

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

The Church Alive – Living In Light of the Risen Christ **Acts 1:9-11**

Let me begin this morning by asking you a question, a question I would like you to take a moment to answer, not out loud, just make a mental note of what first comes to your mind with the question; "What are the most significant events of Jesus' life or aspects of His work for us?" Take a moment to think about this. I would suspect that some of the most common answers to such questions would include things like His virgin birth, His sinless life, His miracles, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. Correct?

However, there is another significant event that is sadly neglected among us; a neglected doctrine or teaching that serves as a very pillar for all that we believe about Jesus and His work for us. A doctrine that without which, all that Jesus had done up to the point of His resurrection from the dead would become mute and meaningless. What is that doctrine? It is the doctrine of the ascension of Jesus; His being lifted up and taken into heaven forty days after His resurrection. Concerning the work of Christ, J. Oswald Sanders, in his book, "The Incomparable Christ" made this observation that would do us well to consider:

*An ascension such as the gospels record was **essential** for a number of reasons...His redemptive work **required** such a consummation. Without it, it would have remained incomplete for it rests on four pillars —incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The ascension was **a complete and final demonstration** that His atonement had forever solved the problem created by man's sin and rebellion. Only thus could He be constituted Head of the church (Eph 1:19-23).*

The redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the very hope of our salvation, is said to rest upon four pillars, the first three of which we are quick to note:

First, we have **the Incarnation** – that moment in time when God of all eternity; the Second Person of the Trinity, came to this earth and took on human flesh. In Hebrews 2:14 we read:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same...that is, He took on flesh and blood (consider also John 1:1:14).

Second, we have **the Crucifixion** – that time when Jesus hung on the cross for the sins of His people; bearing their shame and their punishment. We learn from Romans 6:23 that ***"the wages [the merits] of sin is death"*** – eternal punishment and separation from the blissful presence of God. We deserve that cross – eternally; and yet, according to 2 Corinthians 5:21, ***"[God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf..."*** Isaiah 53:5 reminds us, ***"But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities, the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed."*** The crucifixion was the just penalty for sin, the full wrath of God, falling upon Jesus; who hung there in our place. Therefore, unless Jesus came (the incarnation) and unless Jesus suffered for our sin (the crucifixion) there is no salvation.

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Third, we have **the Resurrection** – this is what we looked at last week; the truth of Jesus having been raised from the dead never to die again. And how is this essential to our salvation? May I remind you what we learned last week? Remember that the death of Christ on the cross actually and fully paid our penalty for sin; and if the penalty for sin is death, then what is only means by which it might be shown that Christ's payment for sin had been accepted by God? He had to be raised from the dead. For if Christ supposedly paid the penalty for sin, which is death, but then remained dead Himself, then He would still be paying the penalty for sin, which is death. The resurrection of Christ then is necessary to prove that Jesus truly had conquered power and penalty of sin, which is death.

This brings us to the final but equally essential pillar of our salvation, that which we find in our text this morning in Acts 1:9-11, **the Ascension of Jesus Christ** into heaven. Let me ask you, when was the last time you heard a message extolling the truth that our salvation is also dependent upon this truth, that Jesus was taken up into heaven? I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Acts 1 and let us read verses 9-11 in order that we may explore the meaning and the blessings of living in light of the risen Christ. Acts 1:9-11 says,

9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

From our text, I would offer you three points of consideration, three points that not only reveal the necessity and reality of the ascension, but also reveal the need of a daily response on the part of the believer because of this truth. As W.H. Griffith Thomas rightly stated *"the ascension is not only a great historical fact of the New Testament, but a great factor in the life of Christ and Christians, since it is the consummation of His redemptive work."* Let me quickly share the three points of consideration and then examine them one by one. First, I would present to you that the ascension of Jesus is **a pivotal event**; it marks some extraordinary transitions, as we will come to see. Second, I would present to you that the ascension of Jesus is **a picture**; a picture of something extraordinary about Jesus. Third and finally, I would present to you that the ascension of Jesus reveals to us **a promise**; and we shall examine what that promise includes.

Let us never regard the ascension of Jesus as some extra afterthought; some insignificant footnote tacked on to the end of the more extraordinary events preceding it. Rather, what we learn from our text are a number of wonderful truths that when considered have a profound impact upon our daily walk with Jesus Christ. Let us then consider our first point, that the ascension of Jesus is a pivotal event.

I. The ascension of Jesus is a pivotal event (1:9a)

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on...

According to our text, once Jesus had said everything needed and necessary for His disciples, **"He was lifted up while they were looking on..."** Whatever else the ascension of Christ may be, it certainly stands as a pivotal event, a turning point upon which one aspect of the

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ministry of Jesus ended and a new aspect of His ministry began. The ascension serves as a transition for Jesus as well as for His people. The ascension is both an ending as well as a beginning.

