

Jesus  
“*The Work of Christ*”  
1 Corinthians 15:50-58

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The Reverend Fitz Neal

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I’ve been thinking of a little verse in Ephesians: “...The unsearchable riches of Christ...” Eph 3:8. I hope that’s your experience. We could look into the life, the teachings, and the work of Christ for an eternity and never plumb the depths of our Lord and Savior.

We can fall at his feet and worship the Father in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. It’s in worship that we behold him, and in doing what he said, that we know him at that face-to-face level that we all long for our whole lives.

Our purpose statement says it so clearly, “Encouraging you to enter into a life-changing relationship with Jesus...” We believe life is found nowhere else and in no one else than God, as God is revealed in Jesus Christ. So let’s go before him in prayer.

**An ascension...Sort Of**

In his excellent book on Jesus called, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey re-tells a scene from a famous Italian movie, *La Dolce Vita* (The sweet life), It’s sort of a reverse story of the ascension of Christ...

*“In La Dolce Vita there is a shot of a helicopter ferrying a giant statue of Jesus to Rome. Arms outstretched, Jesus hangs in a sling, and as the helicopter passes over the landscape, people begin to recognize him. “Hey it’s Jesus!” shouts one old farmer, hopping off his tractor to race across the field. Nearer to Rome, bikini-clad girls sunbathing around a swimming pool wave a friendly greeting, and the helicopter pilot swoops in for a closer look. Silent, with an almost doleful expression on his face, the concrete Jesus hovers incongruously above the modern world.”*

Is this the way it is? Is Jesus like a concrete statue, hovering unnoticed above the modern world? Removed? Never connecting with real life? No. But it's the work of the resurrection and the ascension that enables us to say he is very much connected to our world – more than we are, in fact.

### **The Work of Christ**

We've looked at the historical reliability of the sources for Christ's life and ministry, We've heard anew his claims to be God and a man in one person—how, because of that, he is the bridge across which God comes to us to save us; we looked at his role as the teacher of the world; last week Pastor Bruce began two weeks on the work of Christ—Christ came to accomplish the redemption of the world. No one can save themselves – only God can do it and it's hard work. We can't do it! So God came to do the work for us.

The work of Christ begins with the incarnation – Jesus took upon himself the full burdens of our broken humanity because of our moral failures—our sins, yet he never caved into them as we do.

The incarnation of Christ—God made flesh wasn't just God revealing himself. It was God doing the hard work of living a life of perfect trust and obedience. In every area where we are weak and fail. He was strong and never sinned. Thank you Lord. This is called the *active obedience* of Christ.

Then there's the cross – what happened there is called the *passive obedience* of Christ. He took our punishment upon himself, in our place. He didn't deserve it, but he took it, he received it—all the judgment of God against all sin for all time was meted out upon God himself. That's why our forgiveness is ONLY something we receive—but it's also why it is an act—an action, not a pronouncement. It's full and free.

The work of Christ for you and me. “Oh, the unsearchable riches of Christ!”

But there's more! Many stop at the cross with the work of Christ, but there are two more facets to his work: the resurrection and the ascension.

## The Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a historical fact. It is brute fact, not myth or legend. It is the basis of our lives. If there is no resurrection then the life of Christ in the incarnation and the death of Christ on the cross are no more than ancient tragedy.

But in the resurrection something at once mysterious AND simple takes place: God takes his own redeeming life, God's own trust and obedience and makes it ours. The resurrection takes the work Jesus did in his life and death and gives it to you.

