

I Believe the Son Ascended to Heaven

SCOTT HOEZEE

Movies often have surprise endings. In the movie, *The Sixth Sense*, viewers find out in only the last few minutes of the film that the main character they have been watching for two hours had all along been just a ghost. He had seemed alive; *he* thought he was alive, but he wasn't. It was a shock. Well, the Gospels have a surprise ending, too, and I don't mean the resurrection; because one day the Jesus who came back to life just lifted off the earth and disappeared into a cloud; the disciples didn't see it coming. Today on *Groundwork*, we will wonder about Jesus' ascension into heaven and where he is now. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is now the seventh program of a longer series—12 programs in all—that we are doing on the entire Apostles' Creed; and this is now the fourth out of five programs on just the middle section of the Creed, which deals with Jesus, the Son of God, and his work.

DAVE BAST

This is really the longest series, I think, we have ever done on *Groundwork*, but it is Trinitarian because the Creed is Trinitarian; so the first part of it deals with God, the Father Almighty, the creator and sustainer of all things; now we are drawing toward the end of the second section, focusing on Jesus the Son; and we have seen that he was crucified, died, and was buried; he rose again from the dead; and now, what happens next? As you said, it is a bit of a surprise ending after that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so, this is where the Apostles' Creed goes next. After the resurrection, which we looked at in the previous program, the next two lines are: He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. So, he ascended into heaven and he is now seated at the Father's right hand. Those are the two things we want to look at in this program.

DAVE BAST

Right; and let's get right to scripture, because the ascension, as we call it, is described basically by Luke, and in two different places. One is at the end of his Gospel. As you may know, Luke wrote two volumes: First the Gospel that we call Luke, and then the book of Acts, which is really a carrying on of the story. So, at the end of Luke, in Luke 24, we read that:

⁵⁰When Jesus had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵²Then they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³and they stayed continually at the Temple, praising God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, that is the short version in Luke 24...

DAVE BAST

Right; and it is also the end of volume 1. That is how the Gospel closes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; that is how Luke's Gospel ends...but then, in Acts 1, beginning at verse 6, Luke gives us a slightly longer version: ⁶Then they (that is, the disciples) gathered around him and said, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Now, keep in mind, this is 40 days now after Easter...40 days) "Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷Jesus said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority; ⁸but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹"Men of Galilee," they said, "Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back to you in the same way you saw him go into heaven."

So, there is that surprise ending.

DAVE BAST

There is the story, right, yes; and that is the fuller account of the ascension. You know, the disciples say to Jesus: Well, now are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel? I remember reading a line from the great New Testament theologian Tom Wright, who said: As usual, Jesus' answer to the disciples was: Yes, but not the way you think.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It wasn't going to be a political kingdom; it was going to be a spiritual kingdom, and Israel would no longer be just the Jewish people, but all the people of God, including the Gentiles who would come in to the Church.

SCOTT HOEZEE

All nations would be saved, as God promised originally to Abram way back in Genesis 12; but it is remarkable, Dave, that 40 days...a month and a half...six weeks about after the resurrection, the disciples still are carrying the wrong idea about Jesus in their heads. They keep waiting for the resurrected Jesus to make his move...take up some kind of power against Herod and Pontius Pilate, and maybe ultimately the Caesar in Rome. So, they still have those wrong ideas; they still didn't get it; and yet, Jesus just says: Well, I am going to send the Holy Spirit to you soon, and for now, good-bye; and he floats up, and now we are just left with these eleven now, because Judas is gone...eleven disciples: Feet-of-clay Peter; James and John, who were already arguing for power and angling for power positions; doubting Thomas; Matthew; Thaddeus...

