

The Christ Must Reign

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Date: 24 April 2022

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[0 : 0 0] Conclude our time in Luke chapter 24 with the last four verses from 50 to 53. And the first part we'd been looking at, that the Christ must die, and how Jesus said that to the disciples on the Emmaus Road.

And David looked at that on Palm Sunday. And then last week we looked when Jesus appeared to the disciples and told them that all these things must happen, that it's all written about him in the Scriptures, that the Christ must die, and he also must rise on the third day.

Repentance and forgiveness must be proclaimed in his name to all nations. And this afternoon we're going to be looking at the Christ must reign and talking about his ascension.

So if you turn to Luke chapter 24, we're going to be reading just the last few verses. Luke 24 from verse 50. Speaking of Jesus, Luke writes, Well, this is the word of the Lord, and we believe it to be true.

I pray that he would bless the reading of it. Amen. Well, I remember when me and Jen lived in a flat in St. Leonard's.

[1 : 4 9] It was the place we moved into when we got married. And we lived on the third floor. And across, it overlooked a main road, and across the road, directly across from the flat, was a bus stop.

And I remember when I was going to Bible college, Levi was born at this time, between one and two years old. And he had difficulty saying goodbye. Separation, anxiety, or whatever they call it.

Babies all go through it, you know. And so, he would cry whenever I would leave, and Jen would have to distract him, and I would sneak out the door. Or she would try and teach him how to say goodbye.

But I remember the days when I was going to Bible college, that Jen would take Levi through to the living room, up to the window, to wave at me across at the bus stop, across the road.

And all these other morning commuters, you know, were there, trying to wake up with their coffee, or listening to music, or with their head down, or reading a book. And I was the one weirdo, flapping and waving at a block of flats across the road.

[2 : 4 8] The whole time until the bus came. And even when I got on the bus up the stairs, waving until I was out of sight. It was wonderful. Of course, Levi doesn't have a problem saying goodbye now.

But Ezra, Ezra, my youngest, you know, he's two and a half, and he's got that issue. You know, he struggles to say goodbye. He'll cry. Jen will have to distract him, and I'll sneak out, or perhaps he'll be having so much fun, that he'll be happy to say, oh, bye.

But he does something else, that Levi didn't do. He does something that is so cute, but it makes it all the more harder, to say goodbye. If he sees me getting ready, he'll go into the hall, and he'll grab his shoes, and he'll wait on the bottom stair, with an excited smile on his face, thinking that he's coming with me.

And I'm like, oh, bless you. And he'll even get my shoes for me, and he's got his shoes, and I'm like, I think of what Jesus said to his disciples. Where I am going, you cannot come.

And Ezra gets this upset look on his face, as if he's thinking what Peter thought. Why can't I follow you now? I would lay down my toys for you.

[4 : 04] But he can't. You know, it's not easy to say goodbye. It's not easy to leave, when you have to leave a loved one behind. It's not easy to say goodbye to loved ones, when they have to go, or when they have to go somewhere where you can't go with them.

I remember hearing a story of R.C. Sproul. Some of you will know R.C. Sproul. Told this story when he was very, very young, and his father got called to go away during World War II.

And he was walking his dad down to the bus, the military bus that came to pick him up. And the tears, bawling and crying, when his dad got on the bus and waved goodbye. And a few days later, very, very young he was, he was brought home in a police car, because he was walking down a highway a few miles from his house.

And it was asked what he was doing. And he said he was walking to Italy to go get his dad. You see, it's not easy to say goodbye, to leave if you have to leave a loved one.

The flip side of the sorrow of goodbyes is the joy of the return. The joy that I get and my boys get when we see each other again, or the joy of R.C. Sproul in 1945, at the train station when his father returned.

[5 : 22] In John 14, you'll be familiar with this. Jesus says, Let not your hearts be troubled. Because they were troubled. He was talking about leaving them, and they're like, Why?

You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also. Jesus said this to his closest disciples, to the twelve.

Mine is Judas. Jesus said this. But he also said it in John 17 to us. When he was praying, when he was praying about those who would believe on account of their word, he said this in John 17.

He said, Father, I desire that they also, that's me and you, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you love me before the foundation of the world.

