



The Apostles' Creed (Part 7) – He Ascended to Heaven and Sits at the Right Hand of the Father Almighty

Matt Chandler – October 4, 2015

[Video]

Male: I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth...

Female: And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord...

Male: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...

Male: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

Male: He descended to hell.

Female: The third day he rose again from the dead.

Male: He ascended to heaven...

Female: And sits on the right hand of the Father Almighty...

Female: From whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

Male: I believe in the Holy Spirit...

Female: The holy catholic church...

Male: The communion of saints...

Male: The forgiveness of sins...

Male: The resurrection of the body...

Male: And the life everlasting.

Male: Amen.

[End of video]

How are we? Doing well? Excellent. I've been eager to be with you. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to be in Acts 1. We're going to look at the first 11 verses of Acts as we continue our way through the Apostles' Creed. While you're turning there, if you don't have a Bible with you, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you.

It's always important that you see exactly where I'm getting what I'm saying. Grab one of those. If you don't own a Bible, that's our gift to you. I always say if you want a nicer one, the lost and found is in Connection Central. You can head in there and maybe even find your own. Just grab a Bible. While you're turning there to Acts 1, I'm going to talk a little bit about John 14. I know that doesn't make much sense, but I promise I'll try to weave it together before our time here is finished today.

One of the things that becomes clear as we study the Apostles' Creed is that the nature of God is that he is three in one: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and yet one. It's what C. S. Lewis called a dance, that the Holy Spirit illuminates and helps us understand and praise Jesus. Jesus is bringing glory to the Father. There is this kind of dance of which we are the beneficiaries. We have covered that at length.

If we're honest, it's somewhat confusing, correct? No? Come get the face mic then. If you don't have any, "Oh, how does that work then?" and, "What role does this play?" and, "How does this work?" In a conversation with his disciples, the disciples are asking Jesus about the nature of his relationship with the Godhead, and in John 14, they say, "If you'll show us the Father, we'll believe." Jesus' response is, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father, for I am in the Father, and the Father is in me."

Later on, the apostle Paul would say the same thing like this, that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. If you want to know what God is like, look to Jesus. The reason I can so boldly and ferociously

proclaim that Jesus is the friend of sinners and that God has sent Christ into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world from condemnation is because we can watch the life of Jesus. He truly is the friend of sinners. He eats with, drinks with, hangs out with, encourages, and speaks life into those who had been cut out from the religious establishment.

They were not welcome among the gathering of God's people, yet this is the space that Jesus chose to inhabit, right? We see the heart of God in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as he dwells among us in the flesh. Jesus' conversation with the disciples is, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father, for the Father is in me, and I am in him." Then he says this verse. It's a stunning verse, just one verse in John 14:12 that I want us to look at. "Truly, truly, I say to you: whoever believes in me will also do the works I do, and greater works than these will he do because I am going to the Father."

That's a stunning promise. We know that Jesus isn't a liar. Jesus says that the same things he did, we will be able to do. In fact, he actually ratchets it up. In fact, we'll be able to do far more than Jesus did, right? I have all sorts of questions now. Really the answer to what Jesus is talking about there is actually found in the part of the life of Christ that rarely gets discussed, and we never flesh out the implications of it.

A ton has been written, a ton has been preached, a ton has been laid out around the death of Jesus Christ and around the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and rightly so. Those are epic moments in human history. In fact, I've said that the resurrection of Christ in particular is the greatest moment in human history. Yet, the piece we rarely talk about that I think is tied to what Jesus is teaching here in John 14 is the ascension of Jesus Christ, that he physically ascends and goes and returns to heaven in a physical, human body, that he ascends.

We're going to spend our time today talking about the ascension. This shouldn't surprise you if you've been here for the seven weeks as we've worked our way through the Apostles' Creed because our phrase for today is that he ascended to the right hand of the Father Almighty. That will be the phrase. The last seven weeks, as we've worked through the creed, we've stood and read it out loud. We say that as we do that, two things are happening.

