

Christ's Ascension

Luke 24:36-53

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The theme of the Gospel of Luke is found in Luke 19:10, which says, "The Son of Man..." a Messianic title Jesus used most often for Himself from the book of Daniel "...has come to seek and to save that which was lost." So basically the whole focus of the Gospel of Luke is that the Son of Man, the perfect Man, the Messiah, came into the world in order to save the lost. There is doctrine that surrounds that mission of saving the lost.

It started with the Incarnation; we call it Christmastime, when God became a man. "The word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). So God came to earth in the Person of God, His Son. At the moment of conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary, God fused humanity with deity for all eternity. What an amazing thing that was!

Then the Incarnation led to His Crucifixion. Jesus went to the Cross and laid down His life as a substitutionary, sacrificial atonement for our sins. Jesus died on the Cross for us and for our sins.

That led to His Resurrection. Three days after Jesus was crucified, He was buried. Then

"Up from the grave He arose,

With a mighty triumph o'er His foes."

Jesus rose from the dead. He rose physically, bodily and gloriously from the dead.

Now we move to the Ascension and exaltation of Jesus Christ.

We need to understand how they all fit together. God became a Man in the Incarnation. God died in our place in the Crucifixion. Jesus rose from the dead to purchase and secure our salvation. Then He ascended into heaven and is exalted on the right hand of God the Father. He is preparing for us a place, He will come again to receive us to Himself, that where He is, there we may be also (John 14:3). So there are a lot of implications of the Ascension that we will look at today.

Dr. Albert Mohler, Jr. said, "Without the Ascension of Jesus, the Gospel possesses no present power. When Jesus sat down at the right hand of God, He inaugurated a new age of hope, founded upon His completed ministry on earth."

So the focus goes from Jesus being physically on earth to being in heaven, exalted at the right hand of God the Father (John 2:33). And He ever lives to make intercession for those who call on the name of the Lord (Hebrews 7:25). So as Christians, it's a wonderful truth to realize that Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father.

Leading up to the section on the Ascension, we will have three sections in our text. First is verses 36-43, where Jesus appeared to His disciples. There was a period of 40 days after His Resurrection in which Jesus appeared and disappeared. Our text is one of His appearances after the Resurrection.

Verse 36, “Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you.’ But they were terrified and frightened...” that’s the King James for “totally freaked out” “...and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, ‘Have you any food here?’ So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence.” So this is another post-Resurrection appearance of Jesus Christ.

When Luke wrote the book of Acts, he said that “He presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days (Acts 1:3). So this is one of those appearances.

The emphasis here is that Jesus physically, bodily rose from the dead. That’s why Luke concludes his Gospel with Jesus physically, bodily, visibly ascending back into heaven. He is now the exalted God-Man in heaven at the right hand of the throne of God. So the focus is on His humanity fused with deity; fully or truly Man and fully or truly God in one Person, Jesus Christ.

It is essential doctrine to realize that Jesus died on the Cross, Jesus was buried and He physically and bodily rose from the dead. He didn’t mystically or spiritually rise from the dead.

So Jesus appears in the upper room. In verse 36 where it says, “Now as they said...” the “they” here refers to the two on the road to Emmaus who ran back to Jerusalem to tell the 11 apostles. They were told that Peter had seen Jesus alive, and the two gave their testimony about seeing Jesus.

Luke doesn’t mention it, but the doors were locked and the windows bolted shut in the room where they gathered, but Jesus appeared to them. Jesus’ body was flesh and bone; He could eat, He could be touched, He could be seen, but it was an immortal, eternal body. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality....Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Corinthians 15:53-54). Jesus conquered sin, conquered the grave and even conquered death.

Jesus is the first of a long line of individuals who will be resurrected in glorified, immortal, eternal bodies. What a blessing that is! So our text emphasizes that He was physically risen from the dead.

But they were still terrified. You can imagine how hard it was for them to process all this. They knew He was crucified, they knew He was dead, they knew He was buried, they knew the tomb was empty, they knew there was word the angels appeared and they knew Peter said he saw Him. Yet this is Jesus all of a sudden manifesting Himself behind locked doors! They were terrified.

“And He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.’” Likely they were able to see His scars or the nail prints in His hands, or maybe He just wanted them to see His body, His hands and feet. So He told them to look at Him and to examine Him.