DAVE BAST

All of them...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The work is up to these people now?? In one sense, that wouldn't inspire a lot of confidence.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and that is why Jesus says: The first thing you have to do is wait...which is interesting. You know, that whole 40-day period is kind of mysterious because Jesus' body was obviously different. He wasn't with them all the time. It wasn't like before his death and resurrection. He would appear and disappear. There is something mysterious...we sometimes use the word *numinous* to mean this sense of holy mystery; and that was an interim time; that was not going to go on. So, the ascension, really...I see it as a kind of heavenly body language to indicate to the disciples, you know: Don't look for me [Jesus] anymore

because I am leaving; as I am now, I cannot stay with you, but I will come in a different way and I will empower you by pouring out my Spirit upon you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have noted this, I think, Dave, on other *Groundwork* programs, but the curious thing about those 40 days is we know almost nothing about them; there is almost nothing in any of the Gospels; and even the first chapter of Acts, you are only about ten verses in and Jesus ascends; so, what did he do? We are told the disciples met with him and had dinner with him many times, but they didn't record anything about that, which is interesting; and I think one of the things that means is that everything Jesus needed to tell us, he already told us before his crucifixion. Now it is going to be the job for the disciples to understand that correctly, which they didn't at the time, if you read John's Gospel. John is always saying: Oh, by the way; at the time Jesus said that, we didn't get it; but later we understood. So, they are going to need something to help move things forward. Everything we need to know has been taught and shown and displayed by Jesus, but now it needs to be interpreted correctly...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And proclaimed; and since the disciples...even at this late date...still have the wrong political ideas in their minds, clearly they were not yet in a position to do this correctly.

DAVE BAST

Yes; they had a lot of wrong ideas, I am sure; because, as we will see in just a moment when we look at the ministry of the Holy Spirit...the work of the Holy Spirit...Jesus said he would give them power to be witnesses to him; but he says other things about the Spirit, too, including the fact that he would help them remember all that he had taught, and what it really meant. They would finally get it, but they would only get it under the tutelage, we might say, of this new teacher, the Holy Spirit. So, yes, it is an interesting time, and it is an interesting act or event, the ascension that indicates now this time is being closed and get ready for a brand new era. I [Jesus] am not going to be here physically anymore, even in my glorified body. So, how does Jesus send that message? Well, he rises into the air...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And he is hidden by a cloud. Martin Luther said it wasn't like the way you climb a ladder up into your attic. I mean, sometimes this is critiqued as saying: Well, obviously this cannot be true. This must be a myth. No, it is a kind of symbolism that indicates to the disciples: Now go do what I told you to and wait for the Spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and they wouldn't have to wait long. Ten days...a week and a half...and we get to the Day of Pentecost; and Dave, in just a minute we are going to note that the Church has all along taught that Jesus going back to the Father is a good and positive thing. It looked bad to the disciples, like where did he go? Now we are alone. But, it was positive; and in just a moment, we are going to consider some of the reasons why Jesus ascending, and now being seated at the right hand of the Father, is a source of great power and assurance and comfort for us. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are covering the phrases from the Apostles' Creed that speak of Jesus' ascension into heaven and his being seated at the right hand of God the Father.

So, we just said, Scott, that you know, this ascension was an indication that Jesus was going to leave them in one way, but he would come back in another; and in John 16 he talks about that, and he actually says: This is to your advantage that I am doing this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus says: ^{4b}“I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, ⁵but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. ⁷But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you; ¹³and when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me because it was from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵All that belongs to the Father is mine, that is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

So, there it is. This is the sending of the Spirit. Dave, you just said the Spirit would help the disciples remember everything Jesus said, and finally, interpret it correctly, even though a lot of those interpretations were different than what they thought at the time it happened.

DAVE BAST

Right; he would lead them into truth...

SCOTT HOEZEE

All the truth, yes.

DAVE BAST

One of the results is the New Testament...

SCOTT HOEZEE

There you go.

DAVE BAST

Which is the Holy Spirit's working in and through the apostles so that they could record the right understanding of who Jesus was and what he did; and of course, also there is the power of the Spirit that would come. Jesus says that explicitly: You will receive power to be my witnesses. So, the Spirit is going to convict the world of sin and righteousness, Jesus says in John 16...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And he will enable the witness of the disciples to have an impact, and people will be drawn to Christ. So, these are all ways in which the coming of the Spirit is really a step forward for the disciples, not a step back.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; but the other part of the Apostles' Creed we are looking at in this program is: And he is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. You know, in the tradition of the Church, this is called the Session of Christ. That means he is seated—he is on the throne; and so, the sending of the Spirit was the first great benefit that the Church gained from Jesus' ascension, but now he is seated at the right hand of the Father, but he is not just sitting there, he is very, very busy; and Dave, we can make a list...I think we have four things we want to talk about that Jesus is doing from that position of authority, all of which are wonderful gifts to us.