[6 : 32] To be with me where I am, and to see my glory that you have given me. But how many of us would want Jesus to be where we are?

You see, as much as we talk about and believe that the Lord is present with us in some way, we all know deep down that he isn't. We know and feel his absence.

Jesus isn't here with us like he was with the disciples. Do you wish he was? Boy, I would just love to spend a day with Jesus.

Just to sit and talk with him and spend time with him. How great would that be? But he's not. He's not here. The angels said that to the disciples.

He's not here. Said that to the woman at the tomb. He's not here. But where is he? You see, where he is is more important than where we are.

[7 : 33] Think about what Jesus said to the thief on the cross. Just one chapter earlier in Luke 23. Jesus said, Today you will be with me in paradise.

Now, what's that little phrase that people write on a postcard on their holidays? What's that phrase? Yes. It's not, I wish I was there.

Who says that when they're on holiday? I wish I was there. Back in Scotland in the rain. Wish you were here. That's basically what Jesus is saying. I want you to be with me where I am.

Where I am going. Not for me to come back to you, but for you to come to me. But it's not just a wish for Jesus. He says, I am preparing a place for you there.

And I will bring you. But bring you where? So when he said to the thief on the cross, Today you will be with me in paradise. What is he responding to?

[8 : 33] So the thief said to Jesus, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus says, Truly I say to you, Today you will be with me in paradise.

Now is Jesus saying to this man, You can't come to my kingdom, but I'll take you to a beach instead. That's not what Jesus is saying.

Did you know that the word paradise basically means enclosed royal garden? Paradise means an enclosed royal garden, a kingly garden. Now I admit, I wasn't there.

I didn't go with Jesus and the thief. I don't exactly know what happened or what Jesus meant. But the word paradise does come from the ancient Persian term for a king's garden, an enclosed royal garden.

And biblically it alludes to the Garden of Eden. Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were given the image of God to be rulers of the earth. So I think the point is, whatever our thought about paradise, the eternal and glorious kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ will completely blow it out of the water.

[9 : 39] We cannot think of how great and glorious it will be in the kingdom of Jesus. We don't yet know how glorious he is because as he prayed, we are not with him yet to see his glory.

When he asked Pilate, when Pilate asked him if he was a king, Jesus said, his kingdom is not of this world. Nothing in this world compares with his kingdom.

No earthly king who has ever lived compares to Jesus, the eternal kingdom, the eternal king of that kingdom. You see, it's not only a place that is of unimaginable beauty and pleasure, but a place where there is no sickness, no sorrow, no pain, and no death.

It's a place where there's no injustice, no crime, no evil, no fear, and no sin of any kind. Do you want to go there? Yet Jesus doesn't simply want us to be in a better place.

You see, isn't that the comfort of the world? Ah, they're in a better place. Says who? A better place? Is that what it's all about? A better place? Jesus isn't just wanting a better place.

[10 : 49] See, many non-Christians have this hope, somehow, grounded on nothing, of a better place. To go to heaven, yet all the while rejecting the king of heaven.

How else can you enter? You see, of course, it's not wrong to want to go to a better place. But that cannot be without relationship. Jesus said that eternal life was knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent.

The words in the postcard, wish you were here, are meant to communicate relation, to be with me where I am. You see, the greatness of any place is linked, always linked, to the greatness of the one who rules that place.

The way a ruler rules will always affect the people and the place. And this can be seen in any country of the world at any time. The king makes the kingdom what it is.

So I don't know if you've seen the film The Lion King. It's a famous film. In The Lion King, if you've ever seen it, if you've not, I'll sum it up.

[11 : 56] The land is fruitful and perfect when the true king Mephasa reigns. The lions are safe, they're fed, they're happy, and the land is lush and fertile and beautiful.

But when Scar, his evil brother, takes over, the land becomes dark and barren and ruined, and the inhabitants are malnourished, starving and oppressed. See, the kingdom is always linked to the king.

You know this every time you put fuel in your car. You know this every time you top up your electricity, or when you damage your wheel in a pothole, or when you go to try and buy bread when the imports have broken down.

You know what it's like to live in a kingdom because of the way the rulers rule it. We know where Jesus is. The quality of a kingdom is always affected by who reigns it and what the reign is like.