First, we're aligning ourselves up with orthodox Christian faith that goes back a couple of thousand years while simultaneously affirming and denying. See, whether you are aware of it or not, all of us are being disciplined, right? All of us are being disciplined right now. Whether that discipleship is under the banner of the Christian faith and us growing and maturing in the Christian faith or whether it be

the popular narratives and stories of our modern age, the world shapes us, disciplines us, molds us, helps us understand how to think, puts lenses on by which we see.

Everything you read, write, listen to, watch is shaping you, molding you. The conversations you're in, the relationships you have... You are a disciple. The only question is a disciple of what? Our culture in the day in which we live is trying to disciple us, trying to shape us, trying to get us to see the world a particular way. When we say the creed together, in one sense, we are denying those narratives. We're denying that discipleship. We're saying, "That's not what we believe."

We would deny that, and we would affirm the triune God of the Bible. When we read the creed together as a family of faith, as we stand and read the creed together, we're saying, "We reject this, and we believe this." Over the last seven weeks, I've given a couple of *isms* every week. I probably shouldn't have done a couple because I'm starting to run out of *isms* as we get deeper into this series.

We said we would reject materialism. We reject the notion that what we need for our hearts to be satisfied is more stuff. In fact, one of the bigger lies that lies on top of a capitalistic society is what we need to be happy is more of what we already possess. More, more, more, more, more. Of what? Of what you already have. More of it will finally make you happy, right? It's an absurd lie that we gobble up. We would reject that.

We would reject intellectualism, not the intellect. We are to be an intellectual people, but we would reject that the human intellect will solve the problems of man. In fact, if you're paying attention, it seems like the smarter we get, the bloodier things get, right? This week, the two *isms* we would reject are... Agnosticism. We would reject that the only thing that can be known are the things that can be touched and tasted and seen and felt, right? We would reject that.

We would say, "No, no, no. There are things that are true, that are real, that do exist, that we can't see with our eyes or hear with our ears." We would believe that. In fact, just off the cuff, if we take it out of the arena of Christianity, love. We believe in love, right? Yet, you can't touch it. You can't work it out, some sort of mathematical equation, yet it's there. In fact, if you're married, you believe in love, right? You didn't get married going, "I hope this works for the next couple of months."

You haven't done that. You've stepped into a type of rootedness where you're confident that the Lord will sustain, that God will hold fast a type of love with deep roots. Even on your wedding day,

you say crazy things on your wedding day. Have you ever thought about the vows? They're crazy that you would say that on the most romantic day of your life. "For better or for worse." On your wedding day?

You're saying, "This could go bad, but I'm not going anywhere. In sickness and in health... You could be deformed, and I'm still going to love you. We could be broke, and I'm not going anywhere." We take vows that show we actually believe in love and in a deep-rooted type of love that is not just primarily emotive. It is emotive, but it's not primarily emotive. Rather, it's built on conviction and covenant. Right? We would reject agnosticism. We would reject atheism, the belief that we're all here by some sort of cosmic happening that sprung out of nothingness.

We would reject that and say that there is a God behind it all, and he is governing and reigning and ruling over all things. We would reject that and affirm that you can know the unseen and that there is a God. Would you stand with me as we read the Apostles' Creed together? If you're not a Christian and don't really want to do this, I'm fine with that. You can stay seated. Whether you're in Plano or Fort Worth or Dallas, why don't you stand, and we'll read this together, joining with Christians all over the globe.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen."

Why don't you have a seat. We're going to concentrate now for the next chunk of time we're together on the ascension of Christ, and we're going to kind of tease from the ascension of Christ what is really going on in the ascension that we can be confident that the same works that Christ did, we will do.

In fact, even greater works than those will be done through the people of God. To get to those things, I just want us to read the narrative of the ascension of Christ. It is found in a couple of places. We're going to read it in Acts 1, starting in verse 1. It's important to note that the book of Acts is written by a doctor named Luke who also wrote the gospel of Luke.

