

Ephesians 4:1-16

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 November 2019

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] Last week we saw the ascension to heaven of our Lord Jesus Christ and we tried to lay a foundation in our thinking. To think about the Lord Jesus saving work as he came into the world.

! And the work of the Lord Jesus encompasses his birth, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension. And his priestly ministry today in heaven and his coming again in glory at the end of the age.

And we looked at two or three things. We saw the fact of the ascension and then the meaning of the ascension. And we saw that the fact of the ascension is as much of a fact as the supernatural birth or the supernatural resurrection of Jesus.

That same Bible tells us that forty days after he was risen from the dead, he ascended into heaven. And we looked a little bit at the meaning of the ascension.

And I think it's probably best for us to understand that in terms of what he did when he ascended into heaven. He ascended to me and he sat down. There's the significance of the fact that he sat down. He ascended because his work on earth was finished.

[1 : 17] All that he had come to do to atone for our sins was completed. And the ascension bears witness to this fact that Christ has offered a full and a final and sufficient atonement for sin.

There's nothing more to be done. But it was not only important for us to see that he sat down, but where he sat down. And so he sits on a throne that belongs in heaven to the one who is absolute and final sovereign, to the one who is king of kings and lord of lords.

And thirdly we saw, and it was important, with whom he sat. That he sat and where he sat and with whom he sat. He sits down at the right hand of God. And there we would say he has the ear of the almighty.

And we looked together at these themes. And I said this evening we'd look at the implications of Jesus' ascension. And I want to do that in three ways.

And this is the first time in 16 and a bit years that I've had the same points in the morning as I have in the evening. I've gone to completely different topics.

[2 : 27] And so there's no excuse for forgetting the three points. The three points tonight are a prophet, a priest and a king. And I want us to look at the ascension through those lenses.

You might know that those threefold offices of prophet, priest and king. Why do we talk about that? Because they were the anointed ones in the Old Testament.

And that's what the word Christ means. Christ doesn't mean king, it does mean ruler, but it means specifically anointed one. And so when you look at the Old Testament, who were the three figures that were anointed to their role?

Well, it was the prophet, the priest and the king. They were anointed. The prophet anointed to prophesy. The priest anointed with oil.

And the king. Who was anointed to reign. And Jesus Christ is all of those three figures. He is the perfect embodiment of the prophet, the priest, the king.

[3 : 26] He's the perfect prophet who has come to teach and preach. And he enlightens us with infallible truth. He's the perfect priest. He offers the perfect sacrifice. And he comes into the presence of God and he offers himself to God.

He's the only priest, isn't he, who's got no sin of his own. Which needs to be atoned for. And he is the perfect king. Because there's no limitation to his sovereignty.

There's no end to his reign. There is nowhere that you can look. There is nowhere that you can think of. There is no corner of the universe which is outside of his sovereign control.

And so the Lord Jesus Christ came from heaven into the womb of the Virgin Mary. And he was born in Bethlehem to be our saviour. To be our prophet.

And to be our priest. And to be our king. We see this all the way through the gospels. It's a brilliant way to read the gospel. And see these priestly roles.

[4 : 32] The kingly role. The prophetic role. But when Jesus enters into heaven at the ascension. He continues those threefold office. He fulfills them in a different and in a fuller way.

And I want us to look at that tonight. So let's say he continues his prophetic ministry. By saying the Holy Spirit. Whom he says.

Will teach you all things. As he addresses the disciples and the apostles. The apostles will go out into the world. And they will teach. What Jesus himself taught.

And they will proclaim his truth. And he will remind them. Jesus says. I will remind you of the things that you've heard from me. And the Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth. He tells the apostles.

And the apostles are going to be instruments of the Holy Spirit. Who will teach them. And he continues his priestly office. In heaven. So actually.

[5 : 33] He doesn't make a sacrifice on an altar. For there is one sacrifice. Of himself. And that one sacrifice of himself on the cross. Is sufficient for all time. But he acts both in relation to God.

And to men and women. In those two directions. In which the priest ministered. The priest had a relationship with God.

And a relationship with men and women. He was the mediator. Between God and the sinner. And so the Lord Jesus. He continues that ministry. As the high priest.

And he continues that kingly ministry. From the throne of heaven. Where he sits. As sovereign. As sovereign Lord. As sovereign Lord. Now let me say a little bit.

