

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

CHRISTOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

UNIT 9: THE ASCENSION, SESSION, AND INTERCESSION OF CHRIST

Lesson 28

The Ascension and Heavenly Session of Christ

Exalted to the Right Hand of the Majesty on High

The Ascension as Completion, Enthronement, and Perpetual Benefit

Key Texts: Acts 1:9–11; Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 10:12; Psalm 110:1; Ephesians 1:20–23; Philippians 2:9–11

“Sit at My Right Hand, Until I Make Your Enemies a Footstool for Your Feet” — The Most Quoted Old Testament Text in the New Testament

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SERIES VERSE

*“For we do not preach ourselves
but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants
on account of Jesus.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5, NASB 1995

INTRODUCTION

The ascension and heavenly session of Jesus Christ is among the most theologically significant and the most practically consequential events in the entire Christological narrative, and among the most neglected in evangelical preaching and teaching. The cross draws sustained homiletical attention; the resurrection receives its annual celebration and deserves far more; but the ascension is frequently treated as little more than a transitional logistics narrative between the post-resurrection appearances and the day of Pentecost. This neglect is theologically costly. The ascension is not a parenthetical departure; it is the completion of the incarnate mission, the enthronement of the risen King, and the commencement of the heavenly ministry that the exalted Christ exercises on behalf of His people until His return. To neglect the ascension is to truncate the work of Christ at the resurrection and to deprive the congregation of the most comprehensive possible account of what the exalted Lord is doing for them right now.

Unit 9 addresses this neglect across two lessons: Lesson 28 on the ascension and the heavenly session (what happened and what it means), and Lesson 29 on the intercession of Christ (what the exalted Lord is doing at the right hand of the Father on behalf of His people). These two lessons together provide the most complete account of the exalted Christ's present ministry available in the Christological curriculum. The ascension was the event; the session is the position; the intercession is the activity. Each dimension requires careful theological attention, and each provides pastoral resources of immense practical value for those who understand it.

This lesson examines the ascension and the session under six headings: the ascension as a historical event (Acts 1:9–11); the Old Testament background and fulfillment in Psalm 110:1 (the most frequently cited Old Testament text in the New Testament); the session as the posture of completed work (Hebrews 1:3; 10:12, He sat down, because the work is done); the session as the exercise of universal cosmic lordship (Ephesians 1:20–23); the permanent bodily presence of Christ in heaven (the ascension preserves and glorifies the humanity of the eternal Son); and the ascension's gifts to the church (John 16:7, it is to your advantage that I go away). The goal is to give the congregation a living, theologically grounded, pastorally rich understanding of the one who sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high and who governs all things for the sake of His body the church.

I. THE ASCENSION AS HISTORICAL EVENT: ACTS 1:9–11

The Bodily Departure of the Risen Christ into the Divine Presence and Its Apostolic Witness

A. The Event and Its Witnesses

The ascension of Jesus Christ is a specific, historical, publicly witnessed event. Acts 1:9–11 records it with the precision of eyewitness testimony: “And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven’” (NASB 1995). The event is witnessed by the assembled disciples; the departure is bodily and visible (‘while they were looking on’, ‘while He was going’, ‘gazing intently into the sky’); and the angelic announcement interprets the event and promises the return.

The cloud that receives Jesus ‘out of their sight’ is not a meteorological cloud but a theophanic cloud, the same divine glory-cloud (the Shekinah) that had overshadowed the tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 40:34–35), that had filled the temple at its dedication (1 Kings 8:10–11), that had appeared at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5), and that Daniel’s Son of Man figure rides in his exaltation to the divine presence (Daniel 7:13–14). The cloud-reception of the ascended Christ is the visible sign that His departure is not merely spatial (leaving this location for another) but divine-directional: He is entering the divine presence, the realm of the glory-cloud, in the bodily humanity that He assumed at the incarnation and that He carries permanently into the Father’s presence at the ascension.

B. The Ascension as Completion of the Earthly Mission

The forty-day period between the resurrection and the ascension is not merely a transitional period of post-resurrection appearances but a period of intentional ministry: “to these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3, NASB 1995). The ministry of the forty days is the ministry of the risen King teaching His people about the kingdom He is about to exercise in its present form from the position of the session. And the ascension that concludes the forty days is the completion of the earthly mission: everything the Son came to accomplish in the incarnation, the revelation of the Father, the active obedience, the atoning sacrifice, the resurrection vindication, has been accomplished; and the ascension is the Father’s installation of the completed-work’s accomplisher into the position of supreme cosmic authority from which He will exercise the benefits of the completed work on behalf of His people.