As Jesus was taken up into heaven, it signified the end of His time on earth and the beginning of His time as the resurrected God-man in heaven. And there are two significant thoughts we need to remember that come as a result of this transition of Jesus from earth back into heaven.

The first transition the ascension of Jesus signifies is the end of His humiliation and the beginning of His exaltation. The humiliation of Jesus is the teaching that Jesus, this glorious God of Creation, humbled Himself, lowered Himself, humiliated Himself by becoming one of His creatures; taking upon Himself flesh along with all its limitations and afflictions so that He might become that sympathetic High Priest we needed. As Jesus is lifted into heaven, it marks the beginning of His exaltation – His glory, honor and worth being experienced and recognized by God the Father, the host of heaven as well as all who believe upon Him on this earth. And even one day, all creation will testify of the glories of Christ as the risen, ascended King of Kings. This is what we read about in Philippians 2, the progression from the humiliation, the humbling of Jesus as God became man and then, as He completes His work upon this earth we see Him exalted. Notice this progression in Philippians 2 starting with verses 5-8 where we read of His humiliation:

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

God became man and humbled Himself for our sake upon the cross, dying for our sins. This is the humiliation of Christ. But then, after the cross comes glory and exaltation as we read in verses 9-11;

9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This exaltation began at the resurrection of Jesus but was confirmed as Jesus not only was raised from the dead, but also raised into heaven. The ascension of Jesus serves as a pivot between these two experiences, the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus.

Jesus had come to the earth; had done the will of the Father, having accomplished the work the Father sent Him to do and was now ready to leave the earth and go back to be with the Father. This is what the opening verses of John 17 and the High Priestly prayer is about. John 17:1-5

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1 Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, 2 even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. 3 This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. 4 I glorified You on the earth [in this humbled, humiliated condition], having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself [exalt Me], with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Let us never forget that Jesus laid aside the glory and splendor of heaven in order to come to this earth to be a man, a man who would suffer and die a death you and I deserved so that He might give to us who believe the benefit of His life which we do not deserve, a part of which, as we will see, is the hope of heaven, of being where Jesus is now when He returns for His faithful.

By way of application, we should constantly bear in mind that Jesus is both our risen and ascended Lord and Savior. He is currently seated at the right hand of God and is to be honored and praised. Everything we do is to be done in light of His exalted position as risen King and exalted Head. This desire to do all things for His glory begins with our witness to others concerning who we know Jesus to be; Savior and Lord. Are you talking to others about Jesus? And when you do, do you speak of Him as His exalted position at the right hand of the Father. Do you stress His Lordship over all creation? This is what Peter declared in Acts 2:33-36 where we read:

33 "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. 34 "For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, 35 UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.'" 36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified."

So then, the ascension is the pivotal event between the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus; but it also marks the end of His ministry on earth and begins His ministry for us in heaven. What was Jesus goal or purpose in coming to this earth as man? Paul said it this way in 1 Timothy 1:15, **"that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners..."** His purpose while on this earth was that of redemption, of buying back His people from their sins. His purpose in heaven is different. With redemption accomplished, we see the ministry of Jesus shift from pursuing atonement (paying the price of our sins) to that of being our Advocate, our Representative, and our Spokesman in heaven. Look with me at Hebrews 1:1-3 where we see the accomplishment of our redemption stated:

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

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The key here is that Jesus, as our High Priest, "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High." In the Old Testament, no high priest ever sat down in the presence of God as he ministered in the temple. For the work of the Old Testament priest was never finished. But Jesus sat down; this work of redemption was complete. Again, we read of this in Hebrews 10:11-12:

11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

May this remind us that there is nothing left to be done in order for forgiveness of sins to be accomplished. And does it not make sense, that if Jesus did not need to do anything more for us to save us, then there is certainly not anything we can add to this work. Have you placed your trust fully upon what He accomplished on the cross, confident that there is nothing left for you to do but believe on Him?

From this earthly work of redemption, we see in the ascension of Jesus then the beginning of His new work, His new ministry for us in heaven, that consists largely of intercession; of pleading our case before the Father. We read of this heavenly ministry of Jesus in Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25.

Romans 8:34 - who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Hebrews 7:25 - Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

By way of application, does not encourage your heart to know that Jesus is right now at the right hand of the Father, bending His ear as it were; speaking on your behalf! Jesus is constantly interceding for His people.

This then is just a small example of the pivotal nature of the ascension of Jesus. But let us consider a second feature of the ascension, namely that it serves also as a picture.

II. The ascension of Jesus is a picture (1:9b)

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

We read in our text that as Jesus ascended, He was received in a cloud. Now then, let us not overlook this statement concerning the cloud. It was included for a reason and I would suggest to you a few thoughts to that end.