Luke writes the gospel of Luke, and he also writes the book of Acts as a history of the spread of Christianity through the first century world, and he writes both of those primarily for a Roman official (you'll see it here in a second) named Theophilus who he's trying to win over to the Christian faith. We're watching him evangelize by telling the story of Jesus and by telling the story of the power of the Holy Spirit by which the early church spread like a wildfire through the ancient world. With that said, let's look at this together, Acts 1, starting in verse 1.

"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'

So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'"

Now, in the ascension of Jesus Christ, here's one of the more profound things that is happening. In the ascension of Jesus Christ, Jesus, in a physical form, in a physically resurrected body, is ascending into heaven, and in his ascent into heaven, he is assuming his right throne, and he is leaving the space-time continuum in which he had been existing in physical form. Don't go all Matthew McConaughey, *Interstellar* on me here. Let me just explain.

Before the ascension of Jesus Christ, Jesus, physically a man, is known within the confines of space and time. That means if you wanted to get near Jesus, if you wanted to be in the presence of Jesus, if you wanted to ask Jesus a question, if you wanted to be ministered to or healed by or to be in the presence of Jesus, you had to go where Jesus was. Namely, you had to go to Jerusalem or to Galilee or to a place in which he was doing physical ministry.

At his ascension, although he is still in physical form, he sits down on his right throne on the right hand of the Father and now reigns and rules in a cosmic way that is no longer locked into a given space or time. Christians have no Mecca. We do not believe there is a place where the power and presence of Christ resides in a supernatural way that is beyond the way he resides in you and me as believers now. That's why we don't make pilgrimages to holy lands.

We don't believe that the Spirit of Christ reigns in a powerful way in Jerusalem that is different than the way he reigns in a powerful way in our hearts right here, right now. In the ascension, the space-time continuum that had blocked the physical Christ in has now been removed, and he sits and reigns on his throne cosmically.

Now, before we dig into that a little bit more, I want to point out a Christian that is being asked in 6 because it's our question. Look at verse 6. **"So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'"** Now, I don't know if you're a Christian, have a background in church, how well you remember the Old Testament.

I know what The Village is like. Some of you haven't been to church in a long time. You have these vague recollections of a felt board and of a guy being stuck on a felt board. "This guy here is Abraham." You maybe remember your mom and dad sitting on your bed at night and telling you Old Testament stories. "This is when God drowned everyone on earth, Billy. He killed them all, outside of some animals and Noah's family. Night, buddy." Then they just left you to your nightmares.

That's really your recollection about the Old Testament, but let me just... Real quick primer. When God creates Israel... By the way, he creates Israel. Israel was not a people, and God formed a people out of Abraham, Abram. Abram was from Kush, modern day Iraq. Let it mess with your head a little bit that the first Jew is actually an Iraqi.

Out of the line of Abraham, the nation of Israel is formed, and God gives Israel the prophets, the covenant promises, the law, the sacrificial system, and he gives them all of those things for this

reason. In Israel, the world would see right relationship with God and right relationship with neighbor. The law, the promises, the covenants the sacrificial system was all built out so that the nations might look upon Israel and see right relationship with God and right relationship with others.

The vertical issue between God and man might be solved, and the horizontal issue between man and man would be solved. The question that the disciples are asking post-resurrection (which seems like a legitimate time to ask this question) is, "Is it over now?" That's what they're asking.

"Is it over now? Is the internal and external strife that we know as humans over? Will you now restore the kingdom to Israel? Will the Romans rule forever? Will we be hard pressed forever? Will the conflict between the Sadducees and the Pharisees last forever? Will the horizontal conflict always be here? Will the vertical, internal wrestling always be here? Will you now give the kingdom back to Israel? Will you finally make all things new? Will you finally restore? Will you finally make us right?"

We know this question. We feel this question even as Christians today. If you're not a Christian, watch this. If you're a Christian, raise your hand. Keep your hands up. I want to ask some questions. How many of you are Christians and still have some internal conflicts? You have some doubts, some frustrations, some fears, some anxieties, some lusts? Look around. Here we are. That's unanimous.