Jesus is in heaven. Do we often think of why? You see, we celebrate his birth. We celebrate his descending from heaven to earth. And we celebrate his death because of what it achieved.

[13 : 05] We celebrate his resurrection because it vindicates him. It proves that what he did in his death did the Isaiah 53 thing. His atonement has been accepted.

Death has been defeated. And we look forward to his return. But the ascension of Jesus is one of the most neglected events, yet one of the most significant. Now, why is that?

If it's so significant, why? is it only recorded in one gospel, in one verse at the end of Luke? Now, it's mentioned in Mark, but there's a little bit at the end of Mark that's added on.

It's only mentioned at the end of Luke once, one verse, and then he mentions it again in Acts. But, other than that, the event isn't really mentioned, is it?

Is it? What do you think? You see, the actual account of the ascension is recorded from the ground, from what it looks like from the ground up.

[14 : 07] Jesus is taken up and hidden by a cloud, taken up into the clouds, taken up into heaven, hidden by a cloud. It sounds just like a relocation.

He's moving house. But earlier in the chapter in the Emmaus Road, Jesus said that the Christ must first suffer and then enter into, into what? His glory.

And so, while from the ground of this lowly earth, the ascension of Jesus doesn't look that glorious, we can look into the Old Testament and see what happened on the other side of the clouds. For instance, Psalm 110, David writes about the Christ, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

And so, when Jesus asked the Pharisees about this verse in Psalm 110, Jesus said, well, who is the Christ? Whose son is the Christ? And the Pharisees say, well, the son of David.

And Jesus asks, how is it then that David in the Spirit calls him Lord? And he quotes the Psalm and he goes on to say, if David calls him Lord, how is he his son?

[15 : 19] And Matthew writes that no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare ask him a question. You see, everyone knows now that it can't be David.

It can't be David that Psalm 110 is talking about. As Peter said, he's still, his body's still in the tomb, bones. Jesus also said elsewhere, no one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the son of man.

So when he's talking to Nicodemus. So it's not David who ascends, but it's the son of man who ascends. And so when the disciples witness Jesus ascend into heaven on the clouds, it's a sight that they've heard described about the coming of the son of the man, the son of man.

That's why the angels said to the disciples when he went away, the angels said, he's going to come back just like you saw him. You know, the Old Testament talks about the son of man coming on the clouds.

Well, that's how he went and he's coming back just the same way. And Jesus said this early in his ministry, Jesus referred to himself many times as the son of man, predicting his death and his resurrection, saying to the disciples, see, we are going up to Jerusalem and everything that is written about the son of man by the prophets will be accomplished.

[16 : 43] You see, he also referred to his ascension and glory as the son of man. And he gave his reason for during his trial why they would not see him any longer.

Because it too must be accomplished. Again, the high priest asked him, are you the Christ, the son of the blessed? And Jesus said, I am. From now on, you will see the son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.

they tore their garments. Well, that's it. And he also said earlier in John chapter 6 when the people were grumbling about his hard teaching, he says, do you take offence at this?

The stuff about eating my flesh and my blood, bread and wine, do you take offence at this? Then what if you see the son of man ascending to where he was before? And so what is going on beyond the clouds is that Jesus has been seated at the right hand of God.

so that all his enemies can be subdued. This is his coronation. This is a one-time event, his coronation. The ascension isn't ascending merely in height into the upper atmosphere.

[17 : 55] John Calvin said, what, do we place Christ midway among the spheres or do we build a cottage for him among the planets? Heaven we regard as the magnificent palace of God, far outstripping all this world's fabric.

He is ascending the throne of heaven. The Christ must ascend the throne and reign and enter his glory. The kingdom is not of this world and nowhere on earth can contain his glory.

And so we look into the Old Testament, what happened beyond the clouds. Hundreds of years before it happened in Daniel, Daniel chapter 7, Daniel had a glimpse of this from a heavenly viewpoint.

Daniel 7 says, I saw in the night visions and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man and he came to the ancient of days and was presented before him.

And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all people's nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

[19 : 03] See, Daniel's not describing the coming of the Son of Man to earth on the clouds. He's describing the ascension of the Son of Man to take the throne of heaven. Jesus ascending the throne of heaven is vital.

