

OpenTheo

The Ascension of Christ (Patrick Schreiner)

May 21, 2020



Alastair Roberts

Patrick Schreiner joins me to discuss his forthcoming book, 'The Ascension of Christ: Recovering a Neglected Doctrine': <https://lexhampress.com/product/189139/the-ascension-of-christ-recovering-a-neglected-doctrine>.

This video is sponsored by Lexham Press: <https://lexhampress.com/>.

Transcript

Hello, this is the first of five videos sponsored by Lexham Press. On this podcast, my goal has always been to produce and to highlight helpful material for theologically interested persons. I've always sought to keep my material free to all and accessible to a wide audience.

Time is a limited and a costly resource, and given the amount of material that I produce, I am very aware that I make heavy requests upon yours. I've always felt very keenly in my responsibility to honour the time and the attention that my listeners invest with material that rewards it. As a ministry, although I do need to keep books on the shelf and perhaps a little bread on the table too, the purpose of my work is to serve the well-being of my audience, not to make money for myself.

Thanks to generous donors, I'm released from the imperative of ordering this work as a money-making venture. I've been very humbled by the interest people have taken in the work that I do here, and I greatly value and want to maintain the trust that so many of you have shown in following it. From the outset of my work here, I have determined that the funding of it should be congruent, if at all possible, and to the greatest extent possible, with its purpose.

Any funding approach that would restrict the availability of this material is ruled out. Any funding approach that would lead me to start to produce my material for the sake of funding, rather than because I believed it would be of benefit to my audience, is also ruled out. And any funding approach that would compromise the freedom that I have to

Speak forthrightly and broadly about my convictions is ruled out too.

I approached Lexham Press with the proposal for these podcasts, and the idea was that I have been reading their releases for quite some time now and have been deeply impressed with what they are producing. I've written a chapter in one of their recent releases. I knew that some of them appreciated my work, and so I thought that a mutually beneficial arrangement could easily be worked out.

So we've agreed upon a deal in which they will sponsor five podcasts for a trial period. In these podcasts, I will interview authors of recent or forthcoming books that they are producing. They don't tell me what to produce and what to publicise.

I have freedom in designing these interviews as I want. I also get to choose the books and the authors with whom I especially want to speak. I choose books that I believe are worthy of your attention, and when you listen to the podcast, I hope it will be clear why I have done so.

Lexham Press's motto is, God's word changes things. This is a conviction that I very firmly share. I've always tried to keep the word of God at the very centre of my work here, not the fads, the fixations, or the fights of our contemporary contexts.

I have tried to place the insights of faithful scholarship at the service of the people of God, and Lexham draws on the rich history of the church, delves deep into the text of scripture, and seeks to unite scholarship and faith in order to do the same thing. An example of what they've been producing on this front is their Christian Essentials series, the first three volumes of which are on the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. These volumes display a wonderful combination of scholarly, literary, and pastoral instincts, and are of great benefit to the church and any Christians who are looking for substantial yet accessible theology.

You can visit LexhamPress.com to find out more about the books that they are producing. Relevant links will be in the show notes. Within this podcast, I am joined by an author who also exemplifies this approach.

He has written a short and very readable book, a book you could read in a couple of hours. It will be perfect for a church's book table, and yet it's jam-packed with theological insight. Thank you so much for your continued time, attention, and support.

I hope that you will find these videos as stimulating and as helpful as I have found it to make them. God bless. Hello and welcome.

Today, I am joined by the author of a new book, *The Ascension of Christ*, Patrick Schreiner. He's going to discuss the subject of the Ascension on this rather timely day, the Ascension Day. Thank you very much for joining me, Patrick.

Yeah, it's good to be here. Great talking to you. First of all, what inspired you to write a book on the Ascension? Yeah, so I've been working a lot on Acts.

I'm actually writing a commentary currently on Acts. And so as I began to study Acts, I realized just very early on that early on in the book of Acts, Luke recounts the Ascension. And as many people argue, Acts 1-8, that geographical spread of the gospel is one of the key things in Acts.

But one thing that struck me, I've done a lot in the past on kind of spatial or place studies, is that the kind of geographical imagination of Luke stems in part from Jesus' Ascension. So the reason that the gospel goes out to all nations is because he has been enthroned as the King of heaven and earth. And so if you tie those two narratives together, which I think we're supposed to, because they don't get the Spirit until after Christ has ascended, I think Christ in some sense, his Ascension, breaks that barrier between heaven and earth.

