

**[Please note these are unedited preaching notes  
and are not for publication. They are made available here to aid the deaf community in  
Christ Church and to be a reference for anyone who found the sermons useful.]**

# Ascension – Living with purpose today

Mark 16:14-20

## INTRODUCTION

Thursday was Ascension Day in the churches calendar – it was significant enough that Ruth’s secular school closed for the day, but managed to slip under the radar at Nici’s Christian school.

But I’ve found myself asking the question again – what significance does the physical ascension of Jesus into heaven hold for humanity?

Does it make a difference whether “*Jesus was taken up into heaven and sat at the right hand of God*” or he didn’t? Does it change anything about our faith and the way we live it out?

And I believe that tied up in the answer to this question is a foundational answer to the question of purpose.

Author Alan Paton put the question like this:

*“Who knows for what we live, and struggle, and die?... Wise men write many books, in words too hard to understand. But this, the purpose of our lives, the end of all our struggle, is beyond all human wisdom.”*

And Jesus Christ, in the words we’ve just heard read to us, answers that question like this:

*“Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*

Rick Warren, author of the book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, expresses it like this:

*“It’s not about you.*

*The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfilment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions.*

*If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose.”*

You see – at one time or another we all wrestle with this question about purpose. *What am I here for? What is the reason? What (in Alan Paton’s words) is the end of all our struggle?*

And I’d like us to take a moment this morning to look at how Jesus’ Ascension addresses that question in a very clear and direct way.

1. The Ascension puts **Jesus’ commission** to the disciples squarely **in our hands**. The work of Jesus’ physical body is completed – and ours has begun.
  2. The Ascension tells us in whose authority we live and move and have our being.
  3. The Ascension changes our lives from **inside out!**
- 

### **1. The Ascension puts Jesus’ commission to the disciples squarely in our hands. The work of Jesus’ physical body is completed – and ours has begun.**

Luke gives us more clues about the ascension than Mark does – both in his gospel, and at the start of the Acts of the Apostles. About how Jesus physical body was taken up into heaven – and how a cloud then hid him from their sight.

Come on that’s pretty cool! I think we often have a pious, angelic thought about how Jesus sort wafted up into the air. I’ve no idea what it looked like – but it was significant enough that Mark and Luke recorded the event.

Significant enough that those who witnessed it were in no doubt of what they’d seen.

Now can you imagine what would have happened if only that first generation of disciples who were present at the Ascension of Jesus – if ONLY THEY had taken Jesus seriously when he told them to: *“Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation.”*

Well for starters - it wouldn’t have got very far!

POINT: Jesus had to go!

**He couldn’t die again** – he’d already beaten that one. The cross of Jesus stands witness to the fact that God has overcome the power of sin and death.

**And if he remained** – the community of faith that he had inaugurated – some say at the foot of the cross when he called on Mary and John to care for each other as family – THAT community wouldn’t get on and take God’s salvation message to the ends of the earth.

They'd look to him – rely on him – flesh and blood. But God's purpose is to achieve his plan through the frailty of the human community of faith.

And so the PHYSICAL JESUS – human flesh and all – is exalted – ascends – goes to be – at God's side of the two-sided created order (as opposed to 'earth' – the space-time cosmos we humans live in).

The writer to the Hebrews puts it like this: *"Jesus has gone right through the heavens."* Various Jewish writings speak of different levels of 'the heavens; and Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians 12 of being caught up into 'the third heaven.'

Now when Solomon built the Temple, he declared that *"...heaven and the heaven of heavens (or 'the highest heaven') cannot contain God."*

But though different writers put it differently, the impression is that within 'heaven' there are layers, with God's own dwelling being the innermost one.

And so Jesus physical work is done – and the batton of God's purpose of salvation has been passed on to the community of faith. To you and me and every man, woman and child who put their faith in Jesus.

That means that as long as we live – Jesus' commission is our commission. As long as we draw breath – you and I have a job to do. Our lives are designed to be a physical expression (in WORD and ACTION) of preaching God's Good News to all creation.

---

**2. BUT SECONDLY - the Ascension tells us in whose authority we live and move and have our being. It tells us BY WHOM we are being sent.**

Jesus' ascension to heaven completes and fulfils his role as our **King** and as our '**Great High Priest.**'

**[Australian officer in Germany story]**

John King, an Anglican clergyman who was captured by the Germans in 1940 and spent the next five years in various prison camps, kept a wartime diary. Part of his diary includes a character sketch of Tom Moore, an Australian soldier who was in the same camp for a while.