Think about this for a moment. Jesus ascending the throne of heaven is vital for the past 2,000 years to make any sense at all. Think about all the things that have happened the past 2,000 years.

We tend to look at the negative things. News outlets cover that all the time. What would the world be like without the ascension of Christ? It would be far worse than it is right now.

In fact, in Acts chapter 2, Peter says that the pouring out of the Spirit can only happen if the Christ has ascended. And so to get caught up in people speaking in languages, speaking in tongues, is to completely miss the point because Pentecost starts with the followers of Jesus speaking in languages and the Jews are either amazed or they mock them.

But after Peter explains it, thousands of Jews are cut to the heart. Why? Because what this all means is that the Jesus that they killed is the Christ who has now ascended to throne in heaven.

[20 : 23] Uh-oh. Uh-oh. You see, the Jews are now thinking the one that we rejected, the one that we mocked, this Jesus, the one we turned away from, the one we didn't want released, the one we shouted, crucify him, the one that we killed, he is now the one who, Ephesians 4, ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things.

He's the one, Ephesians 1, raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that's named, not only in this age but the age to come.

Uh-oh. This one we killed, he's the one, Philippians 2, whom God has highly exalted and bestowed on him the name that's above every name so that in the name of Jesus, in the name of this Jesus that they killed, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that this Jesus that they killed is the Christ, the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

That's why they're cut to the heart. You see, the pouring out of the Spirit points to the fact that he has taken the throne. That's the amazing thing. It's like Jesus is shouting down, yeah, you're having a great time, you've got the Spirit, but what that means is I'm on the throne.

He's the one who Peter says in Acts 3, heaven must receive until the time of restoring all things that God spoke about through the holy prophets long ago. You see, we might think that the Bible doesn't mention much about the ascension, but it actually runs through the entire New Testament in practically every book.

[22 : 06] Jesus is reigning above all things and it is seen in practically every page of the New Testament, either explicitly or implicitly. when we understand why Jesus is where he is, like at the end of Luke, remember in John in the upper room discourse, let not your hearts be troubled, the disciples are sorrowful that Jesus is leaving, suddenly at the end of Luke, they're rejoicing.

They return to Jerusalem with joy, great joy. It's because they know why Jesus is where he is. He's taking the throne. The risen Christ is not the king of a fallen earth.

In his kingdom there will be no evil, no darkness, no death. And what does this world have to offer such king? Nothing. See, he's the Lord of lords and the king of kings.

This world could not build a palace ground grand enough, nor a house or a throne worthy of his glory. This world is perishable, but his kingdom is eternal.

His body is a glorified body and he sits at the right hand of God as his anointed king. This world can't handle a king like this. You see, he must ascend far above all things and reign over all things.

[23 : 33] He must, as Psalm 2 says, take possession of the nations and make the ends of the earth his heritage. It's not about inviting Jesus into your heart.

Jesus didn't do all that he did to find a way into your heart. Jesus did all that he did to provide a way for me and you into his kingdom. So what has Jesus been doing for the past 2,000 years?

What's he been doing? He's been subduing his enemies. When you go to sleep, subduing his enemies. When you wake up in the morning, subduing his enemies.

When you go to work, interceding for me and you, for our protection and perseverance. When you have trouble acknowledging him before men, but you do it anyway at great cost, what is he doing?

Acknowledging you before the Father. Jesus is the king. He's been rescuing billions of people out of darkness for the past 2,000 years.

[24 : 42] Peter said in 2 Peter, he's not slow to fulfill his promises as some count slowness. He's patient towards you, not willing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Why? Because nothing unclean can enter his kingdom. Nothing unclean can enter his kingdom. Without him being patient, me and you would never enter his kingdom.

But as it is, he's been empowering his people to proclaim the good news to all nations so that me and you can enter his kingdom because of his death and resurrection and ascension.

You see, without Jesus ascending, the world would be far worse than it is right now. People think that people are good by nature. People think that Britain somehow intuitively knows morals and ethics and forget very quickly that Britain and the ethics and values of Britain were built on Christianity because Christians brought those ethics and values to this nation.