DAVE BAST

Right; so the first thing we could say is that he is praying for us. This is a wonderful truth of the ongoing ministry of Jesus—that Jesus didn’t go to heaven and then turn his back on his people—on the Church—on you and me. So, Paul says in Romans Chapter 8 that [verse 34 paraphrased] Christ Jesus who died, more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us; and John adds in his first letter that [2:1b] if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. So, this wonderful idea that Jesus is still pleading...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And that Jesus is still presenting us before God in prayer. You know, you want someone to pray for you; well guess what? You’ve got the best.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Someone is, right; and he is not only interceding there with his own words but he is mediating *our* words to the Father. So, traditional Christian prayers always conclude with: We pray for Jesus’ sake...we pray *in* Jesus’ name, amen. Why do we pray for Jesus’ sake and in Jesus’ name? Because he is the one...the Spirit will bring our prayers to Jesus and Jesus will bring our prayers to the Father. The whole Trinity is involved in our prayer life; but that is one thing Jesus is doing: Praying for us and bringing our prayers before God...that is one. Two: Jesus still has a real human body; we forget this. He didn’t shed that new body he got at the resurrection when he ascended. He still has his renewed, glorified body of flesh; and traditionally the Church has said: You know why that is good news? Because if Jesus’ fleshly body fits in heaven, your fleshly body one day will, too. In John 14, Jesus previewed this for us:

²“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

DAVE BAST

Yes; amen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A great hope.

DAVE BAST

A great promise. So, here is a third thing, though. Jesus seated at the right hand of God—that is a symbolic posturing position. We don’t believe literally that God and Jesus are sitting on two golden thrones up in the sky somewhere—we don’t believe that is what heaven is or where heaven is. Let’s be clear: God doesn’t have a right hand...God doesn’t have a body...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But this is the symbolic way of saying in terms of biblical culture that Jesus is in the place of supreme honor and authority. He is ruling there; he is glorified there; and here is a passage where Paul writes about this in glorious terms to the Ephesians. So, Paul says:

^{1:18}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; ¹⁹and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (And then he says this about God’s power) That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹

far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in the present age but also in the age to come; ²²and God has placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the Church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. I mean, that is a glorious passage. Jesus is not just above all other power; he is *far* above...not just in this age but in the...I mean, everywhere Jesus is Lord.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because he won the cosmic victory. He is the victor. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords; and we see that. So, he prays for us and brings our prayers to God. He is also, of course, in heaven in his body, assuring us that we have a place to join him one day. He is the cosmic victor...and fourth...a fourth positive thing is...further exercise of that power, Dave, is he protects his people; and Romans 8 comes to mind, right? ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷But, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers; ³⁹neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

DAVE BAST

Yes, amen; and note that last word: Our Lord.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

So, part of what we mean when we say: Christ is Lord—Jesus is Lord—that great Christian confession—is this: We don't just mean he is sort of *my* lord or your lord; we mean he is *the* Lord, enthroned in glory like this, and all power and authority belong to him. So, what does that mean, maybe, in practical terms? Let's think a little bit more about that before we wrap up this program.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We were talking about the ascension and Session of Christ; and you know, Dave, Ascension Day has fallen on hard times in a lot of the Church. It used to be that almost every church would have a special service on that Thursday, forty days after Easter, but the attendance dwindled; so then they started having combined services with two, four, five, ten churches...still couldn't get very many people to come out. So now a lot of churches celebrate ascension on the Sunday closest to Ascension Day, and I am afraid sometimes not even that happens...

Dave Bast: Yes, they ignore it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is too bad, because the ascension, Dave, is like the exclamation mark on Easter. Everybody makes a big deal out of Easter yet...the churches are full; but if we are excited about Easter, we should really also be excited about the ascension.

DAVE BAST

Well, some liturgical churches celebrate Christ the King Sunday...I think they do that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right before Advent, yes.