In this same body, He will ascend back into heaven. He didn’t just dissolve or vanish—He would appear and disappear—but the Ascension was a set event in which they watched Him leave planet earth. And we will watch Him come back one day when He comes to take the church to heaven, and we will return with Him at the Second Coming in power and glory.

“When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled...” still having a mixture of fear, wonder and joy “...He said to them, ‘Have you any food here?’ So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence.”

Why would Luke record all this information? Because it is absolutely essential to not only believe Jesus rose from the dead, but that He physically, bodily rose from the dead. Jude says that we must “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). So it is absolutely essential that we believe in the physical, literal, bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The same is true of His Ascension. That is also an essential, Christian doctrine.

The second section of our text is verses 44-49, where Jesus takes them once again to the Scriptures. They are still a little bit bewildered and confused. They were trying to compute what was happening. It was blowing their minds. So Jesus took them back again to the Scriptures, as He did with the two on the road to Emmaus.

“Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you...’” they were talking about His Crucifixion and Resurrection, but He had already spoken to them about His Crucifixion and Resurrection “...that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” These are the three divisions of the Old Testament the Jews hung on to: the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms, sometimes called “the writings.” Jesus was saying that all the Old Testament Scriptures spoke of His death, burial, Resurrection, Ascension and exaltation.

“And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them...” quoting from the Scriptures “...Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the

Christ to suffer..." speaking His Cross "...and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued..." or "clothed" "...with power from on high."

I like that even as Jesus went with the two to Emmaus and He now is with them in the room, He went to the Scriptures. We too need to believe all the prophets have spoken. We need to base our faith on the Word of God. That's the solid foundation on which we stand. We must think Biblically. There's nothing more important than you knowing the Bible and standing on the Bible.

So I like that He "opened their understanding." They're going to begin to fully understand that Jesus had to die—He died on the Cross for our sins; He had to be buried and then resurrected; and soon He will have ascended back to the Father. It all began to compute when the Spirit of God began to show them these truths found in the Scriptures, the Word of God. The same is true of us. We want Him to open our understanding so we might comprehend the Scriptures.

Then He mentioned the fact that the Scriptures point to the Cross, verse 46, and the fact of His Resurrection on the third day. And we have Luke's account of what we call The Great Commission. "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." The book of Acts was written by Luke as well. It's kind of the second volume of Luke. It goes from the Gospel being preached in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, which would be the city of Rome at that time. So Jerusalem was just their starting point from which they spread the Gospel.

He said, "Behold, I send the promise of My Father." What is that? In John 14:16-18, Jesus makes it clear that "the promise of My Father" is the Holy Spirit. He was actually telling them in the upper-room discourse that "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7). So this is the giving of the Holy Spirit, which would take place 10 days after His Ascension on the day of Pentecost. They would then be formed into the church, the body of Christ. Jesus, being exalted in heaven, would be the Head of the church.

So He gave the Holy Spirit, the church was born in Acts 2 and Jesus is now in heaven, glorified as the living Head of the body of Christ, the church. The Holy Spirit is the Paraklétos, the Comforter. And Jesus said, "Another Helper," which means "another of the same kind" (John 14:16). He was telling them that though He was with them there as God, He would be leaving, but God the Holy Spirit would come and be their Comforter to guide, strengthen and help them.

"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). In Acts 2:41, Peter got up and preached and 3,000 souls were added to the church that day.

Our last section is verses 50-53, in which Jesus ascends back to heaven. Jesus came through the womb of the Virgin Mary, and He would leave from the Mount of Olives and would

physically, bodily, visibly ascend back into heaven. Heaven is a real place. "And He led them out as far as Bethany." Bethany is about two miles from Jerusalem. It's on the eastern slope of Mount Olivet. He often spent time there with His friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus. "And He lifted up His hands and blessed them." The Jews would often lift their hands to pronounce a blessing.

I don't think this was just a "God bless you" kind of blessing. I think Jesus was rehearsing for some time all He had accomplished on earth through the Incarnation, through the Crucifixion, through the Resurrection and soon before their very eyes, the Ascension back into heaven.