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATION: PSALM 110:1 AND ITS NEW TESTAMENT FULFILLMENT

The Most Quoted Old Testament Text in the New Testament, Its Meaning and Its Christological Application

A. Psalm 110:1: The Invitation to the Session

The theological framework within which the New Testament interprets the ascension and the session is provided, above all, by Psalm 110:1: “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet’” (NASB 1995). This is the most frequently cited Old Testament text in the entire New Testament, quoted or alluded to at least twenty-five times across the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline epistles, and Hebrews. Its importance for the New Testament’s understanding of Christ cannot be overstated. Jesus Himself uses it against the Pharisees to establish that the Messiah is not merely David’s son but David’s Lord (Matthew 22:41–46); Peter quotes it at Pentecost to interpret the resurrection and ascension as the fulfillment of the psalm’s invitation (Acts 2:34–36); Paul uses it to describe the present and future dimensions of Christ’s reign (1 Corinthians 15:25); and Hebrews uses it as the central text for the exalted high priest’s heavenly ministry (Hebrews 1:13; 10:12–13).

The precise theological content of Psalm 110:1 is the divine invitation to the Davidic Messiah to occupy the supreme position of authority at the divine right hand, to wait in that position while YHWH subdues His enemies, and to rule in the midst of His foes. The two dimensions of the psalm, the session (“sit at My right hand”) and the subduing (“until I make Your enemies a footstool”), establish the already/not yet structure of the present age: Christ is already seated in the supreme position of authority (the ‘already’ of the session), while the full and visible subjection of all His enemies is still in process (the ‘not yet’ of the ‘until’). The present age is the age of the session: Christ reigns from the right hand of the Father, and the outcome of history is as certain as the divine promise that the enemies will be made a footstool.

B. Acts 2:33–36: Peter’s Pentecost Interpretation

Peter’s Pentecost sermon in Acts 2 provides the most direct interpretation of the ascension and session in terms of Psalm 110:1. Having declared the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:24–32), Peter proceeds to the ascension and the session: “Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:33–36, NASB 1995).

Peter’s argument is theologically precise: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is itself evidence that Jesus has ascended and is seated at the right hand of the Father, because the Spirit is poured out as the gift of the exalted Lord (“having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear”). The ascension and the session are not merely events that happened to Jesus; they are the ground of what Jesus is now doing for His people. The gift of the Spirit is the ascension’s first and most comprehensive gift to the church, the evidence that the exalted Lord is present with His people through the Spirit He has sent, even though He is bodily absent from the earth in His human nature.

III. THE SESSION AS COMPLETED WORK: HEBREWS 1:3 AND 10:12

He Sat Down, The Posture of the Finished Sacrifice and the Perpetual Priesthood

A. The Theological Significance of Sitting Down

Hebrews makes the most sustained use of the session in all of the New Testament, and it does so with a particular emphasis on the theological significance of the posture of sitting down. The contrast Hebrews draws is between the Levitical priests who ‘stand daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins’ (Hebrews 10:11, NASB 1995) and the one High Priest who ‘offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God’ (v. 12, NASB 1995). The Levitical priests stood, because their work was never done, the same sacrifices offered day after day and year after year, never achieving the permanent removal of sins, never providing the once-for-all satisfaction that would allow the priest to sit down in the posture of completion. The one High Priest of Hebrews sat down, because His work is done. Tetelestai finds its bodily expression in the session: the priest who declared the work finished on the cross has sat down at the right hand of God as the permanent, bodily declaration that the sacrifice is complete.

Hebrews 1:3 provides the initial statement: “When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (NASB 1995). The sequence is theologically precise: first the purification of sins (the atoning sacrifice accomplished at the cross), then the sitting down (the session as the completion of the priestly work expressed in the bodily posture of the exalted high priest). The session is the posture of the one who has nothing more to do in the sphere of the atoning sacrifice: the purification is complete, the penalty is paid, the work is finished, and the priest sits in the position of supreme authority as the permanent demonstration that the offering was accepted.