So the short answer is, as I began to study Acts, I recognized, we talk a lot about the cross, we talk a lot about the resurrection, hopefully, but we don't always speak a lot about what the Ascension has to do with those two events, or what importance or significance it has. And as I began to look through Acts, and then the rest of the New Testament, and for that matter, the rest of the Old Testament, the reality of the Ascension just kind of seemed to spring up everywhere. It's kind of like one of those things where once you see the keys, you see everywhere, right? And so for me, I was just looking at the sermons and even the declaration that he's Lord and Messiah, according to Peter in Acts 2 is based on his resurrection and Ascension.

There's kind of a key demarcation, actually, in that speech between those two. And he uses two different Old Testament texts to support that, Psalm 16, Psalm 110. And so, yeah, I was just really impressed by the importance of the Ascension.

It's not that I had denied the Ascension in my own thinking, but I don't think I articulated the significance of the Ascension. So that's where it stemmed from. But certainly, one thing I tried to do in my book is go back to the Old Testament and kind of show that this was something that was predicted long ago.

And it's kind of neat because in Luke and Acts, you get a pretty bare historical report of what happened. There's not much theological reflection in those texts. So at the end of Luke, Luke 24 and Acts chapter 1, you get just this, this is what happened.

This is what happened to Jesus as he rose up, and this is what they saw. But you really get the theology from the Old Testament, a lot of the theology from the Old Testament, which is fun because you get the report and then you go back and you're like, you almost get a heavenly view. Like what happened when he went up there? Well, there's a declaration from the Father.

This is my son. There's a Ascension of the Son of Man, Daniel 7, so forth and so on. So that's where it all stemmed from.

That's a long answer to a short question. And if I'm correct in thinking, Psalm 110 verse 1 is the most quoted verse in the New Testament. That's correct.

Yeah. And that's a huge text, obviously, in terms of his kingship. In my book, I look at it from prophet, priest, and king, just because I think that gives us kind of a fuller view of Christ's work after Ascension.

Now, when we read the Gospels, there isn't an awful lot of material directly speaking about the Ascension, certainly not compared to the crucifixion or the resurrection. And indeed, in some Gospels, it isn't there at all. How can we see the importance of the Ascension within the text itself? Because it seems understandable that people would neglect it if they're just looking at how much space is given in the text.

What is the significance that it has that puts it alongside those events? Yeah, that's certainly true. And I begin the book actually by speaking about one of the reasons we've neglected the Ascension is because I think there's five verses that recount the narrative officially in Luke. So you don't have at the end of Matthew, Jesus is still there.

At the end of Mark, people are running away scared. At the end of John, Jesus is still there on the beach with his disciples. And then you have the other ending as well.

But yeah, so a lot of people are like, well, if the Ascension is so important, why don't these other authors reference it? Well, I actually do think they reference it, but they do it in different ways. So you think of the end of Matthew, right? The famous Great Commission, where Jesus says, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. That's a clear allusion to Daniel chapter seven, which I think is a key Ascension text.

So although Matthew doesn't narrate it, he certainly is alluding to it. And I think that's kind of a proleptic way of referring to it. So I think in one sense, it's very true that it is at the end of Matthew.

You also have in the trials like Matthew 26, 64, when Jesus says, I tell you from now on, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven. So there's very clear indications in the Gospels that Jesus is already thinking of his own Ascension. He knows this is going to happen.

And then in John, I mean, just think about the themes in John. He references many times how he's going to go to the Father, how he's going to depart to the Father. He's going to return to the Father.

All that different language, I think, is Ascension language. So I think we need to be careful to not say, well, it's not narrated, therefore it's not as important. The theology is

certainly there in the Gospels.

And certainly within John's Gospel, it's presented as something that is a demonstration of his origin, that as he returns to the Father, it's proof that he has originally come from the Father. That's right. That's exactly right.

Yeah. Within the Book of Acts and elsewhere, it seems that the Ascension isn't just the end of Christ's story that he's sort of savior emeritus. There is something about his continuing work that takes place.

For instance, the sending of the Spirit. You see Stephen in his speech speaking about Christ standing at God's right hand. And other times we read in, for instance, Hebrews that Christ is active at God's right hand.

What part of his continuing work can we see in the Ascension? How does it feature in our understanding of Christ as Savior and Lord? Yeah, that's a great question. I do think we want to affirm that the Ascension is kind of an authorization, a culmination of Christ's work, that we can begin there. But one of the things I really want to emphasize is that this actually continues Christ's work.

So Christ is not inert or inactive now. He is currently still working in the heavens. There's a great quote, I forget who said it, but a seated cabinet is something like they continue to work, just like the seated Christ continues to work.

