

HE ASCENDED  
INTO HEAVEN



# HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN

LEARN TO LIVE AN  
ASCENSION-SHAPED LIFE

Tim Perry

Aaron Perry



PARACLETE PRESS  
BREWSTER, MASSACHUSETTS

*He Ascended into Heaven: Living an Ascension-Shaped Life*

2010 First Printing

Copyright © 2010 by Aaron Perry and Tim Perry

ISBN: 978-1-55725-547-1

Unless otherwise noted, scriptural references are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, copyright 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted with KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations noted with NAS are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations noted with ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Perry, Tim S., 1969-

He ascended into Heaven : learn to live an ascension-shaped life / Tim Perry,  
Aaron Perry.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-55725-631-7

1. Jesus Christ--Ascension. I. Perry, Aaron Jenkins. II. Title.

BT500.P47 2010

232.97--dc22

2010013810

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in an electronic retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Published by Paraclete Press

Brewster, Massachusetts

[www.paracletepress.com](http://www.paracletepress.com)

Printed in the United States of America

*For Greg and Rachel, David and Ruth,*  
They believed when we could not.

*For Ken Gavel, Doc Taylor, Melvin McMillen,*  
*Clinton Branscombe, and John Symonds*  
For keeping theology, biblical studies, and preaching united.



# Contents

PREFACE

ix

## The Ascension and Jesus



1

LOOKING UP

CONSIDERING THE ASCENSION OF JESUS ♦ 3

2

LOOKING BACK

THE ASCENSION AND THE LIFE OF JESUS ♦ 13

3

LOOKING AT

THE ASCENSION AND THE DEATH OF JESUS ♦ 27

4

TAKEN UP

THE ASCENSION AND THE ABSENCE OF JESUS ♦ 39

# The Ascension and the Christian Life



5

## CONFESSION

THE ASCENSION AND THE POWERS ♦ 75

6

## MARTYRDOM

THE END OF WITNESS ♦ 77

7

## SACRAMENTS

THE PROMISE OF PRESENCE ♦ 93

### BENEDICTION

109

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

111

### APPENDIX

113

### NOTES

121

## Preface

**R**eflecting on the Ascension is necessary, because it suffers from lack of attention in modern times. If the ascension of Jesus is as important as we think it is, why do so many contemporary Christians think so little about it?

A lot of otherwise completely orthodox and very devout people don't bother with the Ascension because, frankly, it's hard to swallow. We allow the questions—themselves provoked by Luke's way of telling the story—in effect, to silence the story. After all, are we really to believe that a literal flesh-and-blood Jesus defied gravity and really rose into the air until a cloud hid him? We've seen far too many portrayals of Jesus floating in wisps of cloudy air to take that image seriously. What happened to Jesus' body after it disappeared? Did it fall back to earth having served its purpose while Jesus' soul left this world behind?

The temptation to drop the ascension story because it appears to ask so much of our ability to suspend disbelief is profoundly real. "He ascended into heaven," after all, is enshrined in the great Creeds, precisely because it is part of the New Testament witness and a central element of historic faith.

To demythologize the Ascension we would have to resort to saying something like this: the Ascension is not only an event in the life of Jesus, but also it is Luke's way of narrating the significance of Jesus' life for his first disciples. It has to do with what Jesus meant to the disciples and, by extension,

what Jesus means for us. It is not only a report of what actually happened, it is a statement of the difference Jesus makes in disciples' lives. And since we modern disciples no longer share Luke's belief in a universe of a heaven above and a hell below, the notion of Jesus literally being taken up in glory can be set aside for other, more suitable metaphors. The Ascension is a metaphor that describes the way Christians experience the reign of Jesus in their hearts. It helps us make sense of the fact that Jesus is physically absent and spiritually present to us at the same time.

Of course, this strategy does grasp a deep truth central to this little book: the ascension of Jesus *has* profound implications for the way disciples, whether from the first century, or the twenty-first, live. However, the effort to hang on to the implications while dispensing with the event itself is ultimately in vain. The only way to maintain that the Ascension continues to speak to contemporary followers of Jesus is to begin from the conviction that the Ascension is, in the first instance, something that really happened to Jesus. In his body.

