



**What Christians Believe
The Apostles Creed
(8) I Believe in the Ascension
Acts 1:1-11
June 28th 2020**

Introduction - Bracelet—WWJD? WIJD?

I don't know if you can see the wristband I am wearing today. If you can't, it has just four letters sewn into it: **WWJD**. The letters stand for What Would Jesus Do? And the idea is that the person wearing the wristband lives with a constant check on their behaviour: "What would Jesus Do? in this situation?" Just for today I'd like to change one letter, from **WWJD** "What Would Jesus Do? "To **WIJD**, "What **IS** Jesus Doing?"

What **IS** Jesus Christ doing right now as we meet, 11:00am, Sunday 28th June 2020? We've been making our way through **The Apostle's Creed**, a wonderful ancient summary of the Christian Faith, and today's line contains the answer to our Question.

"Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father."

What is Jesus Christ Doing now? Well he is sitting at the right hand of God in heaven, and as we shall see shortly, that brings tremendous comfort to us today.

But first, let's remind ourselves what happened. Jesus was crucified on Good Friday to take away our sins. He rose triumphantly from the dead three days later on Easter Sunday morning. For 40 days he appeared to his disciples to prove that he really had risen from the dead and to teach them.... .but what would Jesus do now? Would he live forever on earth in his new resurrection body? (Perhaps some of the disciples hoped so!) No, he had already told them that he was going to depart:

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." (John 14:2-3)

So the disciples are enjoying this new fellowship with Jesus after his resurrection but they know he will have to leave. And so, 40 days after Jesus rose from the dead, he took them

outside of Jerusalem near the village of Bethany and there he lifted up his hands and blessed them and just as he was blessing them, he ascended up into the air until a cloud hid him from view. It was as simple and dignified as that! Ascending symbolises going to be where God is and a cloud symbolises the glorious and holy presence of God. Jesus was going back to his Father in heaven!

Marcus Du Sautoy is a maths professor at Oxford university who wrote a book a few years ago called *“The Great Unknown”* about all the things Science does not know; he ends like this: *“It is important to recognise that we must live with uncertainty, with the unknown, the unknowable...”* Someone listening this morning may be tempted to think “all this talk about Jesus ascending bodily up into the air without a jetpack just couldn’t happen according to science!” But Sautoy is right, there are lots of things Science does not know—and will never know. There’s nothing impossible or even improbable about this wonderful story of Jesus Christ ascending upwardly to heaven, only then to be hidden by a cloud. Jesus had to signal his bodily departure from this world in some way, and this was his chosen way, it was both **literal**—he ascended upwards - and **symbolic**—up means to heaven, cloud means, the glory of God: *“Jesus was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight.” (Acts 1:9)*

And then, after his ascension, the Scriptures teach, he was enthroned in heaven: *God “seated Jesus at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church....” (writes Paul in Ephesians 1)* The one who is seated at the right hand of the monarch rules on the monarch’s behalf. Jesus rules over the universe in heaven.

Where is heaven, I hear someone ask?! We’re not told! Is it in a different dimension? Is it located somewhere in the enormous cosmos that the Hubble Telescope has revealed to us in recent decades? We don’t know! All we do know is that after he ascended into heaven, Jesus was exalted to the highest place and became Sovereign Ruler over Everything! That’s what this line of the creed teaches: *“Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.”*

This series of sermons, you will have noticed is *about Christian doctrine*. And you may wonder why so many sermons on doctrine during this pandemic? Because doctrine makes a strong Christian! Truth helps us through the storms of life. There is no greater example of

that than here at the ascension! Forty days earlier, the disciples were totally distraught at the idea of Jesus leaving them. But when Jesus left them 40 days later, they were filled with great joy! (Luke 24:52) What takes a person from deep distress to great joy? Doctrine! Truth literally changed their lives! Doctrine helped them to understand why Jesus had to die, rise, and ascend into heaven. Doctrine helped them to make sense of their present situation. Doctrine changed their lives from *deep sorrow* to *great joy*! That's what doctrine does and that's why doctrine is important.

When someone says to me, "I don't like doctrine" I say to them, "But doctrine will put steel into your spiritual spine and make you strong in the hour of need." That's we're preaching doctrine during these difficult days. We want to strengthen one another in these uncertain times.