Verse 51, "Now it came to pass, while He blessed them..." grammatically it indicates it was a lengthy blessing pronounced upon them "...that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven." This is a very short account of the Ascension. It is simple but not simplistic. There are amazing truths found in this simple doctrine of the Ascension of Christ.

Acts 1 is Luke's continuation of all that Jesus began to do and teach, verses 1-3. "The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up..." that's the Ascension "...after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen..." we read that in the book of Luke "...to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

So Jesus appeared and reappeared for 40 days after His Resurrection. From His Ascension to Pentecost would be 10 more days. And the apostles would wait for 10 days for the promised Holy Spirit. Verse 4, "And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father." The fact that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost vindicated His death and Resurrection; that God the Father accepted the work that Jesus did on the Cross and He made it to heaven, as evidenced by the Holy Spirit showing up on the day of Pentecost. Verse 5, "John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Verse 6, "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'" This is the program of evangelizing that takes place in the book of Acts. It started "in Jerusalem" and went to "all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Then it ended up in Rome.

Verse 9, "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel..." these were angels "...who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.'"

So it was the same Jesus who was crucified, buried, resurrected and physically, bodily, rose from Mount Olivet into heaven.

Can you imagine seeing Jesus lift off planet earth?! He just lifted off and went right up into the sky. And “a cloud received Him out of their sight.” They were just standing there looking up and saying, “Wow! That’s amazing! Did you see what I saw?!” Then the two angels showed up and said, “Why do you stand gazing into heaven?” I would have said, “Why wouldn’t we?! If you saw what we just saw, you would be staring into heaven right now, Mr. Angel!” So they were just overwhelmed by the Ascension of Christ. And notice it was the same Jesus that they saw lift off of earth and go into heaven.

I’ve always thought that the rapture is kind of a mind-blowing concept. “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven....And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Then I realized it was no big deal; it’s happened already. Jesus was raptured and “caught up.” Jesus took His actual, physical body—granted it was now immortal and glorified—into heaven. And we too one day will get new, glorified bodies and will be “caught up...to meet the Lord in the air.”

Sometimes people ask me, “Pastor John, will we know each other in heaven?” Spurgeon once said, “Do you think we’re going to be dumber in heaven than we are on earth?” The same person you know on earth is going to be seen in heaven but with a new, glorified, eternal body. But it will be the same person. And Jesus’ glorified, eternal body had flesh and bones. You can give hugs to your loved ones. You’ll see them again. You can eat with them. Praise God we’re going to get to eat in heaven! We don’t have to go jogging or walking afterward either. Thank God for that! There will be no sickness, no sin, no corruption. “This mortal must put on immortality.”

Notice the end of Acts 1:11: Jesus “will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” And how is He going to come? Visibly, bodily, gloriously and triumphantly. Jesus Christ is coming again. So the Resurrection, Ascension and glorification or exaltation of Jesus means that Christ will come back for us in power and great glory.

Back in our text in Luke 24:52-53, how did they respond at the Ascension? “And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.” Earlier they were perplexed and wondering and fearful, but now their hearts and understandings were opened to the Scriptures, and they responded in worship, in obedience and they stayed in Jerusalem as they were instructed, waiting for the Promise of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 52, the word “worshiped” appears for the first time in Luke’s Gospel. He saved it for the second-to-last verse of this book to put it in, because this is something to worship God about “with great joy.”

And they “were continually in the temple.” It’s interesting that Luke’s Gospel opens in the temple. Zacharias the priest was offering the sacrifices and burning incense in the temple when the angel Gabriel showed up and said, “Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son” (Luke 1:13). He will be the forerunner of Messiah. And Luke told us about Simeon and Anna in the temple (Luke 2:25-38).

The Gospel of Luke opened with angels worshipping Jesus when He was born and closes with His disciples worshipping Him and being filled “with great joy.” And I like verse 53 that says that they “were continually in the temple.” That doesn’t mean they were literally there 24/7; it means they were frequently going to the temple to worship and pray to God. So they were “praising and blessing God,” and Luke ends with the word “Amen” or “so be it.”

How marvelous is this Gospel of Luke!