DAVE BAST

Just before Advent starts. It is essentially the same thing. What we are saying is, we want to celebrate the fact that Jesus isn't just still alive and out there somewhere, coming and going, or appearing and disappearing like during those forty days. Jesus is in charge; Jesus is, as you said, the victor over not only death and the powers of evil, but he is the victor over sin. In fact, one passage we didn't mention...we could have when we ticked off those four wonderful truths about his Session is the point that Hebrews makes:

1:3b When he had made satisfaction for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Most High. He has finished his work as priest, as atoning sacrifice...he has finished that part of it. He continues to pray for us, as we said, but he doesn't have to offer any more sacrifices to forgive sin; that is done.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; priests in the Old Testament could never sit down because there was always more sacrifices to be made. Jesus made the one sacrifice of his body, and that work is finished. So, we said we wanted to talk about some of the pastoral and practical implications of all this theology we have been talking about, and we have already kind of previewed that in the previous part of this program; but you know, sometimes even in this life, Dave, we will say: It must be nice to have friends in high places. I mean, if you know somebody who knows the President of the United States or the Prime Minister of Canada or the Queen of England, you say well, that's nice because you know somebody who's got the ear of the president. You want to get something to the president, you've got a good shot at it if you've got a friend in high places. Well, we've got a friend in high places.

DAVE BAST

Yes; the highest place...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; there are two things really that are really quite practical about this truth: One, we don't have to do anything more to pay for our sins; Jesus has taken care of that and he sat down, he is finished; and two, we don't have to, you know, look around for someone who can kind of advocate for us or be a go-between or kind of pave the way to get us to God. We've got Jesus who is doing that. The New Testament calls him the one mediator between God and humans. He is the ultimate go-between, and he continues to do that perpetually...constantly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and the other thing, of course, Dave, about the sending of the Holy Spirit is Jesus said...you know, when Jesus was telling the disciples that he was going to go away, he looked around and all their faces had fallen, right? They were all so sad; and Jesus said: Look, look, look; I'm not going to leave you as orphans; I am not leaving you alone; I am going to send the Spirit. And the Spirit, now, Dave, is our living connection to Jesus. He is never...yes, he is with the Father, but he is in our hearts, because the Holy Spirit is the living connection. We have talked about this on other programs. There are different images you can use; but we are hardwired to Jesus because the Spirit is our living connection to our living Lord; and so, he is right here with us at all times. He hasn't really left because the Spirit has come to bring us to Jesus and Jesus to us.

DAVE BAST

There is so much that we could and will say about the Holy Spirit. We are coming up on that in this series...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But, another wonderful thing Jesus says in that upper room discourse in those middle sections of John—John 14, 15, 16, and 17—is that when he sends the Spirit: My Father and I will come and make our home with you...with the disciples. The Spirit is not only Jesus' presence, the Spirit is the Father's presence with us, and they have come to stay.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

You know, they have come to settle down and make their home within us, which is just kind of mind-blowing, if you think about it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and it is a source of great comfort. So, of course, Jesus *is* coming back in a big way, and we are actually going to look at that in the next program in this series; so, he is coming back; but in the meanwhile, because he is the Lord of Lords, and because we have this living connection with the Holy Spirit, when we look around us and life is hard, when we see racial injustice, when we see innocent children suffering, when we see the creation suffering, we can get pretty down about that. Things look pretty bad. The headlines in the news are pretty bad a lot of the time, but there is hope. None of those things will have the last word, because Jesus is on the throne. He is coming back; but in the meanwhile, he is still here. So, you know, knowing and being able to see Jesus in that position of authority is a source of great comfort.

DAVE BAST

One of the scriptures that is often used for Ascension Day, or associated with it, is this wonderful passage from Psalm 47: ⁵God has ascended amid shouts of joy; the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. ⁶Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises; ⁷for God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what a wonderful and fitting way to celebrate the comfort and the hope and the joy that we have because Jesus ascended into heaven, because he is seated at the right hand of the Father, we join with that psalmist in saying indeed, from now and until he comes again, sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King; and for that we say our great thanks to God.

DAVE BAST

Amen; well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue our study of the Apostles' Creed by exploring the scriptures that inform our beliefs about Jesus' second coming and judgment. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you; or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

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