Moore was in charge of the Australian barrack, which meant that he was responsible both to the German authorities for the state of the barrack and to the Australians for representing the interests of the men. This is what John King wrote about the man:

*The authorities expect him to see their displeasure when anything is wrong with the state of the barrack or the behaviour of the men. On the other hand, the men look to him to champion their rights and liberties, real and imagined.*

*To carry out the job efficiently and to retain the confidence of both sides is a rare achievement... but Tom succeeded.*

He spent most days going to and fro between Germans and Australians, and the other leading figures in the camp, making sure everything was sorted out despite the appalling conditions. He won universal respect.

---

This is the kind of intermediary high-priesthood role which Jesus holds since the ascension. Of course as with all analogies – not all the details fit: God the Father is no hostile officer, and the church is far from an army barrack in a prison camp.

But the point is that Jesus has fulfilled the ancient promise of God – that he would eventually send his people a great high priest (the Bible says – a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek) – who would perfectly fulfil what the regular priesthood symbolised but could only achieve in part, and imperfectly.

This means that Jesus – like the Australian officer – is one who both is completely at home ‘on our side’ of the picture – and is able to represent us fully and appropriately on God’s side.

Jesus is, and remains, one of us. A truly human being who still remembers what it was like to be weak, to get sick, and to be tempted over and over from every angle.

The early church led the way in believing that Jesus didn’t cease to be human once he’d ascended – he rules the world as Lord and King – AS A HUMAN BEING.

And when Jesus represents us to the Father – he isn’t looking down on us from some dizzy height – and patronising those poor creatures down there. HE CAN TRULY SYMPATHISE. He’s been here. He knows exactly what its like.

And the point here is that Jesus, having died and been raised from the dead, was then exalted, in the ascension, through all the different layers of ‘the heavens’, right to the very heart, to the throne of the father himself.

He didn’t simply go to some convenient resting place in some spiritual sphere where he could wait – satisfied with having completed his earthly duty.

He went right to the Father’s inner courtroom, in order that by representing us there, by interceding for us with the Father (as Paul writes to the Romans), he might continue to implement the work he had accomplished on earth.

So when we come to pray to our Father in Heaven – we are not shouting across a great gulf. We are not trying to catch the attention of someone who has little or no concern for us. We are coming before the God of grace who has made a way through Jesus in the flesh for us to approach him.

Through him – MERCY is available to set us free from the sin that would otherwise drown us;

and GRACE – to strengthen us and set us on our feet for lives of service and witness.

---

### 3. The Ascension changes our lives from the inside out!

#### [GOLF BALL ILLUSTRATION]

I've heard it said that there are two views of God:

Firstly, God is like a GOLF BALL and if you drop it into a full glass of water it dispels everything else that shouldn't be there. ie. If you're a Christian there are a whole lot of things that you shouldn't be doing – you should just be focussing on the spiritual stuff;

OR the second view of God is more like SALT: if you pour salt into a glass of water – it just infuses the whole thing. You can keep pouring more salt in and it doesn't displace the water. It purifies and kills the bad stuff in the glass.

So apart from sin – God doesn't require us to stop being or doing any of the other things that we were being or doing before we accepted him in our lives. Everything is still there – but it tastes different!

Last week – I was watching the news on TV – and they had a report about the controversial **SEXPO**, down at the Convention Centre.

There in the middle of it all was a stand run by a Cape Town church – promoting the Marriage Course – infiltrating and making a difference amongst a lot of really twisted stuff – FROM WITHIN.

The writer to the Hebrews says this (chapter 9):

*“For Christ entered heaven to appear for us in God's presence... once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”*

The ascension is the completion of the work of Jesus on the cross atoning for our sin.

Not only was the sacrifice killed once and for all – cleansing for the sin of the whole world – but as in the old temple the blood had to be sprinkled on the altar – the work of the cross is completed by the blood of Jesus being brought into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled in the appropriate way before the altar of God.

We are changed from the inside out – because of the Spirit of Jesus living in us. Jesus actually said to his followers:

*“Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin, righteousness and judgement. ...And he will guide you in all truth. The Spirit doesn’t speak on his own – he only speaks what he hears (So, like Jesus, the Spirit is listening to the Father all the time).*

Just like the salt keeps filling the full glass of water – and changing it – God’s desire is to fill us with his Spirit – and to change us. It’s an ongoing process. But it has a greater purpose: it’s not just for you and for me – but for the rest of the world.

God wants to use you – just the way you are to be a bearer of Good News.

---

## **CONCLUSION**

What, or who are you living for? In Paton’s words: *For what end do you struggle?*

I want to invite you today to renew the purpose that God has for you. If your sense of the purpose for which God created you is blurred in any way – hear these words:

*“If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God.*

*You were born BY his purpose and FOR his purpose.”*

---