In His Ascension, Jesus withdrew from the sphere of the seen and the physical to the sphere of the unseen and the spiritual. When Jesus was on earth, He could only be with the disciples at one place and one time; He was limited because of His body of humiliation. He was sinless, but He was thirsty, tired, hungry, weary and He wept (John 11:35). Jesus was human. But now that He is in heaven and can send the Holy Spirit, He can be with any of His disciples any place and any time. This is why Jesus said to them, “Greater works than these [you] will do, because I go to My Father” (John 14:12). He would send the power of the Holy Spirit, the church would be formed and they would go forth preaching the good news of Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ Ascension assured the universal power of Christ. Philippians 2:5-6 says, “Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.” It speaks of Jesus emptying Himself. He was in heaven, eternal with the Father and the Spirit. John says in his Gospel “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Then in John 1:14, he said, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

So Jesus humbled Himself, took on the form of a servant, “became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:8-11). Jesus is sitting on the throne in power and glory in heaven. Jesus is in control of everything in the universe. All power was given to Him.

At His Ascension, Jesus also entered into His glory that He prayed about in John 17:5: “O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” Jesus wanted that glory to be restored. So He went from His humiliation to His exaltation in heaven.

What are the implications or the significance of the Ascension? I want to give you 11 results or

implications of the Ascension. But this list is not exhaustive. How it fills your heart with joy to realize what happened as a result of Jesus' Ascension!

Number one, the Ascension marked the completion of the work of salvation in dying on the Cross for us. Jesus never has to die again. While hanging on the Cross, He cried out, "Tatelestai," or "It is finished" or "Paid in full." Jesus finished the work of salvation on earth. How marvelous!

Number two, the Ascension marked the end of Jesus limitations, which I just mentioned from Philippians 2. Jesus is no longer limited; He doesn't get tired, thirsty, He's not weeping in heaven, He doesn't need to take a nap. Jesus now is immortal and has an eternal, glorified body.

Number three, the Ascension marked Christ's exaltation and coronation. Can you imagine what heaven was thinking when Jesus came home? The angels were clapping their wings—if they have wings. Jesus came from heaven to earth, and they must have been mystified. Why would the Son of God go down to earth and take on a body of limitation? But now Jesus will come back as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16).

Number four, the Ascension signaled the sending of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper..." or Holy Spirit "...will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." It was essential to send the Holy Spirit.

Number five, the Ascension marked the start of Jesus preparing believers' heavenly home, John 14:1-3. In the upper room, Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions..." some Greek scholars say "abiding places," and one translation says "apartments"; no thank you "...if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." In heaven Jesus is building you an eternal home. Isn't that great?! He's preparing a place for you, and He'll come again and take you to heaven.

Number six, the Ascension marked the passing of the work of evangelism to His followers. Jesus gave them The Great Commission. They were to preach the Gospel. "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations." So it was the passing of the baton.

Number seven, the Ascension signaled the Lord's sovereign headship over the church, Ephesians 1:20, 23, and Colossians 1:18, says, "He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." Jesus is now the exalted Head of the church. He supplies the Spirit for the church, He supplies gifts to the church and He supplies gifted men to lead the church. So He is the Head of the church.

Number eight, the Ascension marked Christ's triumph over Satan. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

Number nine, the Ascension signaled the Lord was giving the work of the ministry to gifted men. Ephesians 4:8 says, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." So He gave men as gifts and gave gifts to men. The Holy Spirit gives the gifts of the Spirit. The Spirit was given by Christ and came in His fullness on the day of Pentecost.

Number ten, the Ascension marked the beginning of the merciful, faithful, sympathetic, compassionate high priest's work of intercession for His people. Heaven is a real place. Jesus is actually there waiting for us. What a marvelous thought that Jesus is there preparing a place for us and also praying for us.

Have you ever thought that no one ever prays for you? Jesus prays for you. He intercedes for us. He is our advocate before the throne of the Father.

And number eleven, the Ascension guarantees and secures Christ's Second Coming. This is why the physical, bodily Ascension of Christ back into heaven, after His post-Resurrection appearances, is essential, orthodox, Christian doctrine. Anyone who denies that denies Christian doctrine. It's unorthodox.

The early church had a hymn they sang that was actually placed in the Bible for us. It is found in 1 Timothy 3:16:

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:

God was manifested in the flesh,

Justified in the Spirit,

Seen by angels,

Preached among the Gentiles,

Believed on in the world,

Received up in glory."