And so I think it was Peter Orr, he has a book on Christ's Ascension. He had this line that I really liked how he said, we like to speak about what Christ has done and what he will do, but sometimes we neglect what he is currently doing. So what is Christ doing now? Certainly it's very important to speak about what he's done in terms of the cross, the resurrection, so forth and so on, and what he will do when he returns.

But there's a very real sense in which he continues. And my argument is actually that the Ascension culminates Christ's earthly work and marks a shift in Christ's function as prophet, priest, and king, and really that he now functions in a better sense as the heavenly prophet, priest, and king. So in terms of the prophetic sense, Christ continues to build his church through his word as it is applied by the Spirit.

So as you mentioned, at the Ascension, the Spirit now comes and you've got these texts in John, right, where he says, it's better if I go away. Why is it better if he goes away? It's better that the Spirit comes to us. I think the Ascension, it can be confusing to us because we think this is a strange plan.

Like why didn't he stick around and really end this whole thing? Which maybe that's what the disciples possibly were thinking in Acts 1-6 when they asked that question, but he thinks it's better that he goes away. And even in 2 Peter, he says, we have this word that's more confirmed now that Christ has ascended. He's actually referring back to in 2

Peter 1. If you remember this text, we were on the Mount of Transfiguration.

We have this prophetic word more confirmed now, I think because he's watched now the death, the resurrection, and the Ascension of Christ. So there's something about his prophetic work in and through the church, which actually heightens through the Spirit. You have that text is it John 14? I'm not remembering the exact verse, but maybe you'll recall it where he says, you will do greater works than I will.

Is that John 14? Eight? I want to 18 or something like that. I think it might be John 16. Or is it John 16-7? I can check.

I can't remember. That's John 16-7. Anyways, there's that text that says you will do greater works than me.

John 14-18 is the text. I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you.

But anyways, what does that mean? He's going to do greater work. We're going to do greater works than Jesus. I think a lot of us look at that and say, there's no way we can do greater works than Jesus.

But there's a real sense in which Jesus was limited by his human body. I know that's a strange thing to say about our Savior. But as the Spirit comes, there's also a very real sense in which the Spirit empowers Christ's body to then do the works that he did over the whole earth.

Christ did not travel very far in his earthly ministry. He was relegated to a pretty small piece of land. And so I think some of those greater works, there's a few ways you can take that.

But some of those greater works actually means just he was limited by space and time. And now that the Spirit comes, we can extend those works, the works of Christ, not exactly in the same way, but as his body upon the earth. So that's just the prophetic sense.

I think we also need to think in terms of Christ's priestly work. He's now interceding in heaven. He has a better body.

He's in a better tent. He's presented better blood. I mean, this is all Hebrews, right? And then as the King, he now rules and reigns over all the spiritual forces, the cosmic forces, heaven and earth.

There's a very real sense in which he is declared to be King of the earth on the earth, but he's actually installed as the King of heaven and earth at the ascension. And so I really, I want to push people to say Christ is still active and he's actually active in a greater sense now that he's ascended to heaven. And the way that it's presented within the gospels, it

is in many ways, arguably the gospel statement, Jesus is Lord.

And that statement is one that hinges upon the event of the ascension. There is this more general movement of the cross is presented as an ascension within the story of John, and then that moves up into resurrection. But the culmination is ultimately the ascension.

That's right. And you have this really cool story in 2 Kings 2, where Elijah ascends and gives Elisha his spirit. If you go back and read that text carefully, it's a really interesting text because before Elijah ascends, Elisha asked to get a double portion of his spirit.

And Elisha says something really interesting to him. He says, or Elijah says something really interesting to Elisha. He says, unless you watch me ascend, you will not get a double portion of my spirit.

And I thought that text has always struck me as strange. Like why do you see you have to watch Elijah ascend? But then you go over to Acts and you see in verses 9 through 11, there's all this emphasis on them watching his ascension, Jesus' ascension. And so I think there's a very real sense in which we're supposed to connect those two stories in a prophetic sense that now the apostles are the new prophets upon the earth who get a double portion in some sense of Christ's spirit at Pentecost.

And so you've got all these echoes, and that's just a prophetic echo. You've got all these kingly echoes as well in the Old Testament that are actually informing how we're to view his ascension. That connection with the story of Elijah and Elisha is one I've reflected upon in the past because Elijah is given a particular mission in 1 Kings chapter 19.

And the mission he's given is threefold. He has to anoint Elisha, the son of Shabbat, as prophet in his place. He has to anoint Hazael, king of Syria, and to anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi.