Without Jesus ascending, the world would be barbaric. But as it is, he did ascend and when he did, he sent the promise of his Father, the Holy Spirit, to empower his people to tell the world that he is the Lord above all.

[26 : 07] You see, that is the gospel. The gospel isn't simply that God loves you and he does and we must tell people that. God loves you so much that he would send his Son to die for you so that all who believe will not perish but have eternal life.

But, it doesn't end at that. It doesn't even end that God died to forgive you. What, so everyone's forgiven universal salvation? No.

See, the gospel is Jesus is Lord. Jesus reigns. When this world passes away, there will be one kingdom that lasts forever. And the king of that place is Jesus.

So, if you want in, it is through Jesus and him alone. That's the good news. You see, the good news is that the world needs a better king on the throne.

Is that not the case in every nation? Every nation complains about their government. The good news is about a better king on the throne.

[27 : 08] The good news is about a better rule in the kingdom. And the good news is about a better kingdom itself. Throughout the centuries, countless people are being rescued by that king, turned from wickedness, as Peter says in Acts 3.26.

People are encountering, every day, encountering this ascended king through his word and through his people by the power of his spirit. And because he is ascended and reigning, because he is ascended and reigning, he is our advocate when we sin.

He is our advocate before the Father when we sin. He is our example and strength when we are tempted. He is our intercessor for our protection and perseverance.

He empowers us to proclaim his name as we do so before men. And he acknowledges us before the Father. And though he is absent in body, he is present with us through his spirit and by his word.

Yet he is present in the heavens and so he should be. He doesn't belong to this earth anymore. He is the first of the new creation, the firstborn of the dead, the preeminent.

[28 : 27] He reigns above all things with all authority so that we can have confidence in the face of his enemies that he is Lord and not them. And whether or not he delivers us from their hands, he will stand like he did for Stephen in Acts 7.

He will stand to receive us into his kingdom. And he is the only one who can deliver anyone from the power of sin or the grip of death in the end. You see, we know this.

If you believe the Spirit testifies to our hearts that there is a better world, the Spirit testifies to our hearts that there is a better Lord and his name is Jesus.

He is the ascended Lord and Christ and he ascended into his glory. And that is the reality. And because he is there, he is not here.

Because he is there, he is not everywhere, but he is everywhere accessible. There is no corner of this world that he has no authority in.

[29 : 30] There is no place on this earth that his reign does not have an effect. You see, he is the beginning of a new creation while the old one is still here.

But John writes in his letter, the darkness is passing away, by the way, and the true light is already shining. And he repeats that by saying, the world is passing away along with all its desires.

But whoever does the will of God abides forever. And so, although his kingdom does not belong to this dying world, his kingdom and his reign is breaking in to this world all over the place as lives are being rescued and transformed all over the world to make their citizenship belong to a better place, a place that is eternal and is ruled by a glorious eternal king.

Taken from darkness to life, evil to good, the power of Satan to the power of God. And you see, our hope is not detached from the physical. See, Jesus was raised, but he was flesh and bones.

He could eat fish. They could touch him. They could see him and touch him and feel his wounds, sees scars. Humanity has entered into heaven, yet a new and better humanity than you're sitting in right now.

[30 : 55] Isn't that good news? And even the resurrection itself, would you want to be raised even to that glorious body and remain on this earth and this world with all its litter and problems?

Of course not. And people think with the environment or with net zero or whatever it is that we can change this world. We cannot. But there is a kingdom.

There is a kingdom and there is a king and he can take us there. Just as he was sown in dishonor but raised in glory. He was sown in weakness and raised in power.

He was sown in a natural body but raised in a spiritual body. He was sown in mortality but raised in immortality. So too shall we be. We will be like him.

Yet he has gone ahead already there. He is not only in glory but he is the glorious one. You see it is in his glory that he entered.

[32 : 03] And it is in his glory that we will enter. Not our own glory. It is his glory that we will see. And we will finally be home. We will be with him where he is to see his glory and give him praise forevermore.

For Jesus is the ascended king sitting on the throne to reign forevermore. And we give him praise and glory and honor forever.

Amen. Well we are going to sing two songs now to close. And I hope that we rejoice and are stirred up with thanksgiving and praise as we do so.

May you be encouraged that Jesus has already ascended.