B. The Session as Waiting and Reigning

Hebrews 10:12–13 adds the eschatological dimension: ‘He sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet.’ The session involves both completion (He sat down, the work is done) and waiting (until His enemies be made a footstool). The waiting is not passive inactivity but the active reign of the one who sits at the right hand of the divine power, governing all things through the Spirit and the Word, advancing the kingdom through the mission of the church, and sustaining His people through the intercession that the completed sacrifice makes possible (Hebrews 7:25). The ‘waiting’ of Hebrews 10:13 is the ‘until’ of Psalm 110:1: the session will be followed by the return, when the waiting gives way to the visible, universal, eschatological consummation of the reign that has been exercised invisibly from the right hand of the Father since the ascension.

“When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” | “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’”

HEBREWS 1:3; PSALM 110:1, NASB 1995

IV. THE SESSION AS UNIVERSAL COSMIC LORDSHIP: EPHESIANS 1:20–23

Far Above All Rule and Authority, The Scope of the Exalted Christ’s Reign

A. The Comprehensive Scope of Ephesians 1:20–23

Ephesians 1:20–23 provides the most comprehensive New Testament account of the scope of the exalted Christ’s authority and dominion: “He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (NASB 1995). The scope of the subjection is universal (‘all things’, ‘every name that is named’), the position is supreme (‘far above all’), and the temporal reach is comprehensive (‘not only in this age but also in the one to come’). There is no power in the created order, visible or invisible, temporal or eternal, political or spiritual, that is not subject to the exalted Christ.

The universal cosmic lordship of the exalted Christ is not a future hope; it is a present reality. Christ is not waiting to begin His reign at some future millennial inauguration; He is reigning now, from the right hand of the Father, over all things. The amillennial conviction that the present age is the age of Christ’s reign, the ‘already’ of the kingdom inaugurated in the resurrection and ascension, awaiting the ‘not yet’ of the return and the consummation, is directly grounded in the language of Ephesians 1:20–23 and Psalm 110:1. The one who is ‘far above all rule and authority’ is not a future sovereign; He is the present Lord who governs all things in the power of His resurrection and ascension.

B. Head Over All Things for the Church

The most pastorally consoling dimension of Ephesians 1:22–23 is its specification of the relationship between the universal cosmic lordship and the particular ecclesial headship: ‘He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body.’ The word ‘gave’ (ἔδωκεν, edoken) is significant: the universal cosmic lordship is given to the church. It is exercised for the church’s benefit. The one who holds all authority over all things is the same one whose body the church is; and the exercise of that universal authority is in the service of the church’s

preservation, sustenance, and ultimate glorification. Every power that would harm the church is under the feet of the one who is the church's head; every circumstance that the church faces is governed by the one who governs all things for the church's sake. The universal cosmic lordship of the exalted Christ is not an abstract theological claim about the structure of the universe; it is the most personal and the most pastoral possible ground of the church's confidence in the present age.

V. THE PERMANENT BODILY PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN HEAVEN

The Ascension Preserves and Glorifies the Humanity the Eternal Son Assumed at Bethlehem

A. The God-Man on the Throne

One of the most theologically significant and most often overlooked dimensions of the ascension is its implication for the permanent humanity of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the incarnation (Lesson 6) established that the eternal Son assumed a genuine human nature at Bethlehem: the Word became flesh, taking on a body and soul and human experience into permanent union with His divine Person. The ascension declares that this assumption was not temporary. The risen, glorified, ascended Christ carries His human nature permanently into the divine presence. There is a man on the throne of the universe. The God-man who was born of Mary, who grew in wisdom and stature, who hungered and thirsted and wept and suffered and died and rose, this God-man now sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high, bearing the marks of the crucifixion in a glorified human body, forever united to the human nature He assumed at Bethlehem and never laid aside.

This is a truth of immense pastoral significance. The High Priest who intercedes at the right hand of the Father is not a disembodied divine spirit who has left His humanity behind; He is the God-man who bears in His glorified body the wounds of the cross, who sympathizes with human weakness because He experienced it in the fullest possible sense, and who represents His people before the Father in the specific humanity they share with Him. Hebrews 4:14–16 draws the explicit pastoral implication: “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace” (NASB 1995). The throne of grace is occupied by the one who is fully God and fully human, who knows the full weight of human experience from the inside, and whose sympathetic intercession is grounded precisely in His permanent, glorified humanity.