And he actually only does one of those things. Elisha does all the others. And so his ministry is continued in that of Elisha.

And so Elisha's ministry and Elijah's ministry are all that Elijah began both to do and teach in the terms of his ministry being continued by Elisha in the same way the book of Acts begins with all that Christ began both to do and teach, the implication being he's continuing in his church. That's exactly right. And you have another, I call them shadow stories.

I just like that language of Moses ascending Mount Sinai, right, and going into the presence of God and then bringing the law back down to the people. And the people can't accomplish that law. But again, if you connect that to Acts and Pentecost and the ascension, you have now the new priest or the new prophet going up the mountain in one sense.

And then what is Pentecost? Well, Pentecost is that new covenant, right? The law is then applied to their hearts. And so it's repeating that story, but in a better sense. Now the people can follow the Torah from their heart, according to the promises given and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and so forth and so on.

So all of these stories at some point, I'm already talking to someone about doing this. I want to do a whole biblical theology of ascending, descending, because it's one of those themes that just is all over the scriptures and you just have to see it because from the, I mean, Adam and Eve on the garden, right? They're on the mountain, then they have to descend from that mountain. And the whole goal is to ascend back to God.

You think about the Psalms of ascent, right? With David, who will ascend the holy hill of the Lord, but only those with clean hands and a pure heart. Again, it's one of those things that once you see it, it's just all over the scriptures. And one of the ways in which Luke uses this, I've wondered at least that he uses it this way.

He has a story in the gospel, which has a 40 day period. And that's the story of the presentation in the temple. We think of it as the story of the temptation in the wilderness, but there's a story before that 40 days after his birth, he is presented in the temple.

He ascends to the temple with his family and there is an offering there that is the offering that had to be offered for a child that was born. And I wonder whether there's some connection that Luke wants us to draw there. I mean, the sacrifice would be the ascension of a lamb and the sin offering of a dove.

And I wonder whether we should see some way in which that parallels the ascent of Christ as the lamb, and then the dove, the spirit descending in the form of a purification of the church by faith. I figured you would say something that I wished I would have put in my book and now you have. One of the things that I didn't do a lot with is the ascension offerings, which I would love to meditate more on just in terms of the Old Testament.

And so this pleasing aroma comes up before God and you're kind of bringing that into the New Testament as well. I certainly think there's connections there, even as Christ, the faithful son, the faithful lamb, the faithful sacrifice goes up before the father into that, according to Hebrews, that true temple, the one not made by hands, the one that's in the heavens and that he comes as that pleasing aroma before the father. And according to Exodus, as the priest comes in before the father, he's representing his people on his breastplate, right, and on his shoulders.

And so we, according to Ephesians, are now seated with Christ in the heavenly places because the body must be connected to the head in some source. So how can Paul say that we are in the heavens with him? Well, because our true priest, our true king is now

in the heavens with the father and we are with him there as well in some very real sense. There seems to be a purpose in Pentecost that's not merely the fact that Christ having ascended can give the spirit.

The spirit seems to serve an apologetic purpose that the spirit having been given, there is proof that Christ has ascended. And I think we see further examples of this as the spirit, whereas Christ, the evidence of his, him being in heaven is seen in his judgments upon the earth. I think particularly in the context of the use of the prophet, prophecy from Daniel, the son of man coming to the ancient of days.

And I wonder how the ascension of Christ is presented in terms of its implications on the ground, on the earth. What does it mean that we have one in heaven for us on the ground? Yeah, I mean, there's so many things we could say. If you look at Acts, I think one of the main things that we can say is we have now the one who has been confirmed with all authority in heaven and earth.

So he is the Lord and Messiah that we should worship. As you mentioned, we offer his people and defending his people according to Acts 7 and Stephen's speech. So as the people of God are being persecuted by maybe the empires of the earth or the religious leaders who are opposed to Christ, Christ stands in heaven as our judge, as our advocate, as our lawyer, in some sense before the father.

And this I think stems from the priesthood theme, but saying these are my people. There's that famous text about him standing at the end, not sitting, of Stephen's speech when he's being martyred. And most people argue he's standing in some sense defending.

He's defending Stephen saying, this is my witness. And there's a very real sense in which we witness to the power. You think about the empowerment of the spirit.

We witness to the power of Christ because the spirit always testifies to Christ. And so there's a sense in which the spirit, according to the scriptures, is always pointing us back to Christ and the power of Christ. Now, what power is that? The power of what? Well, according to Acts, that power is especially related to the resurrection life and reign of Jesus Christ.

And so it's with great power that the apostles go out and they heal others. They make the lame walk. And it's with great power that they testify to Jesus's resurrection, that he's the Messiah and Lord.

