



## Pastor's Page

***“Meanwhile, back on earth..”***

Dianne Abbot, Labour MP for Hackney North was asked on BBC1 late last Thursday night what had been her ‘moment of the week’ Her answer was that it was when Gordon Brown moved out of 10 Downing Street. She wasn’t rejoicing about this but said that she had found this historical moment both sad and poignant. I missed it! I suspect that a lot of people (including Christians) missed another very significant event last Thursday too....Ascension Day. I find it interesting that we organise special services, have parties, take a few days off work to celebrate Jesus coming to earth yet we let the official day of his return to heaven largely slip by unnoticed! Perhaps, if we’re honest we find the simple account of his ascension a little embarrassing. Some Bible scholars (perhaps for similar reasons) argue that we shouldn’t understand the ascension as an historical happening but rather as allegorical language teaching us a spiritual truth. However, in Acts Luke refers five times in two verses to the fact that the apostles **saw** Jesus being taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9,10) I believe that the historical and physical ascension of Jesus is crucial to our faith because it teaches us a number of important truths;

- ❖ **Christ’s Position** The bible records the fact that Jesus left this earth and returned to heaven. “While he was blessing them he left them and was taken up into heaven” (Luke 24:51) Hence this is where Jesus is today– in heaven. So the ascension would seem to teach us that heaven is a real place *spatially* and as well as spiritually. Jesus went there in his body. He went back to his Father – Jesus Christ is the first man ever to go to heaven. Paul tells us in Romans 8:34 and Ephesians 1:20 that here (in heaven) Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father, confirming both his identity as the Son of God and his authority as the Lord of creation. All of this underlines the unique ministry of Jesus and the absolute reality of heaven.
- ❖ **Christ’s Provision.** The ascension also reminds us of Christ’s great provision. The writer to the Hebrews says; “After he had provided purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven” (Hebrews 1:3b) With his work of salvation complete he returns to the Father from where he sends his Holy Spirit to live inside Christians to be his witnesses (his **body** on earth) whilst he prays for us in heaven (Romans 8:34)
- ❖ **Christ’s Commission** Lastly the Ascension reminds us that we have a work to do until Jesus returns. Namely to “make disciples of all nations.” (Matt 28:19) Commenting on the Disciples’ response to the ascension John Stott says; *“There was something inappropriate about their gazing up into the sky when they had been commissioned to go to the ends of the earth. The vision they were to cultivate was not upwards in nostalgia but outwards in compassion to a lost world which needed him. It is the same for us”*

We may have missed the commemoration of the Ascension on Thursday but it shouldn’t stop us getting on with our God-given commission today.

16<sup>th</sup> May 2010