B. Implications for Christology and for the Lord's Supper

The permanent bodily presence of Christ in heaven has significant implications for the theology of the Lord's Supper. The Reformed tradition has consistently rejected the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity (the assertion that Christ's body is physically present everywhere because of the communication of the divine attribute of omnipresence to the human nature) and the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation (the assertion that Christ's body is locally and physically present in the eucharistic bread) on the same grounds: the ascension has taken Christ's body to the right hand of the Father, where it remains in a specific glorified-but-still-bodily presence until the return. The Supper is the church's spiritual participation in the benefits of Christ's body and blood, a genuine real participation made possible by the Spirit who unites the believer to the ascended Christ, but not the physical or local presence of the glorified body on the table. The ascension preserves the integrity of the Chalcedonian humanity of Christ: the human nature is not omnipresent or deified into a divine ubiquity; it is glorified, exalted, and permanently present at the right hand of the Father, awaiting the return.

VI. DOXOLOGICAL CONCLUSION: THE ASCENSION'S GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

John 16:7, It Is to Your Advantage That I Go Away

The disciples who watched the ascension from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12) might have experienced the moment as bereavement, the departure of the one they loved, the visible end of the forty days of post-resurrection fellowship, the beginning of the period of waiting. But Jesus had prepared them for exactly this response with a declaration that must have seemed paradoxical in the moment and that could only be understood in retrospect: "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7, NASB 1995). The ascension is not a loss; it is a gain. The departure of the bodily, localized, spatio-temporally limited presence of the incarnate Christ opens the way for the coming of the Spirit, the universal, omnipresent, personally indwelling presence of the divine Helper who will be with every believer in every place in every age until the return.

The ascension's gifts to the church are comprehensive and permanent. The Spirit is poured out (Acts 2:33) because the exalted Christ has received and distributed Him as the first and greatest gift of the session. The intercession is perpetual (Hebrews 7:25: 'He always lives to make intercession for them') because the ascended High Priest presents His completed atoning work before the Father as the permanent ground of the believers' acceptance. The universal lordship is exercised for the church's benefit (Ephesians 1:22–23) because the one who holds all authority governs all things in the service of His body. And the promise of the return is secured (Acts 1:11: 'This Jesus... will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven') because the ascension is not the permanent

replacement of Christ's bodily presence but the temporary absence that will be resolved in the return. The ascension is the beginning of the age of the Spirit, the age of the intercession, the age of the universal reign, and the pledge of the age of the return.

The Philippians hymn provides the doxological culmination: "Therefore God also highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9–11, NASB 1995). The exaltation that includes the ascension and the session is the Father's response to the Son's self-emptying humility (vv. 6–8): because He humbled Himself to the point of the cross, the Father has exalted Him to the supreme position of cosmic lordship over every being in every realm. The name above every name is the name of the crucified, risen, ascended, and interceding Lord, and the doxological response that this name demands is the worship of every creature in every domain of the created order, offered to the glory of God the Father who exalted Him. To the exalted Lord who sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high and who governs all things for the sake of His body, to Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Key Texts: *Acts 1:3, 9–11; Acts 2:33–36; Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:3; 4:14–16; 10:11–13; Ephesians 1:20–23; Philippians 2:9–11; John 16:7; Daniel 7:13–14*

THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
The Ascension	The historical, bodily, publicly witnessed departure of the risen Jesus Christ from the earth into the divine presence forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:9–11). Not merely a spatial relocation (leaving this geographic location for another) but a divine-directional event: Christ enters the glory-cloud of the divine presence (the Shekinah cloud echoing Exodus 40:34–35; Daniel 7:13–14) in the glorified human body that He carries permanently into the Father's presence. Theologically, the ascension is: (1) the completion of the earthly mission; (2) the enthronement of the risen King in fulfillment of Psalm 110:1; (3) the commencement of the heavenly ministry (intercession, sending of the Spirit, universal cosmic reign); and (4) the pledge of the return in the same bodily, visible manner as the departure (Acts 1:11).
The Session	The heavenly seating of the risen, ascended Christ at the right hand of God the Father (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:3; 10:12), signifying both completed priestly work and supreme royal authority. The posture of sitting down is theologically