About each of these. We might not have time for all three. But they sort of merge into one another. So my first point. The prophetic ministry of Jesus. Time and again. The Lord Jesus.

[6 : 32] Particularly in John. The disciples begin to understand. That Jesus is going away. And they mourn it. They are gutted. That Jesus is going to leave them. And he says to them.

That it will be in lots of ways. An advantage. For him to no longer be with them. For him to go. It's better for you that I go. You've read that haven't you?

It's better for you that I go away. He says if I do not go away. You will be disadvantaged. You'll be worse off if I don't go away. And one of the primary reasons. That Jesus says he's going. To go from there.

Is to ascend into heaven. He's going to leave this world. And unless he leaves this world. The Holy Spirit will not come. The Holy Spirit will not come.

Unless Jesus is ascended into heaven. This is the main one. That Jesus. Is going to send the Holy Spirit. He is the one who gives the Holy Spirit to them.

[7 : 33] He is the one who asks his father. And he and his father. Pour out the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit. But it all depends on the purpose of God. On Jesus being ascended back into heaven.

And you find that in repeated in many different places in the Gospels. That one of the purposes of Jesus ascending. And sending the Holy Spirit. Was this teaching ministry.

That the Holy Spirit was going to have in the church. That's something we read about in Ephesians 4. The glorious thing is you look through Acts. And the epistles.

You discover that the Holy Spirit is at work. In laying hold of these apostles. In all of their weakness. In all of their frailty. And making them the most amazing heralds of the Gospel.

What happened. When Jesus went to heaven. Was that he sent down his Holy Spirit. Who filled these very ordinary men. The Spirit of Jesus.

[8 : 37] Went with them. And so as they went out into the world. The Gospel of Jesus Christ. Becomes this flame in their hearts. And they become beacons of light. With a burning desire to proclaim Christ.

To the nations. To Jerusalem. To Samaria. To the ends of the earth. Like you see at the end of Acts. And of course for the apostles. This coming of the Holy Spirit.

Not only that they went out. Like men. Like Peter and Paul. And proclaimed and heralded the truth. And preached it so powerfully. But they also wrote it down. Didn't they? It's what you have.

In your laps. In the New Testament. Now you see. Even from that area alone. How much of an advantage it was. For the disciples. That Jesus should ascend into heaven.

If I do not go away. The Holy Spirit will not come to you. And when he does. He will show you all things. He says to the apostles. He will remind you of the things that I taught you.

[9 : 41] Both Peter and Paul. Not only preaching the Gospel. That the Holy Spirit gave them. The Holy Spirit gave them. I received from the Lord. What I also delivered unto you. That is the authoritative Gospel.

Which they wrote down. And so tonight. As we hear that passage read. We are listening to the very passages. Which people like Peter and Paul. And the writer to the Hebrews.

Wrote in the scripture. Jesus ascended. So that the prophetic ministry of Jesus would continue. And of course you'll notice in Ephesians chapter 4.

If you look there with me. Ephesians chapter 4. In verse 7. In verse 7. Paul tells us that this is a direct outcome.

Of Jesus ascension to each one of us. Verse 7. Verse 7. But grace was given. To each one of us.

[10 : 41] According to the measure. Of Christ's gift. Therefore it says. When he ascended on high. He led a host of captives.

And he gave gifts. To men. To men. It's a picture. That comes from the world of a Roman army. A Roman army does want to battle.

The conqueror. Returns. Or the conqueror moves into the city. And he is exalted. He is paraded through the streets. He is exalted. Before the citizens.

And then he returns back to Rome. And he is greeted victoriously. And he has gained the spoils of victory. And he distributes the spoils. And the plunder of victory. To his people.

It's part of the whole system. Of welcoming back the conquering hero. In Rome. And what Paul is saying here. Is that Jesus is that conquering hero. And Paul uses that picture.

[11 : 42] To say this is what the ascended Christ. Is doing. When he goes into glory. He is giving gifts. He is giving of his plunder. To men. What are these gifts? In verse 11.

What gifts does he give? And he gave. The apostles. The prophets. The evangelists. The shepherds. And teachers. To equip the saints.

For the work of ministry. For building up the body. Of Christ. The church. The church. So why then did Jesus go back to heaven? Why did he ascend from earth?

Why were they to see him no more in this world? It was because, can you see it? He intended to build up his church. But the Lord Jesus is involved, isn't he, in church expansion and church planting.

