

He Ascended into Heaven

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you so much for causing your word to be written. We thank you that you sent your son Jesus to die upon the cross to be our savior. We thank you for his tasting all there is to taste of death with nothing left over.

We thank you, Father, for his mighty resurrection, and we thank you for his ascension, and we thank you, Father, for his coming again in glory. And we thank you, Father, that you didn't just act to save us, but you gave us the good news.

You interpreted what happened. You told us what happened. Father, we thank you for this. We ask, Father, that you would gently but deeply pour out your Holy Spirit into us, so that our minds will not be conformed to this age, but we will be transformed, Father, by your word and by your Holy Spirit.

We will be transformed and have minds that lead us to act in such a way that our lives bring you great glory. And this we ask in Jesus' name, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Please be seated. I wish I could tell you that every time somebody says something to me at a coffee shop, like one of my non-Christian friends, I wish I could tell you that I was like an apologetic ninja that could just always parry everything that they say and just get them.

[1 : 2 1] But, you know, often I'm the exact opposite of an apologetic ninja. I just sort of stand there, not quite sure what to say, and then thinking of the perfect thing to say five minutes or five hours later or something like that.

But I had a time just a little while ago where, maybe it was even about a year ago, maybe somebody had been to a church and heard something like the story of the Ascension, which we're going to look at.

And he just completely mocked the story. And really, like, in really quick, you know, it's as if he'd been practicing, and his speech just came so perfectly flowing and quick.

You know how completely and utterly ridiculous the Bible is? It's completely unscientific. It's worse than unscientific. It's completely anti-scientific. It presents this idea as if somehow or another God sent down a fishing hook or a line and grabbed Jesus and pulls him up into the sky.

And just on the other side of the clouds, you know, where there's the blue dome, and it's just painted blue, and God paints it blue during the day, and he paints it black at night, or however, he just turns the light on and off.

[2 : 3 1] And God lives in some little room just above the sky, and he pulls Jesus up there, and that's where Jesus is. And the God and Jesus are just sort of waiting. And he said, you know, the Bible is just so completely and utterly ridiculous.

And I remember one time when I had something like this happen to me, the fellow did it as well in a bit of a loud voice so that most of the Starbucks could hear it. And I can't remember what I said in reply.

What I do know is that he actually probably, the fellow who said all this to me, actually probably wasn't willing to hear the answer. He just wanted to embarrass me. But some people don't just want to embarrass us, but they're troubled by texts like this.

They're troubled by the fact that it seems as if the Bible has a worldview that science is just completely and utterly disproven of a very tiny little planet Earth, and there's no, you know, the sun is just like a, I don't know, like a light that God turns on in the sky and sort of walks it around the roof, like a theater a little bit, I suppose.

You know, that the, and that God is just on the other side of that ceiling and he turns different lights on and off and, you know, has spotlights that move. And that's sometimes how it looks as if the Bible, is that what the Bible teaches?

[3 : 41] Is that what Christians are supposed to believe? It's obviously scientifically ridiculous. So let's look. Let's look and see what the Bible says. Be a great help to me if you open the Bible.

Bible and Acts 1, verses 1 to 11. And just a little bit of a plug. I also read my Bible on my phone and stuff like that. But, you know, I just want to really encourage you.

There's something about a book. And part of the thing that's so good about a book is that you know it's a book. You know, when you're reading the book of Acts and you know, look at this, there's all this stuff in the book that goes before and there's all this stuff that comes after.

There's just something about a book. And so I want to encourage you not to give up on books when it comes to reading your Bible. I mean, obviously, if the screen helps you read, then that's what you should do. But sometimes it's good to crack open a book and look at the words because you see the bigger flow.

Anyway, Acts 1, 1 to 11. So is the Bible teaching us something pretty ridiculous, not only unscientific, but completely and utterly anti-scientific? So let's have a look.

[4 : 42] And we'll start here. Acts 1, verse 1. In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.

Now just pause. He says here in the first book. So Luke has written another book and we know it as the Gospel of Luke. And it's very important in this case, if we just want to understand what the Bible is saying, to look at how Luke introduces his first book because he has a very similar type of introduction in both books.

So if you can just, you can keep your finger there or maybe you're really good at finding places in the Bible, just turn to Luke chapter 1. And we're just going to read the first four verses of Luke chapter 1 and just see how it is that Luke introduces the first book that he writes.