At least, that's what this book hopes to show.

# The Ascension and Jesus



# LOOKING UP

## CONSIDERING THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

While he [Jesus] was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?"

—The Acts of the Apostles (1:10–11a)

The Ascension is the festival which confirms the grace of all the other festivals put together—without which the profitableness of every other festival would have perished. For unless the Savior had ascended into heaven, His nativity would have come to nothing . . . and His passion would have born no fruit for us . . . and His most holy resurrection would have been useless.

—Saint Augustine

Imagine yourself standing alongside the baffled disciples squinting into the sky trying to make sense of what they have just experienced: the ascension of Jesus into heaven. Christians have often found it difficult to stand in the disciples' place. And yet, the Ascension is included in the Creeds

confessed Sunday after Sunday in churches around the world. Ascension Day is a feast on many Christian calendars. Yet few of us have asked: how does this part of the Christian narrative shape us?

Because the Ascension has not shaped our practice or vocabulary, we may need to take a longer route to discover its practical meaning for us. We must really think about the Ascension. If doubts surface, let them. If the incredible nature of the story begins to press on our minds and hearts, we are well on our way. In the midst of the doubts, we must allow ourselves to wonder just what difference it makes for our understanding of Jesus. Thinking about ascension is necessary but insufficient. We only know and understand the Ascension when we are owned by the ascended Jesus.

New and exciting Christian practices await those who are shaped by the ascension narrative and its theology. This shaping, however, does not happen accidentally. It will take courage and strength of imagination to be taken into this story—that brings us back to the hillside, the disciples, and the words of an angel.

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?” The angel’s question comes from the opening scene of the Acts of the Apostles, the sequel to the Gospel of Luke. What would it have been like to stand there on the hillside with the little band that included Peter, Thomas, and the rest, straining into the sun, hoping to catch one last glimpse of Jesus?

What was going through their minds? Would they have been asking *our* questions? Were they wondering just where Jesus went? Were they wondering what would happen next? Did they have other questions altogether? After all, it had

been an amazing few weeks. Jesus had been crucified; he had been raised from the dead, he then spent forty days with them—appearing and disappearing—and now, after some final instructions to them, Jesus rose into the air and was hidden by a cloud.

Let's face it. It's an odd story. Thoughtful, honest, and devout Christians have wondered: Where did Jesus go? Did he enter a realm of pre-modern spacetravel? Is he living "outside" our universe? Is this story a mythological description of the disciples' awareness that while Jesus was physically dead, he was spiritually alive—at least to them?

If you are asking these or similar questions, you're not necessarily being sceptical or disbelieving. Maybe you are beginning to grapple with a story that Luke knows tests the intellect and accordingly the devotion of authentic Christians. This is a hard story. And it invites hard questions from the start.

Things are further complicated by Luke's way of presenting the event. On the one hand, this event is the climax of his Gospel—it is the event toward which his entire Gospel has been moving. The Ascension is the sign of Jesus' victory—his exaltation. The event is so important to Luke's story that he actually narrates it twice—to end his Gospel and to begin the book of Acts.

Luke wants to leave his readers in no doubt about one simple fact: Jesus left his disciples not through death on the cross, but through conquering death on the cross. The proof of his victory was not only his Resurrection but also his Ascension. It's not that the Resurrection is less important than the Ascension. It is that, in some way, they are

one continuous divine act. Resurrection is the beginning of ascension; ascension is resurrection completed.

If Jesus had only been raised from death, then he would have been like Lazarus—a miracle had been performed—a man had been raised from the dead, only to come back to the form of his previous human life. Jesus might have gone back to Galilee to teach and heal, or he might have—as some of the disciples hoped on Ascension Day—raised an army to overthrow the Romans. The miracle would have been no more than a curious divine detour in the universal human journey from birth to death.

But in his telling of the Ascension, Luke's point is not so much that Jesus has been raised from death, but that Jesus has been raised to a whole new kind of *life* where the old order of things, dominated by death, is behind him. There would be no need for more teaching or healing, for the kingdom had come. There would be no need for armies, because Jesus' enemies had already been defeated at the cross.