Term	Definition
	<p>freighted: the Levitical priests stood continuously because their work was never done (Hebrews 10:11); the one High Priest sat down because His atoning sacrifice is complete and permanently sufficient (Hebrews 10:12: ‘offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down’). The session encompasses: (1) the completed sacrifice (He sat down when the purification of sins was accomplished); (2) the present intercession (He lives to make intercession for those who draw near to God through Him, Hebrews 7:25); and (3) the eschatological waiting (until His enemies are made a footstool, Psalm 110:1 / Hebrews 10:13).</p>
<p>Psalm 110:1</p>	<p>The most frequently cited Old Testament text in the New Testament, appearing or being alluded to at least twenty-five times across the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline epistles, and Hebrews. The text: ‘The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”’ Jesus uses it to establish that the Messiah is David’s Lord as well as David’s son (Matthew 22:41–46); Peter uses it at Pentecost to interpret the ascension as the fulfillment of the divine invitation (Acts 2:34–36); Hebrews uses it as the central text for the heavenly ministry (Hebrews 1:13; 10:12–13). The two-part content: the session (‘sit at My right hand’) and the subduing (‘until I make Your enemies a footstool’) establishes the already/not yet of the present age of Christ’s reign.</p>
<p>Right Hand of God</p>	<p>The positional metaphor for the supreme position of divine authority, power, and honor. To sit at the right hand of God (as Christ does in the session) is to occupy the position of maximum authority within the created order, not a spatial location but a relational and functional position of supreme lordship. Hebrews 1:3 combines the priestly and royal dimensions: ‘He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high’. Ephesians 1:20–21 specifies the scope: ‘far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.’ The right hand of the Father is the position from which the exalted Christ exercises universal cosmic lordship, makes perpetual intercession, sends the Spirit, and awaits the return.</p>
<p>Theophanic Cloud (Shekinah)</p>	<p>The divine glory-cloud that signifies the presence of God in the Old Testament: the pillar of cloud in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21–22), the cloud that filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34–35) and the temple (1 Kings 8:10–11), the cloud at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5), and the cloud that receives Christ at the ascension (Acts 1:9) and that will accompany His return (Revelation 1:7; Matthew 24:30; Daniel 7:13–14). The cloud-reception of the ascended Christ establishes the divine-directional character of the ascension: He enters the divine presence itself, not merely a different geographic location. The cloud that takes Him from sight is the cloud of the divine glory into which He enters as the God-man who takes His glorified humanity permanently into the Father’s presence.</p>

Term	Definition
Permanent Humanity of Christ	<p>The theological affirmation that the human nature assumed by the eternal Son at the incarnation was not laid aside at the resurrection or the ascension but is retained permanently, now in the glorified form of the resurrection body. The ascended Christ is the God-man: He sits at the right hand of the Father in the glorified humanity He carries into the divine presence. Implications: (1) There is a man on the throne of the universe, the representative of humanity occupies the supreme position of cosmic authority; (2) The High Priest who intercedes sympathizes with human weakness from direct personal experience (Hebrews 4:15); (3) The Lord’s Supper involves spiritual participation in the benefits of Christ’s body and blood, not the physical or local presence of the glorified body (ruling out transubstantiation and Lutheran ubiquity); (4) The return will be the return of the God-man in His glorified humanity.</p>
Ubiquity (Lutheran Doctrine)	<p>The Lutheran doctrine that Christ’s human body, having received the divine attribute of omnipresence through the <i>communicatio idiomatum</i>, is physically present everywhere, including in, with, and under the eucharistic bread and wine. Rejected by the Reformed tradition on the grounds that: (1) the ascension has taken Christ’s body to the specific location of the right hand of the Father, where it remains in a definite (if glorified) bodily presence; (2) the communication of attributes in the Chalcedonian tradition flows from the divine nature to the Person, not from the divine nature to the human nature directly; (3) the omnipresence of the human body would effectively deify it, compromising the genuine distinction of the two natures. The Reformed position: Christ’s glorified body is at the right hand of the Father; the Supper is a spiritual participation in His benefits through the Spirit, not a physical co-presence of His body.</p>
John 16:7: Advantage of the Departure	<p>Jesus’ declaration in John 16:7 that the ascension is to the disciples’ advantage: ‘it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.’ The ascension opens the way for the universal, omnipresent, personally indwelling presence of the Spirit, which exceeds the spatio-temporally limited bodily presence of the incarnate Christ (who could only be in one place at one time in His humanity). The sending of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:33) is the first and most comprehensive gift of the ascension to the church: the Spirit who indwells every believer in every place in every age is the presence of the exalted Lord with His people, extended universally through the Spirit in a way that the bodily presence of the incarnate Christ could not achieve.</p>
Philippians 2:9–11 Exaltation	<p>The divine response to the kenotic self-emptying of Philippians 2:6–8: ‘Therefore God also highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’ The exaltation is comprehensive (every knee, every tongue, every domain: heaven, earth,</p>

