

**Scripture Reading: Acts 28**

**“28 “Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. 30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”**

# **'Preaching the Kingdom'**

**There are three major events that follow the victory of Jesus on the cross which we focus on in the Church calendar each year. The resurrection of Jesus which Pastor Liberati has been presenting from I Corinthians 15, the Ascension of Jesus which I will address today and then the coming of the Spirit of God on Pentecost which we address on Pentecost Sunday.**

**Easter or Resurrection Sunday and Pentecost always fall on a Sunday where we focus on those events.**

**The Ascension of Jesus took place 40 days after His Resurrection, so it comes on a Thursday which this year was this past 18<sup>th</sup> Day of May. We celebrated the Ascension with a picnic yesterday and it is the focus of our service today.**

➤ **So this morning I would like to accomplish two things with this message.**

**The most critical is to draw our attention to the importance of the Ascension, but in doing so I want to also remind us about the blessings and benefits that we can find in the Heidelberg Catechism.**

**Pastor Liberati and I often mention how valuable this teaching tool can be, reminding you that it teaches us the Christian faith, and how it includes a host of Biblical passages to support the answers and to invite further study.**

**Today I will address the Ascension of Jesus with two questions & answers given in the Heidelberg along with their Biblical support. Lord willing it will encourage other such studies in our private & family devotions as well as the instruction of our children.**

**As we did with marriage last week, I want to focus more on the impact of the Ascension on our lives than the actual details about how and when the Ascension took place, which we covered in our responsive readings today. We will begin with Question 49 which asks: “How does Christ’s ascension to heaven benefit us?”**

**The Answer given is given in three parts, “First, he is our advocate in heaven in the presence of his Father. Second, we have our own flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that Christ our head will also take us, his members, up to himself. Third, he sends his Spirit to us on earth as a corresponding pledge. By the Spirit’s power we seek not earthly things but the things above, where Christ is, sitting at God’s right hand.**

**Now with each part the writers of the Heidelberg provide their suggested Biblical support which is where we become Good Bereans taking each one back to the Bible to see if it is true.**

**If you have a Bible with good cross references any of these can begin a long and helpful study of the Scriptures.**

**So with the first benefit of “he [the ascended Jesus] is our advocate in heaven in the presence of his Father. They would have us go to Romans 8:34 where we read with a bit of context:**

**“31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect?**

**It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.”**

- **We are to take comfort knowing that the Risen Jesus is seated in heaven as not only as the Ruler of all, but also as our advocate!**

**The other reference the authors suggest come from I John 2, where again in context we read:**

**“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup> And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”**

- **We are to see the work of the Ascended Jesus as our advocate, knowing that He has satisfied God’s wrath against our sins, but also as Ruler of All, satisfying the wrath of God against the entire Creation.**

**This is why we can have hope that those little things we studied last week really can change the course of history. God uses means and those little obediences are the means that our ascended Savior uses to advance His Kingdom here on earth!**

**We are then given three references to study related to the second benefit which was stated as, “having our own flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that Christ our head will also take us, his members, up to himself.”**

**The first suggested passage comes from the Gospel according to John, where we read in chapter 14, ““Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. <sup>2</sup> In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.**

**<sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”**

**And a related passage from John 17:24, reads...**

**24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”**

**And the last passage linked with Jesus taking us to Himself come in the second chapter of Ephesians where we read:**

**“<sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”**

**We should never tire of hearing as part of the absolution after we confess our sins that we are in Christ and as those in Christ we join with that Saints of all the ages and around the world, as those raised up and seated together in the heavenly places.**

- **Again, we should see our individual comfort and the unity of the Body of Christ as He rules from His Father’s Throne.**

**The third benefit comes from how he sends his Spirit to us on earth as a corresponding pledge: And for Biblical support there we turn back to John 14, where we read these glorious words: “If you love Me, keep My commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”**

- **The Catechism teaches us that by the Spirit’s power we seek not earthly things but the things above, where Christ is, seated at God’s right hand.”**

And we can go to 2 Corinthians as well reading from from chapter 1:22 & chapter 5:5:

1:21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the 5:5: Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. And now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”

➤ And finally the writers send us to Colossians 1 as a summary of this benefit:

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in in glory.”

Moving on in the Heidelberg, question #50 asks, why are the words “and is seated at the right hand of God” added? And the answer is given as this:

“Because Christ ascended to heaven to show there that he is head of his church, the one through whom the Father rules all things.”

The Biblical support for the Ascended Christ to be the head of the Church is given in two Scriptures:

The first is cited from that glorious first chapter of Ephesians:

The Catechism lists verses 20-23, but that begins in the middle of a sentence! 😊 So picking up at verse 15 we read: “15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

➤ That passage certainly gives the BIG picture of why we are told that the ascended Jesus was seated at the Father’s right hand.

That truth stands behind all that we do in the here and now and why all those little practical steps I am covering in my messages to Mothers and Fathers can be done with joy and confidence.

The next passage comes from Colossians chapter one where again I want to cite the fuller context:

Colossians 1: “15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or [powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

➤ The answer to question 50 also says Jesus was seated to show that through Him the Father rules all things.

The first Biblical support for that truth comes from a very familiar passage in Matthew 28:18

“18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

Which of course is followed by our marching orders in the Great Commission: 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

And finally, we have this support from John chapter 5:

“22 For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, 23 that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

➤ So we find in those two questions and answers a LOT to ponder here on Ascension Sunday!

Now I have to admit this was a pretty easy sermon for me to prepare with the Catechism answers and Bible references giving me more than enough material!

I trust I have accomplished my two tasks, the first being a review of the importance of the Ascension of Jesus to how we live our everyday lives and our understanding of where history is going.

The second was to show just how the Heidelberg Catechism can be used in our private or family devotions. Those two questions and answers covered a lot of material which is accessible to anyone and I hope many of you will avail yourselves of it.

Of course, I only used two of the five questions and answer about the Ascension! The Catechism covers all the major events in the life and ministry of Jesus, gives us a summary of the Apostle Creed we sing each week and then helps us to understand the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer.

➤ Someone might be wondering why I chose a passage from Acts 28 on Ascension Sunday.

I did so because it shows the understanding that the Apostle Paul had about the Ascension and how we are to be sharing these truths with others whenever we have opportunity

Acts 28: “30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”

### **Communion Meditation: Psalm 110**

The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand,  
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

2 The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!

3 Your people shall be volunteers

In the day of Your power;

In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth.

4 The Lord has sworn And will not relent,

“You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.” 5 The Lord is at Your right hand;  
He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath.

6 He shall judge among the nations,

He shall fill the places with dead bodies,

He shall execute the heads of many countries.

7 He shall drink of the brook by the wayside;

Therefore He shall lift up the head.