

Introduction: We have seen that Christ's post-resurrection ministry for forty days solidified the tottering faith of His church before going back to heaven. After the shock of the Cross, His disciples needed Christ to give, "many convincing proofs of His resurrection" as well as "teach about the Kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). But now here is the question: How does Christ continue to strengthen His church now that He has disappeared into heaven? The clouds of Acts 1:9-11 have hidden Jesus from our sight. *We* don't have the privilege of seeing Christ for forty days alive or to experience "our hearts burning" as He teaches us the Scriptures *in person*! Ah, but we do! By His Spirit Christ now exercises His ministry as Prophet, Priest and King! Such a world-wide, heavenly ministry is the great lesson about Christ's Ascension on which we will dwell this week. May this week's notes convince us that Christ's heavenly ministry on our behalf is even *more effective* than when He walked among us on earth.

Mon/Tues: read John 20:11-18 and Acts 1:1-3. Christ's heavenly ministry of mediation and intercession was uppermost in His mind after rising from the dead. For example, notice how He tells Mary that she was to go and tell the disciples that He was literally *already ascending* in John 20:17. His instructions are clear on this point: "Say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" The reality of His ascension was so present to Him because He knew that *it was there in the heavenly Holy of Holies* that He would effectively control our destinies, convert our hearts and preserve our faith. *Never before this* had the human race had a physically present Mediator in God's court in heaven until Jesus ascended to that post at the right hand of God! This, then, is why Jesus speaks in the *present tense*: He so wanted to be there, knowing that *there* He would exercise a world-wide reign over sinners – rather than remaining localized on earth, limited to being in one place at a time.

Meditate and pray: "Lord Jesus, thank you for your eagerness that we should be saved, preserved and redeemed by your intercessions for us in heaven. Thank you for how eagerly you looked forward in John 20:17 to beginning the business of interceding in heaven on our behalf. Thank you that every day you are up early to order and shape the daily experiences of our lives – quickly forgetting our failures and sins against you from the day before in order to begin afresh with us each day as a day of grace! Who would not want to follow such an eager Savior who has gone in John 20:17 *not only* to His Father but to ours as well to be our Advocate there! Thank you Jesus, Amen!"

Wednesday: read Luke 24:50-53. What causes the disciples' joy at the Ascension of the Lord Jesus? It was the posture of blessing which He adopted as He was taken up from them. With His hands raised He blessed them and, "while He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven." Who can tell what such blessing means in our lives, as He "lives to intercede for us", and tirelessly keeps His hands raised to carry our every need in prayer to the Father? Jesus is no mere Moses, whose hands grew weary and the battle went poorly for Israel in Exodus 17:11!

Meditate and Pray: "Once again, Lord Jesus, we thank you that with your Father and the Holy Spirit it is your will to keep watch over your people – even as you did over Israel in the past (Psalm 121:3-4). Thank you also that your watch-care is an active oversight, and that you can intervene at any point of need. Please, give us boldness to enter into your throne room when we need help in our time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16). Most of all, thank you that your aid is timely: never premature or tardy. Please, therefore, order the events of our lives according to your heavenly timetable, and persevere with your Father in asking for all that we need at every moment. Amen."

Thurs/Fri: read John 19:38-42, Matthew 27:52-53 and Zechariah 12:10-13:1. It is important as we celebrate all the glories of Christ's Ascension, that we not forget that these glories are rooted not just in the death, but even in the burial of the Son of God – which we have described for us in John 19:38-42. That burial was also part of Christ's humiliation. When His body was so courageously claimed and cared for by two members of the religious establishment, (Joseph and Nicodemus), they as leaders in Israel bore testimony to the honor and blessing of God on Christ as He was buried “in a rich man's tomb” – even as Isaiah 53:9 predicted. The life of Christ was honored even in His burial!

This is yet another proof that the power and the glory of the Son of God endured even through His death. Not even physical death could prevent our Divine Savior from revealing the power of God over sin, death and the tomb! Just as His piercing by the soldier *revealed the heart of God in His grief for sinners*, (see Calvin's comments below on Zechariah 12:10 as referring to God Himself, not just the man Jesus), so *even from the tomb* the life-giving power of the Son of God flowed forth – as attested to by the many dead ‘in the Lord’, (Matthew 27:53), who appeared after the Resurrection in Jerusalem! How were such ‘living ones’ kept safe in the tombs until their Savior rose on the third day? Answer: because by the Holy Spirit, they were united to Christ in His death, so that *their bodies*, as also *His body*, were kept safe in the tomb! Talk about the life-giving power of Christ being too strong for death to contain Him! To sum up this great picture of the power of our Savior – even from the grave - consider the following verses:

- In Acts 2:24-25, Peter declares that “the pangs of death could not hold Him”!
- Christ's death in its eternal effectiveness is the stress in Hebrews 9:14's description of His offering up His life on the Cross, “through the eternal power of the Holy Spirit” (Hebrews 9:14)!
- Even in death, Christ's life-giving voice of power still speaks! Whoever hears His voice sounding from the Cross, *in the very act of hearing lives!* See John 5:24-25 and the confessions of faith elicited from the lips of those who saw Christ die, such as the Roman centurion (Mark 15:39).
- Finally, even those scars and wounds on our Savior's body are now glorified, and bear effective testimony in Heaven that Christ's work of saving us is finished, and our needs are carried before God's throne of mercy by the “Lamb that was slain” (Revelation 5:6)!

I close this week's notes with John Calvin's moving words on the piercing predicted in Zechariah 12:10, a verse fulfilled when the Jews and Romans looked upon the dead Christ, pierced by the spear in John 19:37: a picture of God's love as well as a depicting Christ's real human death!

They shall look on him whom they pierced: “... The purpose which John has is to show that Christ is that God who formerly complained, by Zechariah, that the Jews had *pierced* his heart, ([Zechariah 12:10](#)). Now, God speaks there after the manner of men, declaring that He is wounded by the sins of his people, and especially by their obstinate contempt of his word, in the same manner as a mortal man receives a deadly wound, when his heart is *pierced*; as he says, elsewhere, that *his Spirit was deeply grieved*. Now, as Christ is *God manifested in the flesh* ([1 Timothy 3:16](#)), John says that in his visible flesh was plainly accomplished what his Divine Majesty had endured from His people of old, so far as it was capable of enduring; not that God can be at all affected by the outrages of men, or that the reproaches which are cast at him from the earth ever reach him, but because by this mode of expression he intended to declare with what enormous sacrilege the wickedness of men is chargeable, when it rises in rebellion against heaven. What was done by the spear of a Roman soldier John justly imputes to the Jews; as they are elsewhere said *to have crucified the Son of God*, ([Acts 2:36](#)), though they did not lay a finger on his body.”