One more question. How many of you, even though you're a Christian, there are people you just can't seem to get along with? Notice that some hands came up even higher on that one. Here is where we're a little bit jammed up now. You can put your hands down now. Do you see what's happening here? They want to know, "When does this stop...my internal conflict, my external conflict? When does this end? When will you restore? Is it now? Is it now that you'll make all things new?"

Jesus' answer is compelling. First, he has this minor rebuke. He says, "It's not for you to know the times and places." Look at verse 8. **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** Now, just as a general rule, as you read your Bible personally, if in a given 11 verses, something is repeated twice, that's emphasis.

This promise of the Holy Spirit had already been spoken of by Luke earlier in verse 4 as he is trying to explain to Theophilus what Jesus had taught his disciples. Look back in verse 4. **"And while staying with them [Jesus staying with his disciples] he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said..."** This is a quote from Jesus and his teachings. **"...you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."** Let me start to put this together.

What we have is Jesus ascending to his rightful throne, leaving the space-time continuum that limited him to a physical location, and as he ascends to his throne... If we remember back to John 14, why will we be able to do what he is able to do and even more than he is able to do? Because he goes to his Father. Now what does he do when he gets to his Father? He sends the Holy Spirit.

When Christ ascends up to his throne, he sends the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is now the presence of Christ everywhere available to all at any given moment so the presence of Christ is so cosmic that on the outskirts of our solar system, there the presence of Christ is available to whatever via the power of the Holy Spirit, and yet in this room and in our hearts, the presence of Christ is here even now via the power of the Holy Spirit. He sent the Holy Spirit.

That still leaves some questions, doesn't it? Here we have the Holy Spirit, but we're just a bunch of Christians. If you're a lost person, how hypocritical are we? How hypocritical and ridiculous are we? We're just like, "I'm a Christian. I have internal strife and struggle, and there are people I can't stand, but I thought if he sent the Holy Spirit, that nonsense would go away." Let's chat a little bit about what the Holy Spirit does, not exhaustively, because here in a couple of weeks, we have to cover, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." Just consider this a little primer.

If you're a Christian, you're a Christian because the Holy Spirit opened your heart to understand and believe. That's why you're a Christian. You did not save you. You didn't intellectually just get it. If you got it, the Holy Spirit opened up your heart. If I could set the stage, if you've been a Christian for a long time, chances are you were at church, you were at an event, you were just meeting with a friend who was telling you about Jesus Christ, and all of a sudden, something happened.

The fog lifted. It all of a sudden became clear to you, maybe over a period of time, maybe in a moment. You wanted to give your life to Christ. You became aware of your sinfulness. You didn't know what to do about it. All of a sudden, you have life and are not sure how to articulate it, so a well-meaning pastor, a well-meaning friend, good, godly people gave you words.

Maybe you repeated a prayer. How many of you, when you became a Christian, repeated the prayer? I just want to see for my own curiosity. Yeah, we repeated a prayer. We were babies. We didn't have the words. Someone who was farther along said, "These are the words." They helped us understand, "This is what's happening." They gave words to our experience of the Holy Spirit opening our hearts to believe. That's the only way you become a Christian, through the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to believe.

In that, the Bible tells us that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Now the Holy Spirit is inside of me and inside of you. That immediately reconciles us to God. By the blood of Jesus... We've covered this at length. The death and resurrection of Jesus takes care of, pays all of our debt in full. Now that the Holy Spirit is dwelling inside of us, that vertical relationship with God is fixed. Now, because the Holy Spirit is inside of us, horizontally, it's starting to work itself out.

Let me show you what the Holy Spirit does. Now that the Holy Spirit has come in full, humans are turned into proper vessels for... Let's call it cosmic renewal. Let me read this to you, Galatians 5, starting in verse 22. **"But the fruit..."** Is that singular or plural? Don't buy into the list. I'm just asking about the word *fruit*. Is that singular or plural? Singular. **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."**

Now, because we're people who like to justify ourselves, we like to take this list and pretend it's a list where you can be strong in some of these areas and weak in others. Yet the way it is written is, "No, no, no. This is the fruit of the spirit." If you're really honest... I'm going to keep this list up there. If you really look at this list, are you walking in peace if you lack patience? No.