So certainly that Christ is in heaven, it's not that he's, well, he is bodily absent. But another way, he's not absent because the spirit is here with us. And again, according to John, it's better that we have the spirit.

In one sense, we have the presence of Christ with us in a greater sense. And another

sense, we long for that day when we will be with him bodily. And that, I spent some time just thinking through that, like, what does his presence slash absence mean? And I think we need to be more nuanced in terms of how we speak through what presence and absence means.

He's certainly absent bodily, but there's a sense in which he's more present with us by the spirit in another very real and true sense. How do you see the churches, the fact that the church is spoken of as seated in heavenly places with Christ? It seems that we're somehow implicated with him in his situation at God's right hand. How are we to understand what that means for us? Because it certainly doesn't feel like we're seated in heavenly places with Christ much of the time.

How can we take hold of that and maybe understand what Paul is saying there? Yeah, I mean, that's a difficult question, one that I've struggled with, especially in the midst of COVID. We sure don't feel like we're seated anywhere, like reigning or ruling with Christ. But if union with Christ, if in Christ is true, if we are connected, and I already alluded to this, if we are connected to the head and we are his body, there's a real sense in which what has happened to Christ has happened to us.

And therefore, we are now God's royal family now already, really. We're Christ's holy nation, his holy priesthood, as he is our true high priest, and we are his prophets upon the earth. So those kind of three different things that I look at, there's a very real sense in which we are, I don't know if I want to use the language of drawing power from Christ's power, but that we are with him there and with him here.

And that both of those things are doubly true. I think it goes back to the mystery, and this is something I want to continue to think through, the mystery of that connection of the head and the body. And that there's something more there.

That's the one way I like to put it to my class, and this maybe doesn't answer the question, but at least it gets us thinking. That's not a mere metaphor. That's more than a metaphor.

And it seems that Paul is pushing more into that than just saying this is an analogy. That's really true. And it's interesting that even in Greco-Roman literature, you would have a Caesar would kind of be the head of his body, politic, his nation as well.

And so if you go to kind of ecclesiology, I don't know if I'm off your question now, now I'm just rambling. I think it follows the line. Okay.

If we go to ecclesiology, I think it's in a very real sense, we are his embassy now here upon the earth. Our true home is with Christ, and we are now representing our true home. We are heavenly citizens even now, and going to that already not yet.

We're already heavenly citizens now representing that heavenly kingdom here upon the

earth, and we're waiting for those two to be reconciled. So you can hear me struggling a little bit over that, but I think there's something, maybe that's a mysterious thing, how we can both be in the heavens with Christ and upon the earth. But there's certainly theology that backs it up.

So I'd love to hear what you think about that though. I found the image of Christ's body to be the most helpful one, because there is a union between the body and the head. And there are single units, but the head is in the heavens, but the head being in the heavens implicates the body in the heavens.

And the image of angels ascending and descending upon the son of man in John 1 is one that has often served as a sort of linchpin for my understanding of what this means, that Jesus is Jacob's ladder. He's the one that provides the conduit between heaven and earth, the answer to the Tower of Babel. Tower of Babel sought to connect those two realms in a way that was trying to Promethean storming of the heavens.

But what we have in Christ is heaven come down to earth and then man brought up to heaven and the two connected in a single unit in Christ himself. Yeah. And that makes sense of Ephesians 3, where the powers look at this and wonder at this amazing plan.

And maybe they're wondering at that kind of connection we could say between heaven and earth through Christ's body, that he's spanning that space of heaven and earth and now there's ascending and descending upon him and that the spiritual forces are like blown away by this. And that's such an amazing text in Ephesians 3, where they look on this plan of the church and they're like, whoa, this is an amazing plan. And they're shocked at it in that sense.

How should the ascension inform our Christian life of prayer, our life of worship and of witness? Yeah, that's a great question. One thing in terms of just practice and theology and practice, I like to go to the sacraments and look at those first in terms of the ascension. Baptism is a very clear sign of us dying, descending, and then rising up in one sense.

And so we're actually imitating him in that movement. And then the Lord's Supper as well, there's a sense in which we are recalling what he's done and we're recognizing that he's in heaven and that we're also though remembering that one day we will eat with him again. So actually, the Lord's Supper, we're recalling that he is not here in one sense, but another sense he is here fully in some sense through those elements, right? That he is present with us through those elements, but we long for the day when we can eat with him bodily for that messianic banquet.

