The Ascension of Jesus Part 2

The throne, the sealed scroll, the new song, and a multitude no one can count

SPEAKER	Steve Hawthorne
DATE	Sunday, May 16, 2021
PASSAGES	Revelation 5:1-14; Revelation 4:1-11; Revelation 7:9-17; Daniel 7:9-14; Psalm 110:1-4; Isaiah 11:1-10; Genesis 49:9-10; Hebrews 3:1
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:47:53 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The ascension was a transaction. In heaven's throne room the slain Lamb received the sealed scroll that holds the whole of God's purpose, and heaven broke into a new song – not because creation would be fixed, but because he had purchased for God a people from every tribe and nation. Enthroned, he is now their shepherd, leading a multitude no one can count out of tribulation and into worship.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The essence of the ascension is not that Jesus changed location but that something was entrusted to him: authority to extend God's rule and to draw a people near as their priest.
- Heaven is not first of all bliss and mansions. It is the high royal court of God, where every prayer you have ever murmured is heard and recorded.
- John wept because the scroll held every good thing God intends – and no one could make it happen. Then the Lamb who was slain took it from the Father's hand.
- The new song celebrates something new: the Lamb has purchased for God, with his blood, people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation, to be a kingdom and priests.
- Salvation is not only being saved from punishment but being saved to God – brought near as worshipers, honored as no angel is.

- Each people brings its own redeemed glories – its songs, arts and language – without having to renounce who they are.
- We are on a greater exodus, coming out of the great tribulation. Suffering may increase, but the Lamb at the center of the throne is our shepherd, and no tear goes unnoticed.

▶ 0:49:09

Steve welcomed Bruce and Linda Cook from Pasadena – Bruce has worked alongside him for twenty-five years in the Perspectives movement – and set the occasion: the church was in the ten days between Ascension Day and Pentecost, when about 120 believers prayed and praised in the temple and an upper room. The worship that morning "just melted me… it ruins me."

1. The throne of the everlasting God

▶ 0:52:32

Last week's point: the ascension was not Jesus leaving for a paradise. "There was a transaction. That's what made the ascension the ascension." It was the enthronement of a messianic King, foretold and prefigured throughout Israel's story. "The Bible is not a collection of stories to teach you how to be a good little girl and a good boy… It's actually a grand, astounding, unfolding story of what God is doing."

▶ 0:54:19

He recalled Psalm 110: sit at my right hand; rule in the midst of your enemies; your scepter extends – the Hebrew word for "send," the root of "apostle." Not to crush people, but so that a willing people rises like dew. And a priest who is not a go-between but brings the people of God as near as they can come, "not coercing, not provoking, not obligating us," so that we discover the joy of actually pleasing God.

▶ 0:56:49

So this King is active, with two directions to his rule: going out to all peoples as apostle, and drawing them to God as priest – "consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession."

▶ 0:58:42

Daniel saw thrones set up, the Ancient of Days seated, a river of fire, thousands upon thousands attending him, "and the court sat, and the books were opened" (Daniel 7:9–14). That means business is going on. "Every prayer you ever murmured is remembered and is permanently recorded in the annals of this great court. He hears you." The throne is real, though it transcends space and time.

▶ 0:59:52

The rest of the message followed one of the eleven who watched Jesus go up: John, in Revelation.

> "After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven… Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne."
>
> REVELATION 4:1–3 ↗ (NASB)

▶ 1:01:04

Not a statue but radiance; a rainbow, "the whole bandwidth." Twenty-four elders, perhaps the twelve tribes and twelve apostles – the whole people of God represented, as a collective culture counts itself in the front row when its leader sits there. Lightning, peals of thunder and "sounds" John could not even categorise: "they went off the bandwidth of my ability to perceive… which is what we'd expect of the almighty God. This is not God's living room. This is high royal court."

▶ 1:04:14

And four living creatures, full of eyes, six wings each. Forget Valentine's cherubs with little darts: "a cherub, if you saw it, would terrify you." Even John twice fell down to worship an angel and was told to worship God alone (Revelation 19:10). "No wonder God keeps this veil from our sight. It would ruin us." The elders cry, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God… for You created all things" (Revelation 4:11) – praise for who God constantly is. "We're about to turn the page, and something new happens."

