

# the ESSENTIALS



WHAT ALL CHRISTIANS BELIEVE AND WHY IT MATTERS

**Part 6: I believe in Jesus' ascension and reign | Pastor Matt Clark | Feb. 22, 2009**

## **A. Fellowship Time** (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

## **B. Review Time** (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

We're moving from Easter Day to Ascension Day in The Apostles' Creed: "He [Jesus] ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." The Ascension doesn't get as much attention as Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection, but it is essential to our faith.

### **1. The history of the ascension** (Read **Acts 1:3-11** together.)

**Acts 1:10** records that the disciples "were looking intently up into the sky." They just froze. When Jesus ascended, the disciples were almost clueless. But then the angels appeared to them, and they helped the disciples understand that just as Jesus ascended, He will again descend to earth to reign. And in the meantime, they have a mission!

**Acts 1:3** records there was a forty-day delay between the Resurrection and the Ascension. Why? One reason Verse 3 gives is that there was a need for "*many convincing proofs that he was alive.*" Jesus appearing post-resurrection was pretty decisive! He showed himself to over 500 diverse people in different circumstances. Another reason for the delay was to encourage the disciples. Following the crucifixion, we find the disciples huddled in the Upper Room, fearing for their lives (**John 20:19**). If they were to turn the world upside down, they needed vision and hope. Jesus' resurrected life and Ascension were seen not only by them, but many. They provided a living picture of Jesus physically leaving this world to be with His Father. And the angels in **Acts 1** as well as the Bible in **Revelation 1:7** and **Matthew 25:30** say Jesus will return "on the clouds." So the Ascension is an historical event witnessed by many people, giving Jesus' disciples then and now the hope needed to spread the message. This visible ascension brought an end to the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, and it made way for people to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus had told the disciples to wait for in **Acts 1:4**.

### **2. The person of the ascension**

Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was to grant us access to the Father. John writes, "*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*" (**1 John 4:9-10**). As believers we know why Jesus died for us; it's also important for us to understand why He ascended into heaven. **Luke 22:69** records that the Son of Man is seated at the right hand of God the Father. And Paul says in **Ephesians 1:20-21**: ". . . he [God] raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come." Because of Christ's power and authority over all creation, we can be secure in His hands.

Also, **Hebrews 4:14** assigns Him the role of being our high priest: "*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.*" The role of the prophet was to represent God to the people, and the role of the priest was to represent the people to God. Jesus represents us to the Father; He intercedes for us. Note **Hebrews 10:11-12**: "*Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.*" Jesus said in **John 14:6**, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" Without Jesus, we don't stand a chance for being justified before God's righteousness. But each one of us has a friend in high places! Jesus.

Jesus Christ came to introduce us to God's love. He says in **John 3:16-17**, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*" Thus, "*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love*" (**1John 4:8**). Jesus ascended and is seated with God the Father, and they are one on their perspective about you. They love you, and are more for you than you are for yourself. Thus, we can approach the throne of God with confidence, knowing God's mercy and grace.

### **3. The effect of the ascension**

The entire book of Acts is the story of the Early Church and the deep effect it had on the world after Jesus had ascended and given them the Holy Spirit. Jesus had already told the disciples in **Matthew 28:18-20**, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" He also said in **John 14:7**, "*It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you,*" and in **Acts 1:8**, "*But 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.*" The Ascension paves the way for all Jesus' disciples to be empowered by the Holy Spirit and live out the mission Jesus had given us.

Furthermore, His Ascension paves the way for our ascension. Jesus says in **John 14:1-4**, "*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And 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. You know the way to the place where I am going.*" The effect of the Ascension unlocked everything!

### **C. Life Group Questions** (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. What do you make of Matt's biblical claim from John 14:6, "Without Jesus, we don't have a chance with God"? In this day of relativism, how do you help others understand this truth?
2. As Jesus ascended into heaven, He will return. Based on what you learned from the sermon and Scriptures, what is happening in the meantime?—Discuss first what Jesus is doing and then what we are to be doing.

*Leaders—here are some ideas to stir the conversation if needed:*

1. *What is Jesus doing? He is preparing a place for us, interceding for us, and bringing us to the Father as our high priest.*
2. *What are we doing?*
  - What are specifics of the mission Jesus has given us in Matthew 28:18-20?*
  - How does being a disciple and making more disciples practically affect your attitudes and goals, family and work, and finances and time?*

### **D. Personal Application** (1-3 Minutes)

- Continue memorizing the Apostles' Creed line by line each week.
- Live out the mission Jesus has given us as if He will return any minute. Journal about how such an attitude affects your family and work, finances and time, attitudes and goals.

### **E. Prayer Time** (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for loving us so much that He devised a plan for Jesus to be our intercessor.
- Pray that you will fulfill the mission Jesus has left us with on earth and that you would be ready to meet the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in person with joy.
- Pray that excitement fills your soul at the anticipation of witnessing Jesus' return—we often forget this, but Jesus could return at any time!
- Bring any other praises and requests before the Lord that arose during your discussion.

# The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth,

and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,  
whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic church, the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting. Amen.

## For further reading on Christian doctrine:

- *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe it, and Why it Matters*, Charles Colson and Harold Fickett, Zondervan, 2008.
- *Christian Basics: An Invitation to Discipleship*, John Stott, Baker, 1991.
- *Basic Christianity*, John Stott, InterVarsity Press.
- *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, N. T. Wright, Harper, 2006.
- *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis, Macmillan, 1952.
- *Christian Theology in Plain Language*, Bruce Shelley, Word, 1985

## For further reading on the Apostles' Creed:

- *The Apostles' Creed*, William Barclay, Knox, 1998.
- *I Believe: Exploring the Apostles Creed*, Alister McGrath, Intervarsity Press, 1997.
- *Affirming the Apostles' Creed*, J. I. Packer, Crossway, 2008.
- *Credo: Believing in Something to Die For*, Ray Pritchard, 2005.