And so I think of Calvin's doctrine of the supper here, which has a very strong ascension and role of the spirits, that connection between your friends body is very much part of what you're saying. Yeah. And then in terms of prayer, you know, I didn't spend a lot of

time thinking of that.

But I do just want to say Christ as our high priest is interceding for us in heaven. That's very clear from Hebrews. And so what is his main role as priest in heaven? Well, he's interceding for us.

So as we pray to the father, it seems like he is that mediator who brings those requests before the father and represents us in his purity. And the father looks at the son and is well pleased. And so he's well pleased with our prayers in that sense.

And that, I mean, just at a practical level, I think that gives us great confidence. I think many times we come stumbling and stammering before the father, not sure what to say. You think about Romans 8, we have groans, we're not even sure how to put words to what we need.

But if you remember, you have the high priest who is actually interceding and praying, not only for you and bringing those requests before the father, that gives you great confidence to come. I mean, that's the theology of Hebrews, right? You have great confidence to come before the throne of grace. It's no longer a throne of fear, of trembling, but it's a throne of grace.

And you can come with confidence. So in terms of prayer, yeah, I think we come with great confidence because Christ is there for us. Looking at the doctrine of the ascension, but not just the doctrine, the actual accounts, it seems to be one of the points within the gospels and in Acts where the trinitarian shape of Christ's work comes into focus.

Christ ascends to the father and he receives from the father the Holy Spirit, which he gives to the church. How can the doctrine of ascension inform our understanding of God? Yeah, in my last chapter, I actually speak about the trinitarian nature of the ascension. When we think of the ascension, we think of Christ and sometimes we stop there.

But certainly all three persons of the trinity are involved in some sense in this act, in the sense that the father is and confirm faithful work of the son. The father in one sense, it speaks of it in a few different ways in the scriptures, but he is authorizing and exalting the son. God has exalted him.

The father is exalting him. And then for Christ's own work, just if we go to Christ as well, this is the vindication in one sense. I think we use that language more for resurrection, but I think this is also the vindication of Christ's work, that his work is vindicated in the ascension as the father raises him up to the right hand and he's seated.

And then in terms of the spirit, I do think we go back to that notion of it's not until, and I need to meditate more on this, but there's some reason that it's not until the God-man is exalted that the spirit then is able to be poured out upon all people. There's a sense in which, and I know we have in the gospels, like in John, Jesus breathes on his disciples, so

forth and so on, but I tend to think those are a little proleptic. There's a sense in which Jesus is the possessor of the spirit in the gospels and that then he bequeaths that spirit upon his disciples, his people, only after he has ascended to the right hand of the father.

Once his work has been confirmed and authorized, then he has authority to send the spirit to the earth. So I think we need to be very specific that it's not until after the ascension that that act actually happens. The other gospels are more, we don't have room in our narratives to speak of the next phase, so we're going to speak of it in different ways.

The ascension is not the end of the story of the ministry of Christ. We're still awaiting some events in the future. I'd be interested to hear your thoughts about how the ascension provides a helpful and a necessary way of bridging the gap, as it were, between the death and resurrection of Christ, his earthly ministry, and his second coming.

One of the things when I first started writing this book is I began to use the language just in my initial drafts of this is the climax of Christ's work. This is the climax. I don't think that's entirely wrong, but I did stop and reflect there is a sense in which there's another climax that's coming when he returns in Revelation.

Psalms 110.1 is really helpful here when he says, the Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until, you've got that key phrase, until I make your enemies your footstool. So this isn't the end of the story. This is actually the beginning of the end.

Christ's kingship has now been affirmed, but in another sense, again, I want to think through this language, but in one sense, it's hidden. It's still hidden in the heavens, and we are here upon the earth to proclaim that kingship of Christ, that lordship of Christ, the messianic nature of Christ, but it will finally be manifested. It will finally be revealed fully when he descends from heaven, 1 Thessalonians, Revelation 19, so forth and so on.

When he descends and the whole earth will recognize he is the king of kings and the lord of lords. Right now we are witnessing to that reality, but people can't physically see that right now. So, and now I forgot what your original question was.

How it provides a bridge between the earthly events of Christ's ministry and then, or the events of Christ's earthly ministry and his second coming. Yeah. So I would just say that we want, again, we want to keep that, those two poles clear in our mind, that there is a sense in which it is the beginning of that end, and that we witness to that.

I'd also want to say that, you know, when we think of Christ as a prophet, priest, and king, as the prophet, he proclaimed God's word. As the prophet, he performed miracles. As the prophet, he had the spirit.