And here's how he introduces it. Luke 1. Luke 1, 1. Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, sorry, start again.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things that you have been taught.

[6 : 11] So notice here that, in fact, just if you're not aware of this, Luke was not one of the original disciples. He's not Jewish. He didn't actually, he was an eyewitness of Jesus and what Jesus did.

Luke was a pagan, well-educated. He was a doctor, who had been relatively prosperous, upper-middle-class doctor. He becomes a Christian, leaving paganism behind to become a Christian.

And he's one of the early pagans who becomes a Christian. And Luke becomes very deeply involved in the early Christian community. He meets many of the people who are eyewitnesses.

He probably, who knows what types of other things were in circulation, maybe little handwritten things or something like that. And he's a literate man, a scientific man, at least as they would have understood science back then, somebody who was careful in observation.

And he decides to write not a story inspired by true events or based upon true events. He tries to tell you true events. That's what he's claiming to do.

[7 : 15] He tries to put in a narrative form. And the best history is always written in some type of a narrative form. He tries to put in a narrative form, selecting out of the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of things that he could have written about Jesus, eyewitness testimony in a narrative form.

And that's what he's trying to do. And Theophilus is a pagan name. So he's not writing it for Jewish people, although obviously he'd be fine if Jewish people read it. He's writing for other pagans.

Whether Theophilus is a pagan who's become a Christian or whether he's a pagan who's a complete opponent and skeptic, whether he's a seeker, we don't know, but he writes to another pagan.

So now let's look at Acts chapter one. Sort of mindful of that. That's Luke's first book. And now we see Luke's second book. And he wrote the first book thinking he'd write a second.

And now we get how he introduces the second book. Remember, this is all important because we're trying to look and understand does the Bible portray that the universe is a little bit like the Ottawa Little Theater and God is on the roof.

[8 : 24] Well, actually, there's a space between, you know, here. No, God doesn't need a roof. So God just lives on the roof. Is that what the Bible's telling us? So chapter one of verse one of Acts again.

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands or orders.

It's a bit of a military image. Those of you who've served in the military, Jesus gave orders. He gave them a commission. He gave commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

So here's the first thing. Those of you who know me, I'm not going to say, well, this is just a metaphor. It's just an analogy. It's just, you know, a mythical account of peak experience or mystical experience.

[9 : 31] It's, you know, a way to use language or imagery to talk about, you know, what is Luke claiming? If you could put the first point up, Andrew, that would be great.

Luke tells the true story of Jesus, body and soul, being taken up into heaven. That's what Luke's claiming to do. Now, we might say he's wrong.

We might say that he was, you know, full of it. We might say that he's just, he's believing nonsense. We might believe, we might say all of those types of things and skeptics do and people from other religions and other faiths and other spiritualities and philosophies.

That's what they do. But at least we need to hear Luke. And this is what Luke is claiming. Luke is claiming that he is telling the true story of Jesus who, body and soul, he was taken up into heaven.

And so it's not a metaphor. It's not an image. And by the way, you know, here's one of the things. I'm not just saying this because this is what Christians have always believed.

[10 : 42] And some people might feel very uncomfortable because you see some Christians under the pressure of science and of skepticism.

They think they're helping the Bible or helping the Christian faith by saying that it's just a metaphor or it's an image, it's an analogy, it's just a mythic telling of a spiritual truth.

And they might even say, doesn't it actually say, George, in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus doesn't have a physical body but he has a spiritual body? So isn't this just accounting just a spiritual thing? And so some people, in a well-meaning way, they try to reinterpret it.

But the fact of the matter is, that's not at all what the Bible, it's not what the text says. Just even if you just set aside for a second, in a sense, I don't know if any of you have ever watched, there was a movie that went out, a documentary about Christopher Hitchens debating this very orthodox Christian and across the country.

And one of the things that Christopher Hitchens says is that he loves debating this fellow. In fact, here's Lord have mercy. He said, I hate debating those Anglican types because when I start to press them on what the Bible says, they say it's just a metaphor, it's just an analogy, it's just a parable.

[11 : 56] But when I press this guy on things, he says, yeah, darn tootin', that's what it says. And he defends it. And the fact of the matter is, is that you can't read the book of Luke and you can't read the book of Acts without coming to believe that Luke believes that everything he's talking about happened.