2. God's purpose entrusted to the worthy one

▶ 1:07:08

John saw what Daniel had seen centuries earlier: the great transaction, the giving of dominion and purpose. Every eye in heaven was riveted on the One on the throne – and in his right hand was a scroll sealed with seven seals.

▶ 1:08:32

In Roman times deeds and wills were written that way: a brief description outside, the details inside, to be opened only by the one worthy to be the heir or to enact it. So a strong angel proclaims, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" and no one in heaven, on earth or under the earth can.

▶ 1:10:42

"So John began to weep greatly" – not a sniffle; "he's making a scene." He could sense that the scroll held the fullness of God's desire: every evil subdued, every broken thing repaired, "even better than

when it was first made." That wistful ache when you look out the window and think *it should be different than this* – "every good and beautiful thing in the heart of God and in our hearts as well, written, and it's gonna happen – except it's never gonna happen. No one can make it happen… You would weep too."

▶ 1:12:10

> "And one of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.' And I saw between the throne… and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain… And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne."
>
> REVELATION 5:5–7 ↗ (NASB)

▶ 1:12:58

"Root of David" reaches back to Isaiah 11, where the dream of our hearts is expressed – the wolf with the lamb, the leopard with the young goat, children playing by the viper's den – and it begins with a shoot from the stem of Jesse, David's father, to whom the nations will resort. "Lion of the tribe of Judah" reaches back to Jacob's blessing:
"Judah is a lion's whelp… the scepter shall not depart from Judah." Both say his lineage checks out – he is the rightful heir. The point is ancestry, "so we don't overdo the lion thing" – and beyond that, God's choice.

▶ 1:16:46

Then a Lamb standing as if slain – not a sheep sauntering through the courts, but a human somehow identified as the sacrifice. The scroll was not taken but entrusted to him. The living creatures and elders fall down with harps and golden bowls of incense, "which are the prayers of the saints. So you're in there somewhere."

The new song

▶ 1:18:02

"They sang a new song." After half of eternity, something they had never sung. Before, they praised the Creator for who he always is; now something vast had changed. God is doing far more than restoring creation: "We are not just, as the Woodstock song says, trying to get back to the garden. No – onward to something astounding."

▶ 1:19:55

"Worthy" is not a voice vote electing someone who will do. It is acclaim – the Most High has chosen, and he is more surprising and better than anyone imagined. "There's a cry: I have desire satisfied and surpassed."

> "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."
>
> REVELATION 5:9–10 ↗ (NASB)

▶ 1:21:12

From every people, without fail, the Lamb has purchased some for God. "Yes, they were saved from hell. Purchased for God." And the earth has never been governed as God intended. Steve loves mountains and hiking, but compared with what God meant humanity to bring forth, "it's a smoking ruin." Something marvelous is coming.

▶ 1:23:19

Then myriads of myriads of angels – "a good billion" – shouting at full volume, "dumbest angel, back row, full volume": worthy is the Lamb to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing (Revelation 5:11–14). These are not divine attributes; you don't say God is rich. They are the glories of the human cultures God has bought, which those peoples will lavish on him. Then every created thing joins in.

3. Already home, but still on the journey

▶ 1:25:45

It is one thing to sing about who the Lamb has purchased; how will they actually come? "The people bought for God by the Lamb will also be brought to God by the Lamb." He is entrusted not just to run the place but to carry out God's purpose. In Revelation 7 the 144,000 from the twelve tribes – a figurative number for the full complement of God's people Israel – are sealed. Then:

▶ 1:27:42

> "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'"
>
> REVELATION 7:9–10 ↗ (NASB)

▶ 1:28:16

Steve once stood among an estimated million people at a Promise Keepers gathering in Washington. "That's just a million. These are millions of millions."

▶ 1:28:54

"Salvation to our God." We preach that the main point is being saved from punishment, and thank God he rescues us. But these people are saying, "Look who we got saved *to*." Saved to be worship servants, honored with a nearness no angel is given – angels have no crowns to offer. And in Revelation 19, the highest honor of all: matrimony with the Son of God. "That would be obscene if it wasn't in the Bible. But it's there, it's loud and it's clear."

▶ 1:30:54

The angels fall on their faces: blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power and might to our God – every way people and angels can exert themselves, in his hands. Each people will offer its distinctive beauties, its literature, songs, arts and industries, all redeemed by the Lamb.