As the priest, this is debated, but I think he was a priest upon the earth too, although

many Hebrew scholars are now saying we shouldn't say that, but I think he acts in priestly ways as he prays for his people, as he teaches his people, as he forgives sins, as he heals, as he cleanses and so forth and so on. That there's a real sense in which both the prophetic kingly and priestly offices of Christ are carried out upon the earth, but are now carried out in heaven in a greater sense. That he is the greater high priest now that he is in heaven because he is in that true tent, as Hebrew says.

He is the greater prophet because he has now sent the spirit, and he is the greater king because he rules over heaven and earth. And so I want to bring those, what we see on the earth is that clear indication of what he has done, but we must also bring that to what he is doing currently. So it's not that we know his earthly work, which informs his heavenly work, if that makes sense.

We have the revelation, the incarnation of Christ. And so we don't, maybe the danger of emphasizing the ascension is that some people would say, oh, you're neglecting the incarnation now. You're neglecting the cross.

You're neglecting the resurrection. But really all of these things are a singular script. All of these things come together.

And so a true and good and healthy view of the ascension actually pushes us back to the incarnation because it's the God-man, it's the affirmation of the incarnation in the greatest sense. That the man Christ Jesus has now ascended before the father. One author, I forget who it was right now, said, and I'll probably butcher the quote now, but it's a great quote where he said, the dust of earth sits on the throne room of heaven.

In other words, as Christ went up, he was dirty at some point, and he's still a man there ruling and reigning. And that's true also of the cross. I don't think we take away from the cross when we speak of the ascension.

The ascension pushes us back to the cross because according to John, the cross was his exaltation. It was his lifting up. And so there's a sense in which all the authors say his lifting up began as he went up on that tree, and then he was raised from the dead, and then he was raised up to the heavens.

Those are all lifting up realities. And so if we don't have the resurrection and we don't have, sorry, if we don't have the ascension, we do not have the vindication of the cross because the cross just becomes a tragedy. And so we have to take all of these things together.

That's true of the resurrection as well. I think the most difficult thing for us to do is, and this part of this is based on the scriptures, is to distinguish between the resurrection and the ascension because sometimes in the scriptures those slide seamlessly into kind of glorification or exaltation language. So you think of Philippians 2. So is there any

distinguishing feature between resurrection and ascension? Because one of the reasons I think we neglect the ascension is because when we read about exaltation or we read about glorification, we mainly think resurrection.

But I think the authors of the scriptures are thinking of both as a singular script, but it's also very clear that they view them as two distinct acts. So you think of at the end of John, Mary clings to Jesus in the garden. And what does he say to her? He says, no, you can't cling to me.

I must ascend to the Father. It's not over yet. And the disciples, when they ask her, are you going to establish the kingdom? That's the resurrected Jesus Christ standing before them to live forever.

And he says, no, I must send the spirit now. I must ascend. So the resurrection, I think most simply and helpfully, the resurrection proclaims that Christ lives forever and the ascension proclaims that Christ reigns forever.

So the kingship reality, although I speak of prophet, priest, and king, and I think this most historical scholars have said this too. There's a reality in which the kingship metaphor is the root metaphor through which priesthood and prophet fall under. I'd love to tease that out more in future writings, but I think from the beginning in Genesis, there's a clear kingship reality.

And that you even have possibly throughout the scriptures, you've maybe meditated on this more than I have, that there's the separation of those tasks in some sense that are then united again in Christ. And you even see an echo of the uniting in David's life as he acts as a priest and a prophet and a king all at the same time. But you also have Saul who does so in a way that's not called for.

So that's a stream of thought that I'm just kind of hinting at that I'd love to kind of tease out more. But I do think kingship becomes that root metaphor through which prophet and priest actually flow from. Can you think of some very practical ways in which people can incorporate a fuller understanding of the ascension into prayer, into their piety and into preaching as well? Yeah, in terms of, let me just go straight to preaching and then I can go into the other ones.

In terms of preaching, one of the ways I like to start this conversation, we didn't start this conversation this way, but if you're in a low church tradition, you celebrate Christmas, you probably celebrate Good Friday, and you probably celebrate Easter. And typically, that's where it starts, at least in America, or that's where it stops in terms of America. So you're celebrating his incarnation.

Mother's Day as well. You're celebrating his incarnation, you're celebrating his death, and you're celebrating his resurrection. But kind of view the resurrection as the

culmination of this party, and we're all rejoicing because Christ is raised from the dead and amen.

So glad we're celebrating Easter. That's an important thing to do. But according to the church calendar, you actually have 40 days after that, you have Ascension Sunday, where typically in much of church history and many church traditions, you would then have a sermon 40 days later on the Ascension.