You can be like, "Man, my heart is at perfect peace, but if this guy does not speed up his car, I will kill everybody." It doesn't work that way. When there is peace, there is patience. You can pick any two you want. If there is kindness, there is probably goodness. If you lack kindness, you probably lack goodness, right? This is so attached. You can't keep a scorecard going, "How are you doing?" "Well, brother, I'm growing in faithfulness, but I feel like my joy and peace, I'm scoring low this week." That's not how it works. These things are intertwined. This is the fruit of the Spirit.

This is important. If you can grasp this, I'm telling you horizontal relationships start to work themselves out in a better way if you understand this reality about how God is growing us and

really trimming back our lives so we prepare and grow in our fruitfulness. It is in our internal struggles and external struggles that this has developed. Isn't that awful and awesome?

Do you know how I know I need to grow in love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness? My internal struggles and my external struggles. Internally, I struggle to love. Externally, I struggle to do good deeds at times. I'm selfish. I'm aware of those things in me.

As I come across people I find difficult... Can we have real talk in here? Can I have permission to have real talk? It is stunning to me that it is very easy for me to show grace to some people and very difficult for me to show grace to others. Anybody else? There are some people that I can be gracious as long as the day is long. I can just be gracious for what feels like forever. Then there are some people who... I don't even know what it is. They just bother me.

Sometimes, I just articulate that. I'm like, "Gosh, it's just like they're river dancing on my last nerve. I don't even know what it is. I don't know if it's the way they carry themselves." I hope you're laughing because you're with me. Then I feel so evil for that. These are men and women made in the image of God, and it's in those moments where I clearly lack what is supposed to be the fruit of the Spirit in me that I get to cling to Christ, repent of my sins, confess that I'm not there yet, remember that I'm human and grow all the more in grace.

See, I just thought that 20-something years in, the struggles would change. Certainly, they have on some front. Upon my conversion, it was, "Don't get drunk. Don't get high. Don't chase girls, and try not to cuss." For the record, I'm pretty much nailing that right now. Just mark all those off the list. Yet, the insidious aspects of my soul that led to the outworking of those things 20-something years ago just work themselves out differently now.

Golly. How do you kill pride and entitlement? It just keeps creeping in. I've never seen anything resurrect as fast as it does. It's just like a constant fight within my own soul. I just thought that 20-something years in, it would be different. By the grace of God, I've gotten to sit down with very faithful, godly men who are in their eighties, some of them late eighties, and I've been encouraged by their testimony that even after 50 or 60 years of following Christ, the Holy Spirit still prunes the tree for greater fruitfulness and faithfulness.

It is in your internal and external difficulties that darkness is pushed back, that fruit is fully formed, and that our lives are transformed and changed. That's why it's so discouraging when Jesus is turned into some sort of genie in a bottle that is meant to take away any and all of our difficulties. The seduction of the suburbs is comfort and space and no difficulty.

What ends up happening is we buy into that little by little until what you get in the suburbs is what we'll call internally sometimes Camelot. It just looks really pretty, but inside, Lancelot is sleeping with the king's wife, and it's all about to burn to the ground. That's the suburbs, right? It's a pretty veneer that masks all sorts of loss and fear and anxiety and internal and external strife.

The reality of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit in us as found in the ascension is that Christ has ascended and sent the Holy Spirit to be in us, so in the midst of that mess, that mess is refined and used by God. It's not that we don't enter difficulty, but in difficulty, Christ is there. His presence and power are there to transform and turn us and change us from one degree of glory to the next. It does not work itself out with kind of Spirit sprinkle happiness.