Let me put it this way, the resurrection means that:

- **His life becomes your life in this life.** Through trusting our lives to Christ, he takes his life and unifies it with his.
  - **This is the great exchange** – He takes your life in exchange for his. You give him your life and He gives you his life in return.
  - **Galatians 2:20** – *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me, and the life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me.”*
  - **We have a different life coursing through us** – we have no righteousness in ourselves, and our daily lives are lived in Him. This is why forgiveness actually works...this is why we get up and keep going...this is why we care about what goes on in the world...this is why we try to do something about it that is eternal, rather than a patch – because of he who lives within us.
  - **It's not just something we receive** – *it's something we participate in*– every day we join in the resurrection of Jesus by following him.
- **Therefore – our participation in the resurrected life of Christ sets us free**
  - **Free from fear** – God really CAN be trusted! He came through once, he'll come through again and again and again – even when we can't see it yet.
    - **So much of life** – seems to be run by fear –

- *fear of what people think* – so we live according to other people’s expectations, sins, or disapproval – so we try to control what others think of us.
- *fear of death*, – we have an anxious obsession with preserving our own lives, so we grasp and clutch at things the way they are.
- *fear of failure*, or of success – nothingness or nobody-ness – so we seek the heroic or the famous in order to be noticed or appreciated.
- ***The resurrection sets us free from all that – “Therefore, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord because you know your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”***
  - **Free for others** – Whatever they think...we can love
  - **Free because we already died** – we can hand over all our anxious obsessions with preservation and give ourselves away to the Lord
  - **Free for ordinariness** – We can accept where we are and who we are, and let God be God.
- **“We become free to participate in all of God’s purposes for creation as a whole...”<sup>1</sup>**
  - That’s why Paul can say, and we can hear... “Therefore be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because you know you labor in the Lord is not in vain...”

### **Ascension**

The ascension of Christ is the piece that pulls everything together – the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. It’s what makes the work of Christ *work*.

The ascension of Jesus on the Mt. of Olives means two things –

- **it means he took our redeemed humanity into Heaven –**

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<sup>1</sup> James V. Brownson, Inagrace Dietterich, Barry A. Harvey, and Charles C. West, *Stormfront: the Good News of God* (Grand Rapids, Wm Eerdmans, 2003) p.75. This whole section on the resurrection is based on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, “Dying and Rising with Christ.”

- **and it means that the resurrection presence and power of God is set loose throughout the whole universe.**

That our redeemed humanity was taken by Christ into heaven means that we live every day out of that reality, not this earthly reality. Oh, there are earthly realities – we deal with them every day. But the ascension means that they never have the last word. He does.

Have you ever wondered why you are able to keep going, right when you think you can't go another step in life? Because you are living in Christ, who has taken you into heaven already. You are living out of that reality, not the ones that surround you. Have you ever wondered why the church of Jesus Christ just keeps on going even when or especially when the world has written it off? Because we live together out of the reality of our place with Christ in the heavenlies, not by the techniques or values of those around us. "We are set free to participate in God's purposes for creation as a whole."

But more than anything the ascension means that Christ is set loose to be everywhere at once. You see, when Jesus was with the disciples for the 40 days after his resurrection, he was still limited to being in one place at a time. But after the ascension, he no longer has such limitations. He can be here AND at the church down the street. He has all the time in the world to hear the prayer of a child in India, and give encouragement to you.

But even more, because he's set free to be everywhere at once, that means that he is Lord of every realm of life! Let me put it this way – wherever you go. The Gospel of Christ, and Christ himself goes with you. When you go to work, he goes with you. When you go to school, he goes there, too. When you are at rest, he is awake and watching over you. He can be trusted, and he calls you to represent him everywhere you ever go.

*"Therefore, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because you know your labor in the Lord is not in vain..."*

### **When Jesus Shows Up...**

Let me share an ascension story with you. You never know when Jesus is going to show up. It just keeps happening.

A friend struggled to believe in Christ. There are a lot of these stories aren't there? As a figure of history, she had no problem wanting to learn about him. But as a present reality? It just seemed to be too much. I mean, really. He rose again? Please. He ascended to heaven? How cartoonish and overly literal...that's how it seemed. Then, one day, as she was driving back from a 35 mile shopping trip, driving through a little hamlet along the way...suddenly, she said, "It was as though Jesus was sitting right next to me in the car. He was just SO real..." It was the ascended Lord. The resurrected One, the Crucified Savior, the Incarnate God, come to call a daughter into life.

The Jesus the rest of the world sees as floating somewhere above life, suspended as if a concrete statue, was suddenly there – to her, and then she was free for the world. So are you.

*"Therefore be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord because you know your labor in the Lord is not in vain."*