

The Ascended Christ and the Disciple

By Richard Ross

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Prepare to present a silent pantomime. Enlist someone to read out loud Philippians 2:6–11. While that person reads, pretend you are Jesus. Act out His glory before the incarnation, His voluntary humiliation, and His glory after His time on earth.

Assignment Two

Study carefully Romans 8:34. Prepare to share with your group how this brief verse covers much of the history of redemption.

Assignment Three

Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What arguments could you give for making Ascension Day an observed church holiday, similar to Christmas and Easter? What makes it that important? How could broad observances cause believers to think new thoughts about Christ?

Scripture to Memorize

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Colossians 3:1

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will have a greater heart desire to be a disciple of Christ because of new insight into His power and glory revealed in His ascension to throne of heaven.

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Richard has written or compiled twenty-four books for youth leaders and parents. His most recent book is *The Senior Pastor and the Reformation of Youth Ministry* (lifeway.com). You can connect with Richard through RichardARoss.com, Facebook.com/rossrichard, and Twitter @richardaross.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Imagine your friend is getting curious about spiritual things. He says: "OK, I know you Christians make a big deal about Easter and the resurrection. But I also know that when you pray to Jesus, you think He is in heaven. So what happened in between? After Easter, did He die again and then go to heaven? If not, how did He get there?" How would you answer your friend?

Introduction

Jesus Christ has had three "waves" of glory:

1. First, Jesus had glory as the Son of God before the incarnation and even before creation. In John 17:5 Jesus said, "And now, Father, glorify Me in your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed."
2. Second, Jesus had glory as God in the flesh during His days on earth. John said, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).
3. Third, Jesus today has glory as the exalted Son of God, after the resurrection and ascension. This third wave of glory is the focus of this lesson.

Read Luke 24:50–53 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 50. He led them out. Jesus appeared many times to His followers after the resurrection. Then He led them outside Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives. **lifting up His hands He blessed them.** Jesus gave His followers a final challenge and blessing.

Verse 51. was carried up into heaven. Angels filled the sky when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Now those same angels appeared to carry Him into heaven.

Verse 52. returned to Jerusalem with great joy. This was joy mingled with adoration and praise.

Read Acts 1:3, 9–11 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 3. appearing to them during forty days. The ascension of Jesus took place on the fortieth day after His resurrection.

Verse 9. as they were looking on, He was lifted up. Jesus did not just disappear, leaving people to guess what happened to Him. Instead, while His followers were looking right at Him, He was lifted up to heaven.

Verse 10. two men stood by them in white robes. These were angels in human form.

Verse 11. will come in the same way. The angels announced that the same Jesus who just

ascended would return just as personally, just as visibly, and just as gloriously.

Discussion Question

Does this historical record of Jesus *rising up* to heaven give you more confidence that He also will *come down* from heaven? Does that make the second coming more concrete in your mind?

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now present a pantomime while someone reads Philippians 2:6–11. Explain that the person presenting the pantomime will be acting out the person of Christ.

Read Acts 2:33–36 out loud.

Studying the Passage

This passage is part of Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost. He was preaching to the crowd assembled in the temple. The crowd was large because people were amazed that the apostles could proclaim the gospel in various languages they never had learned.

Verse 33. exalted to the right hand of God. Peter knew that as part of the ascension God the Father had enthroned Christ at His right hand.

Verse 34. The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand.” Here Peter is quoting David from Psalm 110. A thousand years before the coming of Christ, God had revealed to David that He would enthrone Jesus at His right hand.

Verse 36. God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. *Lord* means “absolutely sovereign.” *Christ* means “Messiah.” The ascension to the right-hand throne was further proof that Jesus was and is who He says He is.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now present how Romans 8:34 covers much of the history of redemption.

Read Ephesians 1:18–23 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 20. He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand. David Bryant notes: “Beyond His incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, first century Christians lived daily in the full awareness of Christ’s ascension. Their hearts were set on His coronation and current position at God’s right hand. They breathed the very air of His active role from the throne of Heaven, holding sway as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords that He already was.”

Verse 21. far above . . . every name. Christ had every right to rule over the universe by virtue of His creating it. In addition, He could claim the inherited right to preside over it because of His death and resurrection. Now His Father made that position crystal clear by declaring the Son had a name above every authority, power, dominion, and name.

Verse 22. He put all things under His feet. This phrase might relate to the custom of victorious kings placing their feet upon the necks of their enemies. David Booth says: “The glory Christ left behind in coming to earth was returned to Him, along with the new glory of all that He

victoriously accomplished here. God gave Him the universe's highest place of honor and the highest name of honor, along with the glory of His enemies' humiliation."

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now present arguments for making Ascension Day an observed church holiday, similar to Christmas and Easter.

On Your Own

Here are just a few of the names Jesus Christ has been called: The Way, The Truth, The Rock, Dayspring, Son of Righteousness, Light of the World, Bread of Life, The Light, Bright Morning Star, Prince of Peace, Good Shepherd, Lion of Judah, Alpha and Omega, and Name above All Names. Using thoughts from this lesson, what is a name you would like to give Christ? Write it below and then share that name with your group.

Discussion Question

How does this lesson help prepare you for a year of discipleship study?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

A previous lesson invited you to consider whether you are ever tempted to view Jesus as:

Jesus the EMT—You only call for Him when you have a crisis.

Jesus the Santa Claus—He brings you presents and that's about all. You do not treasure a relationship with Him or feel awe toward Him.

Jesus the Grandfather—He gives you what you want, but He does not make any demands on your life.

Jesus the Butler—He quickly appears when you want Him to serve you, but He fades back into the shadows when you don't need Him.

Believers who do not grasp the power and glory of Jesus can have a distorted view of who He is. An antidote to that situation is a clear view of the ascension of Jesus to the high throne of heaven. A Messiah who is ruling and reigning with power and majesty cannot be just a little friend who helps you when you need Him. His grand position gives Him authority over everything in the cosmos and everything in your life.

On Ascension Day, Jesus was exalted to the Father's right hand, incomparable in authority and majesty, reigning over earth and heaven. David Bryant challenges believers "to regard everything else in this light: worship, prayer, service, fellowship, the gifts of the Spirit, evangelism and missions, lifestyle choices, applications of Scripture and our struggles with sin."

At the same time, a sincere disciple might say, "I get the fact that Jesus is the supreme ruler over my life. I'm good with that. But here are my questions: Does Christ enthroned know me? Does He care about me? Is a being that glorious even approachable?"

The answer to these questions is a resounding "Yes!" Because of grace, you are invited to approach Him boldly. But at the same time, you approach Him as a King. Even though He invites you into an intimate relationship, you never lose your awe and respect for Him. David Booth says: "Jesus saved us for Himself. As the living and ascended Lord, He is able to enjoy the relationship with us for which He created and redeemed us. We have an abiding relationship with Jesus in which we experience communion with Him, grow in Him, have joy in Him, learn from Him, and become fruitful in Him (John 15:1–15). As reigning Lord, He invites us to love with our first and most supreme love, and to 'set apart Christ as the Lord in your hearts' (1 Peter 3:15)."

Follow up Question

What new insight into Christ's power and glory, revealed in His ascension to the throne of heaven, give you a greater desire to be His disciple?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.