That's what he believes. From a literary point of view, that's what the book is trying to communicate. Whether or not that's ridiculous, that's a bit of another question, but we can't take refuge that it's describing mysticism.

That's not what the text is saying, just straightly from an intellectual level. Now, here's the other thing about this text, is obviously we can't prove, I mean, Luke is claiming that if we went back in a time machine, and if we were there with the apostles, we were somehow able to be just somehow there in the background waiting for it to happen, what Luke described is what we would see.

That's what Luke is claiming. But the proof for this, for somebody like you and me, is it ultimately goes back to the resurrection, which I'm not going to spend very much time on. But, you know, I'll just share with you, I've had different times in my life, especially in the first ten years of my Christian life, where I almost left the Christian faith.

You know, I have a degree in sociology with a minor in philosophy. I only have studied with non-Christian professors. I've never had an evangelical professor. For any of my first degree and my other types of post-graduate work and my graduate degree, I've always had non-Christian professors.

[13 : 43] And I've had times where I almost gave up my faith. Just as I, you know, you really just, you get filled with the weight of criticism. And it can sometimes be very, it was sometimes very, very hard.

And I'd pray, and I'd do reading, and I would do research. But I have never yet seen any good account for the start of the Christian faith that actually can deal with the facts in a reasonable way.

You know, in our, just during the last election, one of the big cries is that you wanted evidence-based policy, evidence-based thinking. That was one of the big things that supposedly, I'm not making a political comment one way or the other, the conservatives didn't believe in evidence-based policy.

Whether you, you know, that's a separate matter. I'm not going to comment on that at all. But, you know, unless you're a person who just says, on no condition, no matter what actually happens, it's just absolutely completely impossible that anything in the book of, that any of the eyewitness accounts of Jesus are possibly true, if it's just rejected, using the philosophical term a priori, you just reject it completely and utterly as not even being worth considering.

And you just say it's completely and utterly wrong. Unless you're, if you're actually willing to look at the evidence, the evidence is very, very, very strong.

[15 : 06] And there's, I have never seen a good account to account for Christian origins apart from this astounding claim that Jesus really did die on a Friday afternoon, that he was physically just known to be dead, that the thrust of the spear, the partial embalming, the seal on the tomb, and that on the third day, the tomb is empty, even though it was guarded by soldiers, and that Jesus appears alive to a whole range of witnesses over 40 days.

And I, there's been no account that deals with the, there's no other account that deals with the evidence of the explosive growth of the Christian faith in the very city where Jesus died, where all anybody had to do was show the body.

And the explosive growth, despite persecution, despite jailing, it's a complete opposite of the, of, of Islamic origins that are closely tied, Islamic origins are closely tied to military victory.

Christianity suffers complete and utter the, the weight, the unrelated, lending weight of the state and the military against it, and the explosive growth on the claim of an empty tomb and a real resurrection, and there has never been, I have not seen an account that can deal with the evidence.

I just never have. And that's, it's because of that that these other types of claims that I think we need to take them very seriously.

[16 : 47] And, and the claim that we can't take this very seriously, this whole thing of a, of the worldview, there's a very, very simple mistake that people make when they say that.

They, they, sometimes they might be well-meaning, sometimes, like my friend, they were just trying to embarrass me. But, Christians believe, I mean, this is a bit of a theology geek moment, like a bit of time out, theology geeks, okay, time out for theology geeks.

But, the Christian claim is that it's the words of the Bible that are inspired. It's the words, the words that God wanted written are the words that were put down. The Bible doesn't make the claim, Christians haven't made the claim, that God scanned the earth and thought, you know what, the most brilliant person ever is Luke, so I'm going to have Luke write it.

And, and the most mystical person and holy person ever is John. I'm going to have John write it. Oh, and look at Mark. Mark, whoa, IQ through the roof, you know? No.

The Bible, in fact, God, the consistent record of the Bible is that God chooses the weak and the foolish to shame the strong. He wasn't looking for the guys with the highest IQs.

[17 : 54] And that's a bit of a put down for us, by the way, okay? We're not the highest IQs in the city of Ottawa. If you think you are, a few marks off your IQ right there.

And, and so, what the Bible says is that, that, okay, you know what it says? It's very chaste. Look at verse 9 again. Look at verse 9. It's a very chaste description of what happens.