So what is Jesus doing now?

(1) Jesus Christ is Ruling over the Universe

At this very moment, Jesus Christ is ruling over the universe! *"God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church."* Ephesians 1

If we were able to peer into the heavenlies, we would hear choirs of angels worshipping King Jesus: *"Worthy is the lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!"* (Rev 5)

Someone objects: "If Jesus is ruling over the universe at this moment, why does he allow people to kill other people? Why doesn't he stop the Coronavirus pandemic? And perhaps a tragedy closer to home: Why did Jesus allow *that* to happen to me—if he really is King over All?" "I can imagine Jesus being King in a future perfect world, in a new heavens and a new earth, but how can Jesus be King in *this* broken hurting world?" The short answer is that in his infinite wisdom, God has ordained *this period of time in history* where evil is allowed to have some influence. But God has good purposes in allowing it (though those purposes are often hidden from view.) And he is able to overrule that evil by his mighty power to bring about good. The cross of Jesus Christ is the greatest example—wicked men put an innocent man to death, but God "used" that death, overruled that evil, re-purposed that event, to bring about the good of sins forgiven!

So while the rule of King Jesus may be mysterious and sometimes hidden in this present age, the Scriptures make it plain that Jesus is the sovereign ruler over everything—and that should be a great comfort to us!

If you are a follower of the Lord Jesus, know that King Jesus will not allow anything to happen to you except what will ultimately turn out for your good! “What “bad” thing is happening in your life at the moment?” Perhaps you have a list! Will you trust the Sovereign King of the universe, that by his mighty power he will work it out, turn it around, for your good and his glory? The ultimate proof that we truly believe the Lord is King is that we stop worrying about the things that trouble us, jobs, family members, health, whatever.

*The Lord is King! who then shall dare
resist his will, distrust his care,
or murmur at his wise decrees,
or doubt his royal promises?*

What is Jesus doing? He is reigning over the Universe! What else is he doing?

(2) Jesus Christ is praying for you

Hebrews chapter 7: “Jesus is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” Jesus is praying for you, and his prayers are very powerful! Do you recall Peter’s great failure? Fearful to be associated with the condemned Jesus, he lied—three times in a row!—“I don’t know Jesus, don’t know him, don’t know him!” “Simon, Simon, (Peter’s other name) Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith will not fail..” (Luke 22) Peter wept bitterly when the gravity of what he had done sunk in, and he was on the verge of walking out, going back to fishing!

But Jesus prayed for him, and Peter was restored and Peter the Coward became Peter the Brave and on the Day of Pentecost he became Jesus’ chosen leader! All because Jesus prayed for him! What powerful prayers!

Many Christians will pass through a dark “Peter” moment, when it may seem as though their faith will fail. Perhaps you know a fellow believer who is in that place right now! Jesus is praying for them, and so they will not fall, for he is able to keep them— and you—from falling.

(3) Jesus Christ is preparing a place for us!

*“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. **I am going there to prepare a place for you.** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:2-3)* Jesus said those words before his suffering and death, so part of what he meant by “prepare a place for you” was that through his death and suffering, he was going to make the way to God accessible.

But he means more than that! If you have been a Christian even for a short time you will know that this world is not your home and as the years pass you find yourself looking forward to heaven more and more!

My parents had spent 20 years as missionaries in India and Pakistan. By the end of those two decades years they were weary. So in 1970 we came to the west for a while to rest, and I will never forget the welcome we got in St Paul Minnesota.

My dad's home church bought a house and fitted it out just for us. They filled with cupboards with food and bought us a big car. I remember being shown to my room: there was even a radio on the set of drawers—we had never owned a radio as a family, let alone, as children! It was the church's way of saying, "Your home now, rest for a while." And boy, we did!

What is Jesus doing now?! He is preparing a home for his weary children! He's "painting the walls" and "fitting the carpets" and "stocking the kitchen" with our favourite delicacies! So let's not get too settled down here, but set our affections on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God on high. Does someone listening to me this morning need to hear that? You're too caught up in the things of this world, career, house, money, you need to refocus your vision to your true eternal home. And if you are not yet a follower of Jesus, he says to you "In my Father's house there are *many rooms*", enough for everyone, there's one for you, if you will turn to God and believe in his Son.