Term	Definition
	under the earth) and glorifying (to the glory of God the Father). The name above every name is the name Jesus, the specific, historically particular name of the one who humbled Himself to death on a cross, now exalted to the supreme position of cosmic lordship. The exaltation includes the resurrection, the ascension, the session, and the return: it is the Father's vindication of the Son's obedience.
Already / Not Yet of the Session	The eschatological structure of the session: Christ is already seated at the right hand of the Father, exercising universal cosmic lordship, in the fully present sense of the completed atonement and the current reign (the 'already'). But the full, visible, universal subjection of every enemy, the footstool completion of Psalm 110:1, is not yet accomplished; it awaits the return and the final judgment (the 'not yet' of the 'until' in Hebrews 10:13). The present age is the age of the session: Christ reigns invisibly from the right hand of the Father, advancing His kingdom through the Word and Spirit, sustaining His people through intercession, and governing all things for the sake of His body, until the return consummates the visible, universal, eschatological reign.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the ascension and the session are not transitional events in a theological narrative that reaches its climax at the cross and its conclusion at the resurrection, but are themselves of decisive and permanent theological and pastoral significance. The exalted Christ at the right hand of the Father is not resting after the exhaustion of the incarnate mission; He is actively, comprehensively, perpetually present for and with His people in the three dimensions of His current heavenly ministry: universal cosmic lordship exercised for the church's benefit (Ephesians 1:22–23), perpetual intercession grounded in the completed atonement (Hebrews 7:25), and universal indwelling presence through the Spirit He has sent (John 16:7; Acts 2:33). The congregation that believes this will understand their present experience of the Christian life as lived under the active, purposeful, loving governance of the one who sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

We must also believe that the session's 'already' (Christ is reigning now) shapes the entire posture of the church in the present age. The church does not fight to win; it fights from the victory that the exaltation has already secured. It does not try to establish the kingdom; it proclaims the kingdom that has already been inaugurated in the ascension of the King. It does not wait for Christ to begin His reign; it lives under the reign of the one who is already on the throne, who governs all things for the church's sake, and who will consummate the reign in the visible, universal glory of the return.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the ascension and the session produce in you the specific, confident, repose-in-the-reign-of-Christ posture that the New Testament intends. The one who governs all things, every circumstance that the church faces, every political power that seems to threaten it, every spiritual force that opposes it, every personal difficulty that presses upon individual believers, is the one who holds all authority in heaven and on earth, who exercises that authority for the sake of His body, and who governs every detail of the present age toward the eschatological purpose He has ordained. The believer who knows this will not be characterized by anxiety about the state of the world or the state of the church; they will be characterized by the confident repose of those who know who is on the throne.

Desire also a congregation that prays with the specific awareness that the one to whom they pray is the exalted Lord at the right hand of the Father, whose intercession accompanies their own prayers, and whose universal authority means that the prayers addressed to Him are addressed to the one who governs all things. Prayer is not the believer's attempt to persuade a distant God to intervene in the affairs of the world; it is the believer's participation in the kingdom ministry of the one who is already reigning, through whose intercession their prayers are presented before the throne of grace.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Preach a dedicated sermon on the ascension, not merely as a transitional event but as a theologically rich and pastorally significant event in its own right. The sermon could be structured around the three dimensions of the ascension's significance: what it completed (the earthly mission accomplished), what it inaugurated (the heavenly session and its gifts), and what it promises (the return in just the same way). The pastoral aim: the congregation should leave understanding that the ascension is not the end of the story but the beginning of the present age of Christ's most comprehensive ministry to His people.
- Teach Psalm 110:1 as the Old Testament key to understanding the present age. The psalm's two-part structure (the session: 'sit at My right hand'; the subduing: 'until I make Your enemies a footstool') provides the theological map of the present age: Christ is already reigning (the 'already' of the session), and the full consummation of that reign is certain and approaching (the 'not yet' of the 'until'). The congregation that understands Psalm 110:1 will understand why the church can face opposition and apparent defeat in the present age with confidence: the outcome is already determined by the divine promise, and the one who occupies the supreme position of cosmic authority is governing all things toward that promised outcome.
- Use Ephesians 1:20–23 as the primary text for teaching the church's confidence in the present age. The congregation needs to understand that the universal cosmic lordship of the exalted Christ is exercised for the church's benefit, that the one who holds all authority over all things is the Head of the body, and that every power that would harm the church is under His feet. This is the theological ground of the church's missional confidence, its political courage, its

willingness to face opposition without despair, and its conviction that the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