We grow in godliness. We develop the fruit of the Spirit. By the way, that list is awesome. Who in here is like, "You know what? I'm looking at it. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness... No thank you." We want that. It's the life we want, yet the price to get there is the very thing we try to adamantly to avoid.

What we see happening in the ascension of Jesus Christ is he sits on his throne where he reigns cosmically, and he sends the Spirit, and in the coming of the Spirit sealed in our hearts, begins to transform our lives from one degree of glory to the next. We talk about this degree idea, right? One degree of glory to the next. What we want is 40 degrees at a time.

That's not how he works. He's like, "Degree. Let that sit for a while. Degree. Degree." Those degrees feel like they move so slowly that at times, we don't even feel like we're being changed or transformed. We feel stuck. If you remember back to Matthew, one degree over a period of time can put you in a completely different location. You just have to trust that the Lord is at work even when you can't feel or sense or see it.

I think part of the reason we can't see it is because we have been taught poorly and can't identify how God works in the mess. We tend to praise God when everything is going right and have a hard time praising him when things aren't going the way we think they should because we see that as

less of what God is up to than when everything goes the way we want it to. It's a shame because it robs us of gratitude for God being at work in the ordinariness of our lives.

The second thing we see in the ascension is that Jesus' ascension is an image of where we're going. See, the ascension reveals to us the gap of where we are and where we will be. I can see that I am not yet where I will be. That's both true in this life and in this body. If you think back to last week when we talked about the resurrection, we'll talk about that again also in a few weeks more fully.

I am not yet where I will be. That's a promise. I am not yet where I will be. I see in the ascension my future, that according to 1 Corinthians 15, the dead in Christ shall rise. Those who are here upon his return will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye. What is perishable will put on the imperishable. What was sown in dishonor will be raised in honor.

All the limitations I know now will be gone, melted away in the light of the glory of the coming of the Lord. I am not yet what I will be. This creates a kind of holy discontentment in me and should create a kind of holy discontentment in you. Now, let me unpack holy discontentment, because those are words that don't tend to go together, right?

Discontentment is usually an accusation against God. "You didn't give me this. You should have given me this. I deserve this. Where were you in this?" That's unholy discontentment, but holy discontentment is, "If Christ is an inexhaustible well, then I want more. I want more of his presence. I want more of his power. I want more seriousness about putting sin to death. I want more seriousness about growing in righteousness.

I want more of his presence and power in my life. I want to love him more than I do. I want to be transformed in faster means than I'm being. It's a type of... "If there's more to be had, I want it." This is what you see David so anxiously crying out for in the Psalms. "As the deer pants for water, so my soul longs for you," is not a cute, kitschy phrase to be put on a coffee cup. It's, "My soul is thirsty. I want more."

Psalm 27: "One thing I ask and all that I seek..." This is from the king of Israel, flanked on every side by his enemies, his own home life a train wreck. "One thing I ask and all that I seek is to dwell in the house of the Lord all of the days of my life, to seek him in the temple." David understood that the problem of his enemies was to be straightened out between his relationship with God, and the dysfunction in his home could be made right if he could just get with the Lord.

"Let me gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. I want to get to know the Lord. Let me get to the Lord. Let me love the Lord." God will be at work in these messes. If we take these two realities, that the ascension of Jesus Christ puts Jesus on his throne at the right hand of the Father where he sent the Holy Spirit to be sealed in our hearts, to transform our lives, to grow our fruitfulness by the Holy Spirit, and that his ascension reveals the gap that I am not yet what I will be, how do we plug that into symmetry, clarity, community, and counsel? That's what we were hoping the creed would shape in us.

Let's talk about symmetry. For some of us, some of us need the type of holy discontentment that would make us more serious about sin and hungrier for righteousness. See, the apostle Paul who was a stunning preacher of grace still used these kinds of words about pursuing his relationship with God. *Strive. Toil. Labor.* See, for some of us to develop the kind of symmetry necessary, we need to be far more serious about putting sin to death in our lives, need to be far more serious about striving and laboring and toiling toward godliness. We need to get woken up out of the lull of the suburbs.