▶ 1:31:37

"Who are these?" "My lord, you know" – the right answer if you are ever asked something in heaven you don't know. "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation." Not "came out" – they are on their way out. The prophets promised a greater exodus in the last days, gathering every people not to a building but to worship. And the exodus is the hard part: no water, no food, sun blasting down.

▶ 1:34:08

Don't get lost in a particular end-times chart, Steve said. The great tribulation describes the whole troubled stretch from Jesus' death onward, and we are still in it.

▶ 1:34:48

They have not renounced their families or ethnicity. Kurdish believers do not have to stop being Kurdish to follow Jesus, and he begins transforming Kurdish ways until they sing of him "in ways that only Kurdish hearts could ever recognize and resound with."

▶ 1:36:04

"They serve Him day and night in His temple." When we sang that morning, in an old church building on Arroyo Seco, not sure whether to shake hands or bump elbows, "we were actually... our priest has brought us to the throne." And he who sits on the throne "will spread His tabernacle over them" – John bends the noun for the wilderness tent into a verb: God will tent over them.

▶ 1:37:33

> "They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."
>
> REVELATION 7:14–17 ↗ (NASB)

One of Steve's favorite lines. How can he be on the throne and with us? "He's on the throne in order to be more abundantly present." A lamb as shepherd seems odd, but he is the sacrificial Lamb, enthroned.

▶ 1:38:59

"The weather report is kind of clear." Proportionally there is more persecution now than ever, and opposition to Christ's lordship is not getting sweeter, "even in our sweet and kind nice country." We may be honored to suffer with him and be glorified with him (Romans 8:17). This is not yet "no more crying" (Revelation 21:4). There is weeping here – but not a single tear goes unnoticed, and the shepherd is the one who was slain, acquainted with grief.

Consider Jesus

▶ 1:40:34

"Holy brethren... partakers of a heavenly calling" – not a call to a mansion someday, but to what heaven wants to see fulfilled on earth. And that call is possible because we have a great apostle and a great high priest. "The short version of this message: look to Jesus. Consider him, care for him, embrace him, celebrate him."

▶ 1:42:13

> *"He reveals his glory to all peoples as the apostle, but as priest he helps, so that the living God will receive glory from all the peoples."*

▶ 1:42:54

So expect his life, power and presence; follow our great apostle as he fulfills God's purpose for the nations; join our great high priest as he helps us worship. Steve had the room stand and pray from pages 55 and 57 of the booklet: sing of his singular worthiness, gathering a people from every people; rejoice in the fullness of his family, many more coming; and praise the Lamb as our shepherd. "Lead on, O Lamb of God... Go in his joy, go in his presence. He's your shepherd."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Psalm 110:1–4 (NASB)
- Hebrews 3:1 (NASB)
- Daniel 7:9–14 (NASB)
- Revelation 4:1–3 (NASB)
- Revelation 19:10 (NASB)
- Revelation 4:11 (NASB)
- Revelation 5:5–7 (NASB)
- Isaiah 11:1–10
- Genesis 49:9–10
- Revelation 5:9–10 (NASB)
- Revelation 5:11–14 (NASB)
- Revelation 7:9–10 (NASB)
- Revelation 7:14–17 (NASB)
- Romans 8:17
- Revelation 21:4
- Isaiah 53:3

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Steve said heaven is first of all God's royal court, where every prayer is heard and recorded. How does that picture change the way you think about your own prayers?
2. John wept because no one could open the scroll of God's good purposes. Where do you feel that ache – "it should be different than this" – and what does the Lamb taking the scroll say to it?
3. What is the difference between being saved from something and being saved to God? Which one has shaped your faith more?
4. How does the vision of every people bringing its own redeemed glories to God affect how you see other cultures, or your own?
5. We are "coming out of the great tribulation" with the Lamb as our shepherd. Where do you need him to shepherd you through suffering this week, and how could you look to him there?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Steve Hawthorne taught this second of two messages on the ascension at Hope Chapel. He has worked for twenty-five years alongside his colleague Bruce Cook in the Perspectives movement, often traveling together, and wrote the "ten days of praise" prayer guide for the March for Jesus movement that the congregation used between Ascension Day and Pentecost.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbQh5gRY5RM&t=2873s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.