

THE ASCENSION - OURS TODAY?

Christians can be so uneasy about what might or might not have *happened* at Christ's Ascension, that they can forget to proclaim its *meaning*.

The New Testament writers do not focus much on the **event**. The epistles and two of the Gospels do not describe it.

Mark's Gospel illustrates (16:19-20) the difference between **event** and **meaning** within one verse:

SUBJECT	<i>So then the Lord Jesus</i>
CONTEXT	<i>after he had spoken to them,</i>
EVENT	<i>was taken up into heaven</i>
MEANING	<i>and sat at the right hand of God.</i>
RESULT	<i>And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere.</i>

The unique event of the Ascension, like all unique events, cannot be compared to any other. The best way to assess the Ascension-event, is to ask what God seems to have said through it to Christians at the time. Somewhat surprisingly, it dovetails neatly with 21st. century Christian belief.

Most Christians, for instance, sing these Christmas words and find them meaningful:

'He came down to earth from heaven
who is God and Lord of all.'

At Christmastide we celebrate the mystery of Christ's *human* status.

At Ascensiontide we celebrate the mystery of Christ's *divine* status - so we might reverse the lines to read:

'He returned from earth to heaven
who is God and Lord of all!'

That's the meaning of the Ascension, and of Mark's imagery that Jesus '*sat at God's right hand*'.

When Queen Elizabeth was a princess, someone, who thought her face familiar but could not place exactly who she was, groped around for a subject of conversation, and ended up asking what her father was doing!

She answered in one word: 'Ruling!'

That's not a bad answer to the more important question 'What is Jesus doing?' - a question that the Ascension was designed to proclaim.

One reason why the Ascension was necessary is that the first-century followers of Christ needed to know when the Resurrection appearances would end, for, as Jesus had taught them, it was necessary for him to leave them before they were sent the Holy Spirit. [John 16:7]

The **Ascension** stands uniquely as -

- **the counterpart of Christmas**
- **the count-down to Pentecost**

God - usefully symbolised by a cloud [Acts 1:9] - takes Jesus to himself.

But that is not all! Christians who are truly '*in Christ*' partake in some real sense of Christ's Birth, his Ministry, his Death: yes - and his Resurrection and Ascension too! (*If you have been raised*

*with Christ...*says St. Paul [Colossians 3:1].)

A Christian minister once asked another Christian how he was.

'All right under the circumstances', he replied.

The minister then said, 'But what are you doing *under* the circumstances?'

The minister had grasped the meaning of the Ascension for today's Christians, which is spelt-out in Ephesians 2.

We read there first of our 'dead' state in submission to the world and to evil forces, but then the writer breaks forth in praise to God for his rescue of us:

***But God, who is rich in mercy,
out of the great love with which he loved us,
even when we were dead through our trespasses,
made us alive together with Christ
- by grace you have been saved -
and raised us up with him
and seated us with him in the heavenly places
in Christ Jesus.***

When Christ's Ascension begins also to be ours, life can look very different indeed!

If Christians, by and large, tend to lack authority and victory, it may be because their ignorance of the Ascension has resulted in their not responding to Christ's invitation to begin to share in it, to reign with him, and to have victory and authority.

Let's put that right.

Let's proclaim afresh what the Ascension teaches about Christ's position - and *ours* !