Then others of us need to learn to rest in the finished work of Christ. Let me kind of hopefully help form symmetry with just my own pastoral confessions. I have not been the kind of husband I should be this week. Maybe I'm tired. I don't know. The banner over our house just read "Matt Chandler" this week. It was just about me, what I wanted. I just wasn't that great of a husband.

It's funny how it works. I wasn't that great of a father. I'm striving to be better at both of those, but here's how these two work. In my striving to be better at both of those, I'm simultaneously resting in the reality that God's love for me is not predicated upon me being better at that, but even as I strive, he loves. For some, we need to understand there is a pursuit here, there is a run here, there is striving here, there is toil here, there is labor here.

As we strive, as we toil, as we labor, we rest. In what? In the finished work of Christ. I don't know where you are. I don't know how you've come in here. Maybe you need to be woken up and get up and toil and strive toward godliness. Maybe you're exhausted and need to learn to rest in the finished work of Christ that covers you as you do. That's the symmetry we're looking for.

What about clarity? One of the pastoral privileges of ministry is you get to enter the heartbreak of others and mourn with them. We are, if you will, a type of first responders. If we know you, if you're

a member, if you're with us here and end up in the hospital, we're going to come see you. We'll be there right after the ambulance leaves. We will cry with you. We will sit with you, not with pithy phrases or bumper sticker theology. We'll sit, and we'll cry, and we'll mourn, and we'll pray, and we'll just be present.

One of the things the ascension shows us with profound clarity is that you, regardless of your situation, regardless of what you've walked in here with... I'm not naïve. We've all carried some things in here today. You have not been abandoned. We prayed earlier as a staff, and one of the prayers that came us was a rejoicing in the fact that there are no secrets in this room.

God just knows every detail of your life. There is nothing hidden that he doesn't see. He knows that thing that is weighing heavily on your heart, that thing you feel like is burning your world to the ground, that thing you feel like is unresolvable. He knows all of those things. You have not been abandoned. The ascension of Christ to his right throne where he sends the Holy Spirit so his presence might be known everywhere.

The reason the ascension is so beautiful is that with clarity now, you can rest in this. Look at me. He knows. You have not been abandoned. In fact, marvel with me. Christ lived in a physical body in a physical world. Let's just quickly walk through Jesus' life. His family thought he was crazy. Does anybody have family strife? Jesus understands family strife.

The Bible says that Jesus wept. It's the shortest verse in the Bible. Jesus wept at the death of his friend. He lost a friend. Jesus was lied about, betrayed by a close friend, physically suffered. The Bible says we have an empathetic high priest. Not only have you not been abandoned, but our God understands. He put on flesh and dwelt among us. We have an empathetic high priest who is compassionate toward our losses, toward our sorrows, toward our pain. This is the beauty of the ascension.

When it comes to community... Let's talk about community. If we're saying... By the way, we are saying that we are not yet what we will be. Correct? Everybody agrees we are not yet what we will be. Amen? Fort Worth, amen? Plano? Dallas? Amen? We are not yet what we will be. We know that we are in process. That means if we're looking at our lives and at the fruit of the Spirit, we are in various stages of fruitfulness.

Some of us just have tiny little berries, just barely fruitful at all. Others of us have growing fruit, but it's not fully ripe yet. We're just not there. On this linear line of progressive sanctification, we're moving, but we're not quite where we will finally be. If that's true, if I'm not there yet and you're not there yet, and other people aren't there yet, doesn't it make sense that there will be some horizontal conflict that has to be worked out?

With this in view, shouldn't this make us all the more gracious toward one another? Gosh. I know I'm not there yet. Brothers, sisters, let me try to help with a real practical thing. I don't know all the nuances of why there are specific people who are so hard to extend grace to and other people with whom it's really easy, but it is a good, godly discipline for you to watch your mind concerning other Christians.