So do you remember the Gospel of Luke? How does it begin? It begins the Gospel of Luke. What is it? It's what Jesus began to do and to teach.

[12 : 49] And then you come to the Book of Acts, written by Dr. Luke again. And what does Luke say? He says the Book of Acts is what Jesus continues to do and to teach. And how did he do that?

He ascended into heaven, chapter 1. He did it through those whom the Holy Spirit fills to be Christ's ambassadors and servant. That's the glorious thing.

If you look at the gifts in Ephesians 4. That are given by the ascended Christ. They are mainly gifts of the ministry of the Word. It was he who gave some to be apostles.

Some to be prophets. Some to be evangelists. Some to be shepherds. And teachers. And teachers. To equip the saints for the work of ministry. For building up the body of Christ.

That is the ascended Christ's purpose. In sending the Holy Spirit into the world and upon the church. These apostles were anointed by the Spirit to proclaim salvation.

[13 : 57] In the same way as Jesus was anointed. To procure salvation. To obtain salvation. And the two things need to be seen together.

Not only does he have a prophetic office. He has a priestly office. We read about that in Hebrews chapter 4. Hebrews is full.

Isn't it when you read it? Of fulfilment. And Jesus brought that to the ministry of the priest. In the Old Testament. So again let me point out to you.

The priest he acts. In relation to God. And he acts in relation. To God's people. He acts before God. As an intercessor. And he also acts before the people.

As a carer. Have you noticed? That in the Old Testament. That it's part of the ministry of the priest. Part of the role of the priest. Was to be sympathetic with the people. That's part of the qualification.

[14 : 58] To be a priest. In the Old Testament. To have a sympathetic heart for the people. Not just a relationship with the God who's called you. But a relationship with his people.

For whom he needs to have sympathy and understanding. And isn't that why. The Lord Jesus is the priest par excellence. We noticed it last week.

That how in his ministry in heaven. As the great high priest. The writer of the Hebrews says. That he is not a priest. Who is unable to sympathise with us.

In our weaknesses. That he was in all points tempted. Or tested. Just as we are. Yet without sin. And when he went into heaven.

He went into heaven. To fulfil the function of a priest. To God's people. It was us Jesus. In our human nature. That he ascended into heaven.

[15:57] That Heidelberg Catechism says. He is the one in heaven. In our flesh. And he is in our flesh. In the sense that it is. In our human nature.

That Jesus is ascended into the presence of God. And therefore. Tonight in heaven. There is a man. Who bears the reality. Of humanity. In a glorified state.

He is a glorified human being. In the presence of God. And that's why he relates to people like you and I. He is able.

To say when we suffer. Not. I know nothing of that. I'm above and beyond the things that you are going through. He doesn't say that does he?

No he says. I have stood precisely where you are. If you look in the place of. Your suffering. And your anguish.

[16:59] And your anxiety. And your agony. And if you watch the place where your tears have been shed. You'll see my footmarks. You'll see that my tears have dropped in the same place.

You'll see. That the aching of my broken heart. Was in the same situation as you were in. And so therefore. The writer to Hebrews. Tells us that he is able to have compassion.

He is able to understand. We frequently long for that. Don't we? When we are in some situation. Like Hebrews has got in mind. We do not have a high priest.

Who is unable. To sympathize with our weaknesses. You know this problem. Let me tell you. You know this problem. You know this problem.

Because when you have compassion on people. And for brothers and sisters. In their time of need. When they are really going through something. And you go to sit with them.

[18:05] You go to talk with them. How do you find yourself? When you go to write to them. What do you find? What do you say to people? You say. I felt totally helpless.

Isn't that true? We say this. I went to see them. But I just. I didn't know what to say. I couldn't think of what to say. And then when we see the same kind of situation.

That there was. Something I could do. And that. We often feel. I just didn't know what to say.

I don't know what to do. But our Lord Jesus is not like that. Professor M. John Murray says.

He describes Jesus' compassion. As omnipotent. Compassion. Because in his compassion. Not only of the perfect priest. But of the perfect king.

[19:08] And the perfect sovereign. There is nothing. On which. The Lord Jesus cannot draw. Omnipotence.

Has servants everywhere. And what it means. Is that the sovereign Lord. Who sits on the throne. As he's gone into heaven.

When he has compassion. The sovereign Lord. Is able to speak a perfect word. That's why sometimes. You find.