And then a week after that, you'd have a Pentecost sermon. So I think one of the best things to do is actually just complete that kind of Christ act and have the five-fold piece there of Christ's word in the church. That would get you to preach on the Ascension at least once a year, which I think would be the minimum to preach on the Ascension.

So let's recover Ascension Sunday and let's keep preaching on it. So now that I'm writing this book, my pastor has me preach every Ascension Sunday. So that's kind of fun.

But yeah, so in terms of church, that's what we should do. In terms of personal piety, I think recognizing as we spoke of in terms of prayer, recognizing that you have the great high priest who is interceding for you in heaven and he's not embarrassed by you. That's one of the language I like to use because you are unified to the son and he is not embarrassed by you.

He actually represents you in heaven, which gives you great desire to go and pray before the Father through Christ because you know it is a throne of grace and it's a throne of welcome and hospitality because the son is there. And so in terms of piety, in terms of praying, I think this compels us to pray and it compels us to pray theologically because we know Christ is ruling and reigning and he's the one who's going to ultimately enact these things that we pray for. So we're going before, right, not only the priest, but we're going before the king of heaven and earth who is still directing all affairs.

It's not like we believe in Christ in a deistic sense after his ascension. We believe that he's still providentially ordering everything. And so if you believe someone has the power and the will to providentially order things, then you would go to them and knock on that door and say, this is what I need in this time.

This is what I'm asking you to do in this time. So a lack in a negative sense, and I'm preaching to myself now, but a lack of prayer is a lack of acknowledging the reality of the ascension. And that's very convicting for us.

So yeah, there was another piece of it that maybe I missed, but it was partly in prayer. So I found this very illuminating and helpful. Thank you so much.

Just in conclusion, did you have, when you start off a book like this, you have an idea presumably of where you're going to go with your arguments and where it's going to end up. And yet there's almost always a surprise. There's almost always some way in which

you find your mind being changed or your thinking being developed and you come out of the whole process changed yourself.

Were there any particular ways that that happened for you in writing this book? Yeah, that's a great question. This book, as I said at the beginning, it stemmed from work on Acts, but then I actually preached a sermon that kind of followed the outline of my book. And that's where the outline for this book came from.

So the outline largely stayed the same. I think what shifted for me was number one, I recognized that you could read through this and even in my own mind, I wanted to emphasize the ascension so much that I could overstate things. You know, when you see something, you want to just hammer it home, which is okay.

But so what I did in the last chapter, which was really actually probably the most formative for me, because it was newer to me. And we've talked through some of these things now, but relating it to other doctrines, relating it to other events in Christ's life, what we could call like the theological grammar of the ascension. In other words, have I emphasized the ascension so much that I'm no longer putting my eyes on the cross when Paul says, I came and preached Christ and him crucified.

Or when 1 Corinthians 15, he doesn't even mention the ascension explicitly. He actually does later on in 1 Corinthians 15. But in that little summary at the beginning, he doesn't mention the ascension.

And so for me, correlating it, I mean, I do biblical studies, but correlating it with other doctrines and other realities was really helpful for me to say, we can still lift up this doctrine, this event, and not downplay other ones. But as it's almost like a drawstring in that sense, you lift it up and the others come up with it. I think sometimes we think, well, if you lift that one up, you're denigrating those other ones.

I just don't think that's true. I think as we have done this, it actually brings all of these things up together. And then the other piece, I think the other piece that I made a transition on as I was writing this was to tie it to the church at the end of every chapter.

And to say, just as Christ acts as our prophet, priest, and king, there seems to be evidence in the scriptures themselves that we now act as his representative, royal family upon the earth, and his priests upon the earth. I mean, what do we do? We pray for one another. We intercede for one another.

But we not only intercede for one another, according to 1 Timothy, we intercede even for the nations and the rulers of the earth. And that's a very priestly task. I think that's kind of obvious as we read 1 Peter chapter 2. We can see that.

But to actually tease those things out in greater detail and look for the priesthood, the prophetic, and the kingly realities that are now here in the church that we are now to go

and perform because Christ has ascended. That is really helpful. Thank you very much.

And your book is called *The Ascension of Christ*. That's correct. It's a short book, very readable and accessible to a wide audience.

And when does it come out? And where can people find it? Yeah, it comes out. It's with Lexham Press. And it comes out, I think it's at the end of July is when it's coming out.

So they can find it on Amazon or Lexham.com, wherever you get books that nerds want to read, so not Barnes and Noble. Thank you very much for joining me, Patrick. And happy Ascension Day, everyone.

Thank you. It's great to be here.