Do you remember reading or perhaps seeing *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* for the first time? How did you feel when you heard the Stone Table crack? When you stood with Lucy and Susan staring at the very-much-alive-again Aslan? When you heard him speak of the "deeper magic from before the dawn of time" that made death work backwards? That eruption of crackling joy and deep yearning is what Luke wants his readers to feel!

This joy is grounded not simply in the story's beauty, but in its beautiful *truth*. And as truth, our expression of the Christian faith must be shaped in light of the Ascension and not simply as a response to our feelings. Luke's Gospel

ends with Jesus returning to his Father—enthroned as King of Creation—and the Acts of the Apostles opens with a retelling of the Ascension to remind us that if the old order is defeated, then the disciples, including you and me, are the vanguard of the new order. Luke then calls us, through the rest of the Acts of the Apostles, to be “Ascension people.” He invites us to take up the dramatic roles we’ve been given through the Ascension.

But if this is Luke’s point, if the Ascension is clearly a pivotal moment that shapes those who pay attention to it, why does Luke rush past it so quickly? Is Luke afraid his readers—now you and me—will get stuck there on the mountain, stumbling around looking up with our mouths agape, wondering where this kingly Jesus went?

In a word, *Yes*. We could get stuck in such a beautiful place. Luke rushes the story because he doesn’t want us to be too comfortable, gazing after the ascended Lord with the first followers of Christ. He wants us talking, writing, thinking, serving, reflecting *because* of the Ascension. So, Luke informs us that two angels appeared and told the disciples to (we paraphrase) “Stop Looking Up!” They told the disciples that Jesus had been taken into heaven and would return in the same way he had left.

What would the disciples have heard in these words? Simply put, they would have been reminded of the risen Jesus’ words to them concerning the kingdom during his final forty days with them. Of these teachings, three have been passed to us. Jesus taught his disciples that

- ◆ the kingdom would indeed arrive, but on the Father’s timetable, not theirs;

- ◆ their role in the Father's work required baptism with the Holy Spirit; and
- ◆ the kingdom would expand as the disciples proclaimed the Good News in Jerusalem, to the surrounding countryside in Judea and Samaria, and eventually to all corners of the world.

Notice the unifying theme for these words—imminent activity. The kingdom *will* come. The Spirit *will* baptize. The gospel *will* be proclaimed. Now the angel asks, "What on earth are you waiting for?" There's no time to be looking up; there's work to do!

Following the angel's own admonition, Luke doesn't want us stuck on the mountain, either. He wants us to know that there's still work to do and Luke in the Acts of the Apostles starts our glimpse at this work. The Spirit empowers ordinary folks to be gospel witnesses, boldly shouldering their commission, and spreading the Good News from Jerusalem to Rome, from Jews to Gentiles. Luke wants us talking, writing, thinking, serving, reflecting *because* of the Ascension; he wants our current manner of faith reexamined *because* of the Ascension.

Luke wants us to know that evangelism, justice, and mercy must be spoken and lived in Jesus' name for the poor, violent, and abused. But such work is only Christian, is only in the Spirit of Jesus, if it is done in Jesus' name; if it is done in the name of an ascended first-century Jew. If we neglect, ignore, or simply forget the Ascension, then the angel will change his message from "Stop looking up!" to "Stop! Now! Look Up!"

But why? Because the Ascension is a key part of our story. Unlike the disciples, we have lost the ability to believe in and

be changed by the Ascension and without it, we neither tell nor live the story rightly. We might be doing good things, but we are not passing on the Good News that's been passed to us.

So, let's ask a question of ourselves—especially if we've been in the church for a long time: how much of our Christian life—how we pray, how we worship corporately, how we witness—draws strength *intentionally* from the Ascension? Could it be the case that even after decades of church life, the answer is none?