I would suggest to you that the mentioning of the cloud is reminiscent of one of the ways in which God, in the Old Testament, manifested Himself. Let me take you through some of these references and say to you that Jesus being received in the cloud pictures for us the power and the presence of God. The disciples, as they looked upon Jesus in the cloud, would have very likely associated Jesus with the power and presence of God. In Exodus 13:21-22, as the children of Israel were preparing to leave Egypt, we read:

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21 The Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. 22 He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

As the Lord protects His people from the advancing Egyptian army, we see His power expressed in a cloud in Exodus 14:19-20:

19 The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. 20 So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.

At the giving of the Ten Commandments, as Moses was preparing to go up on Mount Sinai, we read in Exodus 19:9 and 16:

9 The Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the Lord...16 So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

At the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Solomon's Temple we read of this manifestation of the cloud as the glory, power and presence of God in 2 Chronicles 5:11-14:

11 When the priests came forth from the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to divisions), 12 and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps and lyres, standing east of the altar, and with them one hundred and twenty priests blowing trumpets 13 in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the Lord saying, "He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting," then the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, 14 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.

And here, at the ascension, we have Jesus being received into what, a cloud. A picture of the power and presence of God. And according to verses like Matthew 24:30, Mark 13:26 and Luke 21:27, when Jesus returns, all the earth will **"see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with great power and glory."** In our text, the angels remind the disciples that this is in fact the manner in which Jesus will return – with the cloud, with the power and presence of

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God. And the question for each of us is this; on that day He returns, will you gaze upon Him as your Lord and Savior or will He be coming as you Judge because you have not believed upon His work as expressed in His incarnation, His crucifixion, His resurrection and His ascension?

This brings us to our final point of consideration, seeing the ascension of Jesus as a promise.

III. The ascension of Jesus is a promise (1:10-11)

10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

As just alluded to, a moment ago and confirmed for us in our text, the ascension of Jesus signifies the very manner in which Jesus will return. Jesus ascending into the cloud and He will return with the cloud. This is a promise of His return. Beloved, this is one of the key reasons why we affirm the visible, bodily return of Christ in the future. We never have to worry that Jesus might have already come back and that somehow we missed it. Our text promises that Jesus was *seen* going into heaven and therefore He will be *seen* coming back to earth; He "will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven" – physically, bodily, literally.

This is a promise, not only of the angels here in our text, but also of our Lord Jesus Himself. Let us look at this promise as found in John 14:1-3. There we read these words:

1 Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 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.

There are a number of promises here in this passage that relate to Jesus having ascended into heaven. First, Jesus says that He must go to His Father's house; He must ascend into heaven in order to do what? In order to ***"prepare a place for you."*** We are reminded by Jesus that once in heaven, He will be making preparations for the eternity we will spend with Him there. What is Jesus doing for believer right now? Not only is He your advocate and intercession, but He is also your Architect, preparing your place in heaven with Him. What a blessed thought. And it begs for another promise; that if Jesus ascended into heaven in order to prepare a place for us, then it must follow that He will what? He will come again. That is what we read in verse 3, ***"And if I go [if I ascend to My Father] and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may also be."***

Beloved, our very hope of heaven is tied to the ascension of Jesus into heaven. Before He could begin the work of preparing a place for us; and before He could come again; He had first to be taken up into heaven; exactly what we read in our Acts 1:10-11 text.

Time keeps us from looking at all the blessings of the ascension of Jesus, but one more of great significance is the sending of the Holy Spirit, this Spirit of power who comes upon believers and enables them to be witness of Jesus. In John 16:7 we read the words of our Lord who said:

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But I tell you the truth, 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 go, I will send Him to you.

While we do not know exactly why Jesus must go for the Spirit to come, it was all a part of God's plan. And so we know this, that the Holy Spirit has come to us in a way that He would not have otherwise if Jesus had not first ascended into heaven. And it is by the Spirit of God we have our hearts opened to understand our need for Jesus. It is by the Spirit that we are "born again"; given hearts of flesh in place of hearts of stone and are enabled to follow after Jesus. None of these blessings would be ours if Jesus had not ascended into heaven and sent the Spirit. So then the promise of the Spirit, the promise of our hope of Heaven with Jesus, and the promise of Jesus' return are all founded, confirmed and made trustworthy because those 11 men saw Jesus physically, bodily and visibly ascend into heaven.

Have you believed on the Lord of the ascension? Have you trusted in the work of His incarnation, of His crucifixion, of His resurrection and of His ascension into heaven? If not, why not? Let today be the day of salvation and call upon the Lord of the ascension to save you!

Beloved, the ascension of Jesus was the most fitting climax that could be conceived for the life Jesus lived. When He ascended, not a single claim of God on humanity was left unsettled and not a promise God made was left with uncertainty. Will you live in light of this risen Savior and Lord, being reminded of the blessings and benefits that are yours because He has ascended just as He has said!

Soli Deo Gloria

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