

The Apostles' Creed Week 5 The Ascension

4) He ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father, and He will come to judge the living and the dead.

a) He ascended into heaven:- This is recorded for us in Luke 24, verses 50 – 53 and Acts 1, verses 6 – 11. In the reading from Acts, the disciples are said to “*return to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives*”. The village of Bethany is on the far side of the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem.

We are not dependent solely on the two accounts by Luke. The Ascension is alluded to in John 6, verse 62: John 20, verse 17: Acts 2, verses 33 – 35: Ephesians 4, verses 8 -10: 1 Peter 3, verse 22, and others.

The Ascension can be seen as a fulfilment of the promise of the Lord Jesus in John 14, verse 2 “*I go to prepare a place for you*”. It is also a sign that His atoning work is completed. He is now with the Father in heaven, until He returns in glory. It indicates that the period of post-resurrection appearances was now over and that His return to heaven would inaugurate the era of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church see Luke 24, verse 49: Acts 1, verse 8: John 14, verses 15 and 25 – 26 and John 16, verses 5 – 15.

Note that the episode described in Matthew 28, verses 16 – 20 takes place on a mountain in Galilee, not near to Jerusalem. This fits in with the resurrection appearance to the disciples in John 21, which is set by the lakeside in Galilee.

b) He is seated at the right hand of the Father:- Our Lord Jesus Christ took the words of Psalm 110, verse 1 as applying to Himself: Matthew 22, verses 41 – 45. That we say He “sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty” is an acknowledgement that His work as Saviour and Redeemer is finished. In John 19, verses 28 and 30 the Greek word carries the meaning of “*it is accomplished*”. He has triumphed over death and the grave and sits enthroned as victor. Not only is our Lord Jesus Christ “*seated at the right hand of the Father*” it is also our place “*with Him*”. Read Ephesians 2, verses 4 – 6. If we continue reading to verse 10, we see that this has implications for our ongoing Christian life! Next time you say the Creed, remember these verses!

There are times where the Lord Jesus is mentioned as “standing”. These can be seen as special occasions. In Acts 7, verses 55 – 56, does He stand ready to welcome Stephen, the first Christian martyr? Certainly in Revelation 1, verses 12 – 16, He stands in judgement on the Seven Churches of Asia. (Chapters 2 and 3).

c) He will come to judge the living and the dead. This is the theme of many of the parables told by our Lord Jesus Christ about Himself. Read Matthew 25, verses 31 – 46. Note that the title “*Son of Man*” is taken from the Book of Daniel, chapter 7, verses 13 – 14 and is used more than 40 times in the Gospels by the Lord Jesus Himself: e.g. Matthew 9, verse 6; Mark 9, verse 9; Luke 18, verse 8; John 12, verses 34 – 36.

The preaching and teaching of the Apostles refer to the Lord Jesus as “*the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead*” - Acts 10, verse 42 and 2 Timothy 4, verse 1. A more graphic description of the Last Judgement is in the book of Revelation, chapter 20 and verses 11 – 15.

Maybe, if some churches believed what it says in the Creed, there would be more fear and trembling on the part of the abusers and those who have covered up for them.

I wonder when the ancient hymn Dies Irae was last used in the Church of England?

*Day of wrath! O day of mourning!
See fulfilled the prophets warning!
Heaven and earth to ashes turning!
From the Latin of the thirteen century.*

*O what fear man's bosom rendeth
When from heaven the judge descendeth,
On whose sentence all dependeth!*

If you are concerned by these words and the many references in Scripture to judgement, read Hebrews 2, verses 14 – 18 and Hebrews 4, verses 14 -16 and be comforted. “*We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and He is the propitiation for our sins.*” 1 John 2, verses 1 – 2.