Maybe that's not fair. Undoubtedly prayer, worship, politics, and public witness in the life of many churches are shaped in some fashion by Jesus' ascension because their members were passionately concerned about all those things. No doubt many of us can look back on years spent in faithful churches, whether urban or rural, small or large, and be overwhelmed by the strength of faith and practice of these fellowships. We remember Easter testimonies that called us to the joy and hope of resurrection in the face of death; we remember Good Friday sermons that called us to the cross in the face of hostility. But can we remember hearing that the Ascension called us to anything?

The Ascension calls us to look up at Jesus *and* to stop looking up because it is the great transition from the mission of Jesus to the mission of the church. It points up to Jesus and ahead to his disciples—even us! The rest of this book is *both* about looking up *and* looking ahead. As we look up at Jesus, we reconsider key questions: How do we think of Jesus' life and work? How do we think of his death? How do we think of his current absence and presence? But the Ascension forces us to move through Jesus to the mission of the church:

How do we think of *ourselves*? How do we call to the world—including how we call to conquered enemies of Jesus who still appear to be in control? How does this seemingly absent Jesus strengthen us in this changed but fallen world?

By asking these questions together, we hope a withered part of our theological imagination will be reinvigorated. But more than this, we hope local churches, local communities of believers, will be reinvigorated, because the church, global and local, should be excited, filled with anticipation of *the present* because of the Ascension.

Look again at Augustine's words about the Ascension that opened our chapter: "[It] is the festival which confirms the grace of all the other festivals—together,—without which the profitableness of every other festival would have perished. For unless the Saviour had ascended into heaven, His nativity would have come to nothing . . . and His passion would have born no fruit for us . . . and His most holy resurrection would have been useless." It seems that the Ascension was quite a big deal in the fifth century! More than Good Friday, Easter, more even than Christmas, Augustine believed that Ascension Day ought to be the climax of our Christian Year.

So, what would it mean for churches to celebrate Jesus' reign? Could we have ascension presents and ascension carols? (Would we stress over shopping days leading up to ascension?) Could public celebrations and games and music and laughter initiate racial reconciliation, enrich the poor and homeless, and uplift the depressed all to celebrate the kingship of Jesus?

These somewhat facetious possibilities abound for new forms of ascension-shaped Christian practice and mission. But

first, stop. Let's look up. And then we will follow Jesus into all our Galilees with all the joy the Ascension affords.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Augustine said that without the Ascension the Resurrection would have meant nothing. If the Ascension is so important in the Christian narrative, why has it been neglected?
2. The authors say that without being shaped by the Ascension, our lives do not accurately reflect the Good News. Is the Ascension as necessary to the Christian narrative as the authors suggest?
3. Do you agree with the authors' belief that the Ascension changes Jesus' mission so that he no longer needs to teach or heal? Why or why not?
4. What public celebrations could faithfully embody Ascension Day in your community?



# LOOKING BACK

## THE ASCENSION AND THE LIFE OF JESUS

When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

—The Letter to the Ephesians (4:8–10, KJV)

"[This] is how the clues God leaves sometimes work . . . Sometimes, as in a great novel, you cannot see until you get to the end that God was leaving clues for you all along. Sometimes you wonder, *How did I miss it? Surely any idiot should have been able to see from the second chapter that it was Miss Scarlet in the conservatory with the rope.*"

—Lauren F. Winner

Everybody has a Jesus. Bookshelves in any bookstore contain popular and academic works on the "Jesus of history" or "the real Jesus." And every one is different. Jesus has been a Marxist, an anti-Marxist, a feminist, an

anti-feminist, married, single, and as real as Napoleon and as legendary as Orisis, the Egyptian Judge of the Dead. Jesus, it seems, emerges from the concerns and ideals of the writer. This is nothing new. The nineteenth-century "Jesus of history" looked a lot like a German liberal Protestant: downplaying miracles, stressing morality. As a result, Albert Schweitzer hung a huge question mark over the whole historical Jesus process by saying that all these views of Jesus looked too much like his contemporary scholars and not like the Jesus described in the Gospels. Schweitzer pulled back the curtain of objectivity to reveal the cultural bias behind it. Others have quipped that these views of Jesus are simply the reflections of scholars' faces seen at the bottom of a deep well. They reveal more than bias; they reveal ideology.