- Preach the permanent humanity of Christ as a pastoral resource for those who feel that God is distant, inaccessible, or unaware of the specific texture of their human experience. The High Priest at the right hand of the Father is not a disembodied divine spirit but the God-man who experienced human life in its fullest, most costly form and who carries that experience permanently into His glorified humanity. Hebrews 4:14–16’s invitation to ‘draw near with confidence to the throne of grace’ is grounded in the permanent humanity of the one who occupies the throne: He knows your weakness, because He bore it; He sympathizes with your suffering, because He endured it; and the throne is therefore a throne of grace, a place of confident approach rather than terrified distance.
- Address the theological basis of the Lord’s Supper in the context of the ascension. Many congregations observe the Supper without any clear understanding of the relationship between the present bodily absence of Christ (at the right hand of the Father) and the spiritual reality of the Supper as a genuine participation in His body and blood through the Spirit. A brief teaching on the ascension’s implications for the Supper, distinguishing the Reformed position from Roman Catholic transubstantiation and Lutheran ubiquity on the one hand and from a purely memorial Zwinglian view on the other, will give the congregation a more theologically informed and more spiritually enriched engagement with the ordinance.

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTION

1. How prominent has the ascension been in your preaching and teaching ministry? Have you ever preached a dedicated sermon on the ascension as a theologically significant event, distinct from the resurrection and the session? What has been the primary framework through which you have presented the exalted Christ to your congregation, and what specific pastoral needs in your congregation make a richer account of the ascension and the session most urgently relevant?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)

2. Read Acts 1:1–11. Identify: (a) the period of time between the resurrection and the ascension and what Jesus was doing during that period; (b) the specific details of the ascension event as Luke records it (who was present, what they saw, what happened to Jesus, what the angelic announcement said); (c) the promise of the return in verse 11. What is the relationship between the ‘just the same

way' of the promised return and the bodily, visible character of the ascension? What does this relationship establish about the nature of the return?

3. Read Psalm 110:1–7 and Acts 2:29–36. How does Peter's argument in Acts 2 establish that Psalm 110:1 cannot refer to David himself (vv. 29–34) and must therefore refer to a descendant of David who would be exalted to the divine right hand? What specific events does Peter connect to the fulfillment of Psalm 110:1 (resurrection, ascension, outpouring of the Spirit)? What is the specific conclusion Peter draws in verse 36, and what is the audience's response (v. 37)?

4. Read Hebrews 10:11–14. Identify the specific contrast Hebrews draws between the Levitical priests who stand and the one High Priest who sat down. What does the standing of the Levitical priests establish about the character of their ministry and their sacrifices? What does the sitting down of the one High Priest establish about the character of His ministry and His sacrifice? How does the 'waiting from that time onward' of verse 13 ('until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet') relate to the already-completed nature of the sacrifice?

5. Read Ephesians 1:15–23. In verses 20–21, identify the scope of Christ's exalted authority (what He is placed 'far above') and the temporal reach of that authority ('not only in this age but also in the one to come'). In verses 22–23, identify the specific relationship between Christ's universal cosmic headship and His headship over the church. What does the word 'gave' in verse 22 ('gave Him as head over all things to the church') establish about the purpose of the universal cosmic lordship?

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)

6. The lesson argues that the ascension is among the most neglected events in evangelical preaching and teaching and that this neglect is theologically costly. Do you agree with the diagnosis? What specific theological and pastoral consequences follow from a sustained neglect of the ascension and the session in preaching? How would a congregation's understanding of the present age, the church's mission, prayer, suffering, and the Lord's Supper be enriched by a more sustained theological engagement with the ascension?

7. The lesson presents the session's posture (sitting down) as a theologically significant act grounded in the contrast with the standing Levitical priests of Hebrews 10:11. How does this contrast illumine the completed character of the atonement in a way that is pastorally distinctive? What does it mean for the believer's assurance that the High Priest who represents them before the Father is seated, in the posture of completed work, rather than standing in the posture of ongoing sacrifice?

8. The lesson distinguishes the Reformed view of the Lord's Supper from Lutheran ubiquity and Roman Catholic transubstantiation on the basis of the ascension's implication for the bodily presence of Christ. How persuasive is the exegetical and theological case grounded in the ascension? What specific New Testament texts, read in light of the ascension, support the Reformed position that the

Supper is a spiritual participation in the benefits of Christ's body and blood through the Spirit rather than a physical co-presence of the glorified body?

9. The lesson argues that the universal cosmic lordship of the exalted Christ is exercised 'for the church's benefit' (Ephesians 1:22–23) and that this is the most pastoral possible application of the session's significance. How does the specificity of this claim, that the one who holds all authority governs all things for the sake of His body, shape the believer's experience of suffering, opposition, and apparent defeat in the present age? What specific pastoral situations would most benefit from this specific articulation of the session's pastoral significance?

