

## 76 The Ascension of the Lord

Ascension Day has just been and gone in the calendar of the western Church - and perhaps you didn't quite notice it!

Of all the major Days kept by the Church to mark key events in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, Ascension Day tends to be the most neglected. In the shops you won't find any "Happy Ascension Day" cards, let alone special chocolate goodies for the children, and many local churches may not even gather for worship on Ascension Day as it always fall in midweek and does not even merit a Bank Holiday!

And in one sense, this neglect is entirely scriptural - for there is no description of the Ascension in Matthew, Mark or John. It is only in Luke and Acts - both of which have the human author of Luke of course - that we are given a description of the event. Bearing in mind that the Scriptures are "God-breathed", that is, issuing from God the Holy Spirit through their various human authors, we can see from this that it is the Holy Spirit Himself who is giving far less emphasis to the Ascension than to other events in the Lord's Gospel ministry.

That comparative neglect can only mean one thing - *the Ascension does not really matter!* Now that odd statement needs to be explained.

To start with, the Ascension simply consists of the Lord's physical return from earth back to heaven from where He came in the first place. The four massive "Headline Events" of the Gospels are clearly: first, the initial coming of the Son of God from heaven, of God being born as Man, entering into His creation as one of us; second, His subsequent death on our behalf, the culmination of His whole ministry; third, His resurrection from the dead; and fourth, the giving of the Holy Spirit, described as "another Counsellor" (John 14.16, 26 / 15.26 / 16.6-7).

In the light of those four massive Events, we see two things. We see that those four Events are the keys to our understanding of who Jesus is and what He is all about; it is in the light of those four Events that all human beings are to form their reaction to Him - either as Lord and Saviour, or as "thanks, but no thanks". Going on from that, we see that the Ascension is merely the obvious, to-be-expected, undramatic closing of the chapter of Jesus' incarnation - the departure of His physical presence from our midst.

Hence we can see why the Holy Spirit is not over-emphasising the Ascension - He does not need to, because crucially *it makes very little difference to Christ's disciples*. In one crucial sense, very, very little has changed by the Ascension, and that "very, very little" is entirely for our benefit anyway!

Look again at John 16.7 - "But I tell you the truth: It is for your benefit that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you ..." (NIV).

Jesus is telling His disciples of then, and His disciples of now, not to fuss. Yes, physically He is no longer visible to our earthly eyes, but so what? We are already convinced as to who He who is, what He has done, for whom, and why, and what is yet to come, and for whom and why. He's got us! We belong to Him right now. We believe Him - and our belief in Him has nothing at all to do with some wimpish "fingers-crossed / let's-hope-there's-something-in-this" attitude. Look at that wonderful phrase in Acts 1. 3 - "*many infallible proofs*" (AV). In view of those many infallible proofs, it is not us who are the fools by yielding our lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. Frankly the most foolish thing a human being can do is NOT to yield to Him.

So, we cannot physically see Him. But *spiritually nothing has changed*: we are just as close to the Lord Jesus Christ, here, now today, whoever we are, wherever we are, as were Peter, John and the others on the tracks around Galilee. And how is this? Because we have been given the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor, the Comforter, who indwells these puny little lives and does His steady, gracious work, for our blessing - and for God's greater glory.

And finally, the fact that we cannot see Jesus now because He is departed from us physically brings to us all one huge benefit: *Jesus is no longer limited to being in one place at one time*.

It means that by faith in Him, any one of us has access to Almighty God our heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ His Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit, anywhere, any time, about any thing, for as long as we like. No wonder Jesus told those disciples in that upper room, "It is for your benefit that I am going away"!

Jesus' work is done, the Holy Spirit is given: we are in the presence of the Lord just as much these days as were the first disciples in those days. But now: no queues; no waiting; nobody listening; a private audience with the King of kings whenever we have the sense to ask.