While unfortunate, this type of reflection is understandable because Jesus remains a figure of fascination even for those who are not people of Christian, or any, faith. Jesus captivates us. Jesus is beyond our control, and any attempt to describe him with words reveals just how little control he allows us to have. These unintentional self-portraits in Jesus studies tell us that Jesus, more than being the answer, is the question.

What happens if we take a literary approach, reading the Gospels less like a newspaper and more like a historical novel? Would this allow those chronologically nearest to Jesus to provide our best opportunity to understand Jesus' own interpretation of his life and events? If we set aside the questions of history, the what-actually-happened of our curiosity (questions that are important and curiosity that is legitimate) for a moment, could our understanding of Jesus change for the better?

Since Luke's Gospel ends with ascension, we must then ask: how does the end of the story shape what we see going on at its beginning? In its middle? Beyond this, how does employing the Ascension as a hermeneutical practice shape us?

This ascension practice of study is a bit like the film adaptation of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*. One word came to mind: dull. The movie seems to lack story, sequence, and connection from scene to scene and between the characters. Then, in the last ten minutes, everything falls into place. The scenes now fit; the characters' acts and words did, in fact, tell a riveting story. Each scene contained clues that now, in hindsight, engaged the viewers in that last culminating, illuminating moment.

Luke wants the Ascension to evoke a similar experience for his readers. Once we pause with the disciples on the hillside—once we look up—the Ascension acts like a literary flare, casting new light on previous parts of Jesus' story that we may have passed over too quickly. Themes that we otherwise might have missed, in the light of the ascended Christ, become suddenly obvious. Three significant scenes in the story give us a sense of the whole. (A fourth scene—the cross—will be the subject of a whole other chapter.) For now, let's practice ascension-interpretation with three scenes—two from the life of Jesus and one from the life of his Mother—and see how these incidents will shape our understanding.

The Blessed Virgin Mary's words, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word," capture her heart attitude (Luke 1:38). Some see in these words the posture of passivity that they fear has come to express the general response of women to men. There's ample evidence in Christian history to make such a case. But

how does the end of the story challenge this interpretation? How does the Ascension demand we reread them? Here are further words from Mary:

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:48–53)

Did the same woman who confessed herself a servant of God really speak *these* words? (Hardly the acquiescent Jewish housewife!) Here Mary is acutely aware of being caught up in the mighty acts of God to rescue his people. But the two speeches are so different! Indeed, some scholars have argued that the Magnificat is developed from a hymn that an early Christian community wrote, obviously *after* the Ascension, only to be worked by Luke into his narrative. Whether or not the theory is true is not relevant to this discussion. In any event we see just how much Mary's Song is infused with the theme of *divine victory*—with the theme of the *Ascension*.

Catch the irony of the song in Luke's setting. God is going to display his power, scatter the proud, put down the mighty, and send the rich away empty-handed. God is going to exalt the lowly, fill the hungry, and intervene on behalf of a particular people. God is going to conquer his enemies and right all that is wrong with creation!

How? Through the miraculous conception of his Son in the womb of a Jewish teenager. The birth of a baby is *the* decisive and ultimately victorious act of God.

This irony brings us back to Mary's response to Gabriel. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord." The Greek word we translate servant, *doulos*, doesn't mean a servant, but a slave. But doesn't this emphasize subservience and passivity all the more? Simply put, Mary didn't choose to serve God; God chose her. *Slave* may make us feel uncomfortable, but that's what Mary says.

Now alerted to Luke's ironic reversals, we know that we shouldn't take this title at face value. Who else are God's slaves? In Luke's own writings, Paul and his companions are given that label. In his letters to the church in Corinth, Paul applies this term to all disciples regardless of sex or status. But even more interesting is the use of the term in the Old Testament. Who are the female slaves of the Lord there? Among others there are Deborah, a judge and military leader; Jael, an assassin; and Esther, a queen. Hardly shrinking violets!

When Mary takes the title slave of the Lord, she places herself at the *head* of a long line of *female liberators* of God's people! The Ascension opens our eyes to the theme of conflict and victory right at the beginning. The *victory* of God is the One carried by the Blessed Virgin.