If you are meditating on their weaknesses, you are sinning against God, and you are sinning against them. It's an evil thing. It is an evil thing for you to be an expert in the weaknesses of your brothers and sisters. The discipline God has called you and me to is to be an expert in the strengths of our brothers and sisters, especially those who get on our last nerve.

It becomes hard to disdain the one you can see the work of God in. I mean, think about it. Let's do this. How many of you Christians would say, "I know I have weaknesses"? Go ahead. Raise your hand. "I know I'm a Christian. I know I have weaknesses. I know I have areas I'm not as mature as I would like to be." Fort Worth? Dallas? Are you with us? Hands down.

How frustrating would it be for you to know that someone out there is just meditating on those? No awareness of what you do well, no awareness of how you sacrifice, how you serve, what you long for, what you desire. There is no thought of that at all. "They just show up every week and want to just make it about them." Right? Just meditating on your weaknesses. See, that's wicked. It's evil. There's no place for that in the household of faith, especially those who bother us.

Lastly, on counsel, because I am aware that I am not yet what I will be, I will not be surprised when I blow it. I will not give in to the paralysis of guilt and shame when I fall short of what I know God has called me to. One of the reasons I wanted to confess this week that I haven't been a great husband this week and haven't been a great dad this week is I wanted to lay that down for you because in that, I'm well aware that I have fallen short of what God would have me to be.

What I got the opportunity to do is mirror the gospel to my family and to my children. I got to apologize to my wife for that, and I got to apologize to my children for that and say, "I'm going to do what I can to work harder to be the man God has called me to be. Forgive me, children. Forgive me, wife." Now I'm not in paralysis. I'm not like, "Well, it's worthless now. I've already blown it. I might as well just stay here." I'm not going to do that.

I'm not going to be surprised by my own shortcomings. Gosh. I've been living with me for 41 years. I don't know when I'm going to stop being surprised, right? I'm not going to give in to the paralysis of guilt and shame. It has been paid for on the cross. Listen. This is also how we counsel one another. Brothers and sisters, just so we can break through this ridiculous veneer that we'll give ourselves over to, in group life and community life, you'll be surprised at how often it is your weaknesses that encourage and stir up faith in your brothers and sisters.

See, if someone comes to you and says... I'll just use mine. If I came to you and was like, "Man, I've just been a crummy husband this week, and I haven't been a great father," and your response is, "Well, what I have done is I read a great book on marriage and wrote a blog on it. Here are seven steps I do to get through." Cape is all waving in the wind. What does that do except try to push me into guilt and shame?

No, the right response is, "Thank you for sharing that with me, brother. Here's how I've wrestled a bit this week. Here's where I need to grow in grace. Here's where I'm hoping the fruit of the Spirit might be all the more grown in me." See, at that moment, we push past the veneer, and we become the people of God. We counsel one another not just with our strengths but with our weaknesses. We are all of us fully human.

The last thing I'll say just as I close us out is the invitation into the life of ascension is not just to a life of blessing but to a life of burden. Here's what I mean by that. Sealed by the Holy Spirit, walking in relationship with others, made right with our Creator, we will begin to feel the sadness and brokenness of the world that Jesus feels.

We will long to herald the good news, to push back what is dark, to give of ourselves, to stand in the gap, to join the refrain of the disciples who said, "How long is it now? Will you finally..." If you remember back, the Great Commission is woven into this charge at the ascension, is it not? "I'm going to give power to you. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will be my witnesses to Jerusalem, all of Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

How are we as witnesses reconciled to God, as we grow in our fruitfulness, reconciled to one another, and become a picture of the beauty of the reconciling work of God in Christ? Might we be people who walk in the blessing and the burden of the ascension. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for an opportunity to let the Word of God read us, bear its weight on us. Thank you for my brothers and sisters again. For those who aren't Christians, aren't quite sure what to think of any of this, Holy Spirit, will you do the work of illumination? Will you lift the fog? Will you shine a light into the recesses of our hearts and help us see and believe? Encourage the saint this morning. Confront the idol. Encourage the weak. Reveal your patience with us all. Help us. We need you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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