought.

Of course the clearest record of the ascension is found in the first chapter of Acts:

So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and

even to the remotest part of the earth." And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." (Act 1:6-11)

Let's focus this morning on this scripture and then we should probably continue at least two more Sundays (next Sunday we will be back in our series on the doctrine of eternal punishment)...but we should then look further into the ascension:

1. The Blessings of Christ's Ascension
2. The exaltation of Christ (to the Father's right hand) and its significance

3. What the ascension tells us about the return of Christ at His second coming

He Was Lifted Up and a Cloud Received Him

We know that Christ rose *bodily* from the dead:

Luk 24:36-43 While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and *said to them, "Peace be to you." (37) But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. (38) And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? (39) "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." (40) And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. (41) While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" (42) They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; (43) and He took it and ate it before them.

And again:

Act 10:40-41 "God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, (41) not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

Therefore, Christ's ascension was a *bodily* ascension. His ascension was *a change of place*. (I am getting some help here from Herman Hoeksema in his *The Triple Knowledge* commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism) –

“In His human nature Christ departed from the earth, and went into heaven, both in body and soul. After His ascension, He is, according to His human nature, no longer on earth; He is in heaven only. This view of the ascension of Christ is strongly emphasized in the Catechism.” [Ibid]

Why? Why did the reformers underscore what we would see as a rather obvious fact. *A change of*

location. Now in heaven, not on earth. Well, it is because our understanding of – perhaps surprisingly to you – of the Lord's Table is directly informed from the ascension.

There was and still is a difference in the doctrine of the Lord's Table between Reformed and Lutheran theology. We don't have time this morning to spend detailed explanation of this disagreement, but let me just summarize:

1. The Lutheran position (consubstantiation). This doctrine maintains that the body of Christ can be present in more than one place at the same time. Lutherans answer the question, “how can Christ, according to His human nature, be in heaven, and yet also be bodily present in the bread and wine of the Lord's supper. They answer by saying that at His exaltation His body and soul did not leave earth so as to be only present in heaven, but His human nature at that time

became *ubiquitous*
(everywhere present).

Thus, in respect to the Lord's Supper, the Lutheran doctrine is that Christ's true body and blood are present in the Lord's supper, though this presence is not physical or earthly. If this is rather confusing to you, it should be. Because Lutherans also insist (correctly) that the two natures of Christ (human and divine) are not fused into one.

NOTE: Neither the Reformed nor the Lutheran church accept the Roman Catholic doctrine of *transubstantiation*. Though you can see that the Lutheran *consubstantiation* is much closer to it than the Reformed position. Rome teaches that the bread and wine actually and really become the body and blood of Christ so that the mass is in fact, Rome insists, a real and repeated sacrifice of Christ.

And so, you see, how we understand the ascension of Christ has important doctrinal implications. And this is why the

writers of the Heidelberg Catechism stated repeatedly what we would think should be obvious:

“That the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ implies a change of place. He departed from one place, the earth, and he went to another place, heaven. In respect to His human nature, he is no more on the earth.” (ibid)

A careful and studied reading of the even this single account of the ascension here in Acts 1 should lead us to one plain conclusion.

Act 1:1-3 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, (2) **until the day when He was taken up to heaven**, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. (3) **To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs**, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

“He was lifted up while they were looking on.”

He departed earth, this place, and entered heaven.

NOTE: It is quite interesting and profitable to study the subject of *clouds or cloud* in both Old and New Testaments. The glory of the Lord, as in the cloud in the wilderness, is directly connected with *clouds*. Christ was received by a cloud – which surely means that He ascended to and into the very glory He had with the Father. Also note then Rev 1:7, 14:14-16; 1 Thes 4:17; Matt 26:64 as examples.

In addition:

Act 1:11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come **in just the same way** as you have watched Him go into heaven."

And thus:

Rev 1:7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

What “From One Place to Another” does not mean

Christ’s ascension also shows us that we must not think of it as we would (as Hoeksema illustrates) “...of a person taking a journey from Chicago to New York, from one earthly place to another.” There is a real mystery here. What the apostles saw when Christ ascended was not like standing on your front porch and watching your visitors drive away until they were out of sight.

No, the fact that Christ was received by a cloud, out of their sight, teaches us that while the ascension truly was a matter of Christ leaving this earth and going to another place – heaven – it was far more mysterious.

The ascension, along with many other scriptures, shows us that while we refer to heaven as being “above,” Christ’s entrance to heaven was not a matter of Him traveling through space until he reached the edge of the universe and arrived at the entrance to heaven. NOTE: And neither will be YOUR entrance into glory – you will arrive in heaven instantly – *absent from the body, present with the Lord.*

America has several active space probes exploring different parts of the solar system and beyond. Their approximate real-time locations include:

Voyager 1: Located roughly 173 astronomical units (over 16 billion miles) from Earth, traveling through interstellar space.

Voyager 2: Located about 13.3 billion miles) from Earth in the constellation Pavo, also well beyond the edge of our solar system.

The Bible does not tell us directly what the actual *location* of heaven

is. However, we do know that thinking of entering heaven is a matter of taking a linear trip from point A to point B is not accurate. We are not going to have to travel for billions of miles to arrive at heavens door.

In fact, I would suggest to you that both heaven AND hell are very “close.” This should give great comfort to the believer and great terror to the wicked. Why can we conclude this? Consider:

Act 7:54-56 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. (55) But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; (56) and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Eze 1:1 Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the

heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

Mat 3:16-17 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, (17) and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Rev 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."

2Ki 2:11-14 As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. (12) Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw Elijah no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. (13) He also took up the

mantle of Elijah that fell from him and returned and stood by the bank of the Jordan. (14) He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and struck the waters and said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha crossed over.

2Ki 6:15-17 Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" (16) So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." (17) Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

The nearness of the Lord. The nearness of heaven. This should be

a tremendous comfort to every true Christian:

Psa 145:18 The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.

The kingdom of God is very near to us. It is concealed, but it will be revealed on that Day when Christ comes. That which is hidden will be seen.

In contrast, as we said, this truth should be a terror to the wicked. The door to hell is quite near, so that they walk on a slippery place and at any moment they could fall into the fires which they deny. They will see it. The God who they now mock, who they insist does not see what they do in secret, is right next to them, watching and knowing.

Christ our Lord and Savior is ascended. He sits at the Father's right hand. He is exalted. But He is not far from His people. In fact, He is closer to them than when He was here on this earth. Why? Because when He ascended, He sent His

Spirit who now indwells us, who leads us, who teaches us.

Here is Hoeksema once more:

“Wherever, as far as it definite location is concerned, we conceive the heaven of glory to be, whether we think of it as above and beyond, or whether we conceive of it as interpenetrating our world, as surrounding us on all sides, though we cannot see it; we may never think of it as far away in the earthly sense of the word, so that there is no contact between heaven and earth, and as it would actually have to take a long time to reach it. Proof of this is the fact that at the same moment the disciples, who had just seen the Lord ascend and while they were still staring into space, two angels from that same heaven of glory stood by them to announce that their common Lord had been take up from then into heaven, and would so come again.” [ibid]

Sin has Separated heaven from Earth – But they will be joined again

Christ's ascension also shows us that while heaven and this world are separated, and have been ever since the fall, this separation will not stand forever. Even now, in His Church, the kingdom of heaven is among us. It is *now, but not yet*. When Christ returns in judgment, He is going to create a new heavens AND earth, joined together once more.

“God’s purpose is to unite all things I heaven and on earth into one glorious creation in Christ as the head over all.” [ibid]

“This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”