

## **We Believe In Jesus Christ's Ascension To The Right Hand Of The Father And In His Personal Return In Power And In Glory.**

### **Introduction**

As we anticipate the Christmas holidays and the joy and peace we associate with that special season, it's hard to ignore the trouble in our world. Indeed, the violence, injustice and corruption, tend to spoil it. And the commercialization of the holiday totally distracts us from the essence of the message that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son—which is the whole reason for the season!

So how can we maintain the right attitude in the midst of such distractions?

In Acts 1:1-11, Luke summarizes the things that are essential to our faith, and which need to be the primary source of our hope, joy and peace:

- The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- Christ's ascension into heaven
- The promise of Christ's return

We have considered Christ's atoning death and His resurrection. In this message, we want to consider His ascension and promised return.

As with Christ's resurrection, the same ones who doubt that also doubt Jesus' ascension into heaven and His promised return from there. So let's begin with the facts and then deduce the reliability and implications of these other two beliefs.

Here are the facts:

- Jesus was a real, historical figure—attested to by secular and even hostile sources.
- He died (as everyone does), but His tomb is empty; His body was never produced by those who accused Him of being nothing more than a mere man and even a deceiver, and who made the accusation that His disciples stole His body to make it look like He rose from the dead (an absurd claim given the circumstances and penalty for allowing such a thing to happen).
- Jesus foretold that He would be raised from the dead in fulfillment of the Scriptures.
- Eye-witnesses claimed they saw Him after His death—at the risk of losing their lives.
- Lives have been radically changed by the belief that Jesus rose from the dead (see Rom. 10:9-10)
- During His life and after His resurrection, Jesus spoke of the place He had come from, that He was returning to, and which He would come back from: a place He called heaven.
- Eye-witnesses saw Jesus—in His material body of flesh and bone—

disappear, and they testified that they were told where Jesus was going and that He would come back in the same way.

These are the facts. What do they mean and how should they impact our lives?

**First**, since we can trust what Jesus said about His death and resurrection, we can trust Him concerning all He said about heaven. And one of the things He said about heaven was that He was going there to prepare a *place* for us (Jn. 14:2).

Heaven is a real place.

The word translated “place” in John 14:2 is *topos*, from which we get the English word “topography.” Topography is the description or mapping of a physical area or structure.

Although we can’t perceive heaven with our physical senses, it is a very real place. It existed before the physical realm, and so, in a sense, is more real.

Humankind was created as a reflection of the image and likeness of God, who existed before anything, and whose throne is in heaven.

Moses was told to construct the tabernacle according to the pattern shown him when he was on the mountain. God opened his eyes to see the pattern that exists in heaven. And so, the earthly tabernacle is a representation of the heavenly tabernacle, which existed first.

In the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven, we see mountains (Rev. 21:10), rivers (Rev. 22:1), and trees (Rev. 22:2). We may assume that the same things that make up our physical earth, and which we think are so beautiful, are reflections or representations of that which is in heaven.

We often imagine heaven to be some ethereal place consisting of clouds, some big golden gates, and little else. But this is not how the Bible presents heaven! If we think this physical world is beautiful, the Scriptures say, ***“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”***-- 1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV)

Heaven is devoid of sin and all its consequences.

But the greatest “beauty” of heaven will be that there is no Tempter, and so no temptation or sin or any of their consequences!

Satan, all his demons and all who have caused suffering, along with death and hell will have been cast into the lake of fire.

And ***There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain . . .*** " God will wipe every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4 NIV)

This is just a glimpse of the place Jesus has ascended to, so as to prepare for us!

**Secondly**, Jesus said He was coming back to take us to be with Him where He is (Jn. 14:3).

As certain as Jesus came the first time, He's coming again.

We may wonder at the ignorance of the people of Jesus' day because they didn't recognize Him or the signs of the time.

And while Jesus did say, "***No one knows about the day or hour*** [of His return], ***not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father***, He went on to say,

***As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*** (Matthew 24:36-44 NIV)

Jesus condemned the religious leaders of His day because they couldn't interpret the signs of their times (Mt. 16:2-3).

But Jesus has told us what the signs of His coming again would be (Mt. 24:1-35; Lk. 21:5-36). Do we see them?

He will return first for His bride, and then finally to fully establish His kingdom on the earth.

We must also discern the reasons and stages for Christ's return. He will return first *for* His Bride, and then *with* His Bride.

In Jesus' day, after the bride and bridegroom are pledged to be married, the bridegroom goes to his father's house, where he builds an addition for himself and his bride. After it's completed, he goes to the bride's house where

she has been preparing herself and waiting. When the bridegroom's arrival is announced, she goes out to meet him, and he takes her to their house where the marriage celebration takes place for seven days.

This is exactly what is seen in Jesus' return for His Bride, the Church! We are awaiting our Savior from heaven, Jesus Christ, who will ***come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*** (1 Thess. 4:16-17)

John describes this scene from heaven, where he was caught up (Rev. 4:1) so he could see the events in heaven and on earth. And he writes,

***Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."*** (Revelation 19:6-9 NIV)

After the celebration of the wedding supper of the Lamb, John describes the coming of Christ *with* His bride:

***I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.***

***The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean [That's us!]. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*** (Revelation 19:11-16 NIV)

The Old Testament prophet, Zechariah, describes the same event:

***Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. (Zechariah 14:3-4 NIV)***

**Thirdly**, Jesus said we would share in His glory in that place and reign with Him.

Jesus' ascension was to a place of glory and honor—the right hand of God.

And because we've been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:6), we will share in His glory and authority.

***For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness REIGN in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:17 NIV)***

***Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also REIGN with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; (2 Timothy 2:11-12 NIV)***

***You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will REIGN on the earth." (Revelation 5:10 NIV)***

***Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will REIGN with him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:6 NIV)***

***There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will REIGN for ever and ever. (Revelation 22:5 NIV)***

Our faithfulness in this life and in this world prepares us for reigning with Christ. If we are faithful with earthly responsibilities, Christ will entrust to us heavenly responsibilities. This is our inheritance. This is our reward.

## **Conclusion**

The belief in Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension and return are essential to our Christian faith. Indeed, these doctrines give us hope in this world, which is becoming more and more corrupt and will one day pass away. But Christ's Word and His Promises will never pass away.