10. The lesson closes with John 16:7's claim that the ascension is 'to your advantage' because it opens the way for the universal, omnipresent, personally indwelling presence of the Spirit. How does this claim address the apparent paradox that the departure of Christ should be experienced as a gain rather than a loss? In what specific ways is the Spirit's universal presence a greater benefit than the spatio-temporally limited bodily presence of the incarnate Christ in His pre-ascension form?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)

11. The lesson recommends preaching a dedicated sermon on the ascension. Draft the main point and two to three major moves of such a sermon from Acts 1:9–11 or from Hebrews 1:3 and 10:12. What is the specific pastoral aim of the sermon, and how would you help the congregation receive the ascension not as a transitional logistics narrative but as a theologically and pastorally significant event? What specific misunderstandings or neglects about the ascension do you most want to address in your congregation?

12. The lesson recommends using Ephesians 1:20–23 to teach the church's confidence in the present age. Think of a specific way in which your congregation has experienced the present age as threatening or discouraging, a political development, a cultural shift, an experience of opposition or marginalization. How would the specific claim of Ephesians 1:22–23 (the one who holds all authority over all things exercises it for the sake of His body) address that specific experience? What would you say to your congregation, and what texts would ground what you say?

13. The lesson recommends preaching the permanent humanity of Christ from Hebrews 4:14–16 as a pastoral resource for those who feel God is distant or unaware of their human experience. Think of the specific pastoral conversations in which this truth would be most immediately applicable, what kind of suffering, what kind of spiritual experience, what kind of theological question most directly calls for the specific pastoral resource of the permanent, sympathetic humanity of the High Priest? How would you present this truth to a specific person in a specific pastoral situation?

14. This lesson opens Unit 9 on the Ascension, Session, and Intercession of Christ. Lesson 29 will address the intercession specifically, what the exalted Lord is doing at the right hand of the Father on behalf of His people right now. Having studied the ascension and the session in this lesson, what

specific questions about the intercession do you most want Lesson 29 to address? How does the theology of the session (the completed atonement as the permanent ground of the sitting-down) prepare the ground for the theology of the intercession (the presentation of the completed atonement as the perpetual ground of the believers' acceptance)?

PRAYER FOCUS

Open this lesson's prayer time with a reading of Psalm 110:1–7, the Old Testament's most comprehensive prophetic account of the exalted Messiah's present reign and ultimate triumph. Read it as the psalm of the present age: the invitation has been issued ('Sit at My right hand'), the invitation has been accepted (the ascended Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father), and the promise of the footstool is in process of fulfillment (the enemies are being subdued through the advance of the gospel and will be fully and finally subdued at the return). Let the group inhabit the psalm as those who live in the age of the session, in the 'already' of the seated King and the 'not yet' of the fully subdued footstool.

Spend time in specific worship of the ascended, seated Lord. Adore Him as the one who completed the earthly mission and entered the divine presence in the glorified humanity that He carries permanently into the Father's presence. Adore Him as the seated High Priest whose sitting-down declares the sacrifice complete, the penalty paid, and the purification of sins accomplished. Adore Him as the universal cosmic Lord who holds all authority in heaven and on earth and who exercises that authority for the sake of His body the church. Adore Him as the one who sent the Spirit as the first great gift of the ascension, through whom the universal, omnipresent, personally indwelling presence of the exalted Christ is made real to every believer in every place in every age.

Pray through the pastoral implications of the session for specific dimensions of the congregation's life. Bring before the exalted Lord those in your congregation who are anxious about the state of the world, the state of the nation, the state of the culture, and bring for them the Ephesians 1:22–23 assurance that the one who holds all authority over all things exercises it for the sake of His body. Pray with the confidence that prayer addressed to the exalted Lord is addressed to the one who governs all things, through whose intercession the believers' prayers are presented before the throne of grace. Bring before the seated High Priest those in your congregation who feel that God is distant, and bring for them the Hebrews 4:14–16 assurance that the one at the right hand of the Majesty on high is the God-man who sympathizes with every weakness and who invites them to draw near with confidence.

Close with the Philippians 2 doxology of the exaltation, spoken together as the corporate confession of those who live under the reign of the exalted Lord and who await the day when every knee will bow:

“God also highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow... and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:9–11, NASB 1995

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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