The Ascension recasts our interpretation of the life and words of Mary. If Luke expects us to do that with his narrative, shouldn't we do it with our own? We live in an ascension-graced world and our lives must now be interpreted in this light. This means we must treat our own lives like *historical novels* and less

like newspapers. Small, perhaps insignificant events in our own lives must now be reexamined.

What details in life do we gloss over? What periods do we skip over quickly when considering our pasts? The Ascension leaves no event darkened; they all warrant reexamination as they are now enlightened by the ascension of Christ. Have you ever experienced moments of insight months or perhaps years after a difficult event? Have you ever seen significant emotional, spiritual, or professional growth only after reflecting on past seasons of trial? Perhaps we can learn to see moments of grace where God had shaped our futures, where previously we only saw pain, inconvenience, perhaps tragedy. Of course God was up to something! How could we have missed it!

Our second opportunity to practice ascension interpretation opens with Jesus rising from Jordan's baptismal waters to hear a heavenly voice declare him to be the "Beloved Son." "Jesus," continues Luke, "full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished (4:1–2)."

Lauren Winner, in *Mudhouse Sabbath*, talks about how fasting weakens and strengthens us simultaneously. The connection between the two is *desire*. We long for food as our bodies are *weakened*; we long for God as our spirits are *strengthened*. Our hunger for food reminds us that our true hunger is for communion with our Creator and Redeemer.

Likewise, we see both physical weakness and spiritual strength in the temptation of Jesus. After having been baptized

by John in the Jordan, Jesus left civilization behind to fast for forty days.

Consider the significance of the wilderness. Jesus didn't retreat from people to seek a quiet place to commune with his Father. On the contrary, in Jewish and early Christian thought, the wilderness was the devil's home turf. After fasting for a long time, Jesus was hungry *and* ready to face the tempter's full force. Early Christian readers rightly grasped that the confrontation was a microcosm of Jesus' mission. Here, in the wilderness, before he could begin his work, a decisive battle determined the course, shape, and eventual success of Jesus' mission.

Jesus didn't wind up there by accident. The Gospel writers agree—Jesus went to the wilderness, obeying the call of the Spirit. The conflict Jesus faced did not signal God's abandonment or rejection. He did not go alone. The confrontation with the very personification of evil marked the beginning of Jesus' mission to the world. After God commissioned Jesus at his baptism, Jesus headed off to war.

Scattering the proud and pulling down the mighty has begun!

But of course, and here is Luke's penchant for irony again, *the war would not be fought in the way we usually think*. It is not a contest of equal and opposed powers. Jesus fights by God's rules. Look at Luke's ordering of the three temptations (4:1–10): the devil preys first upon Jesus' hunger and exhaustion. "If you are the Son of God command this stone to become a loaf of bread." The devil tries to break the link between physical and spiritual desire. He hopes to distract Jesus from the sources of spiritual strength by focusing attention on his physical

weakness. Jesus' refusal to be baited in this way, though, only increases the intensity of the battle as the tempter moves on to his next tactics.

Next, the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and opens to him the route of political power: "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please."

Finally, the tempter offers the path of religious adoration, when after taking Jesus from the mountain to the temple pinnacle, he says, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. . . ."

Perhaps what surprises us most is that Jesus never disagrees with the devil. He doesn't dispute Satan's authority to make these offers or his power to bring them about. Quite the contrary, Jesus takes them as legitimate, yet denies the devil his prize.

These are alluringly and frighteningly real temptations. They are brutal battles. When we stick with the story till the end, this different picture emerges. Luke wants us to know that Jesus faced real temptation from beginning to end and succeeded. Only Jesus felt the tempter's full power to prey upon the weaknesses of the body, will, and spirit. And in each case, Jesus resists only with the words of Holy Scripture and eventually, he is victorious.

Irenaeus, a second-century church father, sees here the beginning of the undoing of the Fall. He plumbs the depths of Paul's title for Jesus, *the second Adam*, by setting the temptation of Adam alongside the temptation of Jesus. Here's how he presents it: Adam and Eve faced the tempter in God's garden. Satan came to their place of advantage. He appealed