That God speaks to you. When you read the Bible. Or when you hear a sermon. And you say. That was for me. That was for me. Of course it was.

It's God who spoke it. And that is why. We are able to come to the throne. Of grace. And obtain mercy. And find grace. To help. In our time of need.

[20:05] Because we have such a high. High priest. At the right hand of God. And that is the implication. Of the ascension. That is why Jesus ascended.

Upon high. It was because. To the sufferer. He sends relief. He is the perfect prophet. He is the perfect high priest.

Not only because. He sympathizes with us. And has compassion. And. But because also. He intercedes for us. I guess.

There is not a person. Here tonight. Who is not. Deeply conscious. Of the frailty. Of their prayer life. Some way to humble people.

Ask them about their prayer life. And the weakness. We find in ourselves. When we. When we seek to pray. For those who are going through. Kind of tough times.

[21 : 05] And deep waters. That we know nothing about. But there is an intercessor. In heaven this evening. Who understands.

Every area of your need. There is no facet. Of your situation. That he does not perfectly know. And you know. For him to have the ear of God.

Is. Well that's quite unique. You can see instances of it. In the New Testament. Think of. Places like John 17. Jesus is humble enough.

That. To. To. Let the disciples. Overhear him pray. I'm sure he did it partly. Because. He wanted them to know. That when he ascended. In his ascension glory.

He would pray for them. He cries out. He says. To his father. I have kept them. In your name. None of them are lost. Except the son of perdition. Now father.

[22 : 00] You keep them. You keep them. I do not pray. That you would take them. Out of the world. But I pray. That you would keep them. From the evil one. I wonder.

Have you ever thought. Why it is. In some moment. Of. High kind of. Tension. And distress. And temptation. Why is it. That you haven't fallen. Why is it. You haven't become. One of the kind of. Spiritual car crashes.

That there are out there. I have two friends. That have recently. Kind of. Crashed out of Christian ministry. And have left their wives. It's a total disaster.

Both were ministers. Why is it. That. They have fallen. I have. Why is that. It's certainly not.

[22 : 55] Because I'm better than them. I lived with them. I know them. I can tell you one of the reasons. I can tell you one of the reasons. Why you haven't fallen. And that is because. At the right hand of God.

Tonight. There is one. Whoever lives. To make intercession for you. And he is therefore. Able to save. To the uttermost. But there is one other thing.

It's that Hebrews teaches. That not only. This great high priest. Has gone into the presence of God. To fulfil this ministry. And he has omnipotent. And kingly compassion. But he's gone there.

As the forerunner. So come with me. Let's look at some passages. As we close. Hebrews chapter 6. Verse 20. Here's the writer. And he's describing.

What Jesus is doing. When he went into heaven. And he says. There doesn't he. He says.

[23 : 54] We have this hope. We have. Verse 19. A sure and steadfast. Anchor of the soul. A hope that enters. Into the inner place. Behind the curtain.

Where Jesus is gone. As a forerunner. On our behalf. And that forerunning. Ministry.

Of the Lord Jesus. Is what I read at funerals. You know this. Very famous passage. Don't you? Let not your hearts.

Be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my father's house. Jesus says. There are many rooms. There's plenty of room. If it were not so. But I have told you.

That I go to prepare. A place for you. And if I go and prepare. A place for you. I will come again. And will take you to myself. That where I am.

[24 : 51] You may be. Also. And that is the cast iron promise. Of the eternal son of God. His people.

That is why there is absolutely no question. Is there of a child of God. Having an inheritance in glory. It is because Christ has said it. If I go.

If I ascend. Literally. I will come again and receive you unto myself and where I am you may be also and it means that our entry is secured but I'll tell you something else one of the implications of the ascension of Jesus is that having entered into heaven where he lives and reigns and is guaranteed to us that that will one day be our home we need to hear his voice don't we we need to hear his voice when he says do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven the New Testament constantly is pointing this to you it's saying to you let your manner of life be consistent with those who are citizens of heaven from where we look for the Lord Jesus Christ and this perhaps is one of the most telling and thrilling things that the ascension of the Lord Jesus tells us that he is forming a people for his own glory and he reigns in heaven tonight as prophet and priest and king and so that one day he will see a people who are eagerly pressing forward because our true home is where he is and may God teach us on his son's ascension to heaven that we made true of our citizenship there let's pray let's pray

Thank you.