The whole account of the ascension, what goes on, the few verses before, which we're going to look at in a moment, the few verses after give you interpretation and context, okay? But the actual event, look how simple it is.

And when he had said these things as they were looking on, he was lifted up and the cloud took him out of their sight. It's very, very discreet. Now, you know what? It might very well be that if we went back in a time machine and we knew how to speak to the apostles, we'd mastered their language, that if we were going back, afterwards as they were going back to their next place, they might actually, each one of them might literally have thought, whoa, you know, the world is like the Ottawa Little Theater and God is on the roof and God pulled Jesus, and that might be what they think.

I mean, that might be what they think. But you know, one of the things which is so wonderful about the Bible is that none of this is actually in the Bible. Like all their views about how the world worked, all their views on what we would now call astronomy and physics, it's not there in the Bible.

[19 : 23] Part of the power of the Bible as God's inspired word is what's not in it. And you know, we should be so glad that what is in it right now doesn't accord with what we say in 2016, because the fact of the matter is that if Jesus tarries in 2416, the science that we now hold, they will laugh at.

So that if the Bible was written in such a way of somehow or another that God had magically given the apostles an understanding of physics and astronomy that would match 2016, it would just make it ridiculous in a hundred years' time.

You see, part of the power of the Bible is all the things that are kept out. Here's another thing. This actually is something, and you know, maybe science will come up with something a little bit different.

You see, the possibility, it is making an astounding claim. What the text is saying is that Jesus started to rise. And that as he started to rise, a cloud comes and obscures him.

Now, if you've read Luke, you'll know that at the end of the transfiguration, the cloud comes and obscures Jesus and everything that's going on. They're in a cloud.

[20 : 34] And if you've read the Old Testament, there's a cloud that leads the people of Israel by day. And if you read the Old Testament, you know that the Shekinah, the glory, the cloud comes and settles on the temple, that there's different times when the cloud is a very, very chaste way of describing the presence of God's glory and how, as God's glory comes, it's as if we can no longer see God's glory because our unfallen, our fallen eyes cannot behold unfallen realities.

But rather than trying to do it the way Steven Spielberg would do it, the Jewish people under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit give a very chaste, simple description.

And so what we see is that Jesus is rising, the cloud, the Shekinah glory comes and no longer can Jesus be seen. And we can just imagine that Peter and John and James, they elbow the others and say, we've seen something like this before.

The cloud's going to go away and it's just going to be Jesus only. But the cloud fades, they're looking up, waiting to see Jesus only and Jesus is gone. Christians believe, you want to know something which is really cool?

And I have to be careful. I'm going to be saying a few things about physics and all next week. I know there's at least one real physicist in the room, so I'm always a bit nervous anything I say about physics. But what I understand about, one of the things I've understood about physics is that, and this is mind-blowing, is that space is curved.

[22 : 14] Like, I always just sort of thought that space, like if you were able to get like a laser, like some unbelievably powerful type of laser that would never turn, would just go straight and somehow could withstand gravitational pull so that if you pointed it at a black spot in the sky, it would just go on forever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever because space just goes on forever and ever and ever and ever.

But you know what physicists say? That if you had that, if you had that, that laser and it could point in, it would never vary, it would never go anything other than straight and it would never be affected by gravitational pulls, that if I did it like this and it could speed time up, it would hit me in the back of the head.

That's what physics teach. Space is curved. Isn't that freaky? And so what the Bible teaches is that everything that we know, all of space and time was created by God.

Just imagine, I'm not God, but just imagine I'm God. This is space and time, all of the created order. It's this tennis ball. And God is outside of it.

There was a really, really wonderful debate slash dialogue the other night and right up here, the philosophy professor from the University of Toronto who was the atheist, you could almost see him just going like this, like, you know, how on earth could there possibly be a God who's created all things?

[23 : 45] Like, what was he doing before? Like, was he just sort of sitting around waiting and he just sort of like with a little bit of a grin on his face? The fact of the matter is is that space and time is created.

It's on the ball. Time doesn't apply to God. Just as if you're watching, you know, Downton Abbey or watching something on Netflix and we're outside of it, the time that's going on in the show, that's completely different than us.

Just a very smart way. And all of creation is like this tennis ball. It's even curved because who on earth can get their mind around the fact that space is curved? And God is outside of it.

Time doesn't apply to him. And what the Bible text is just saying is that Jesus, who lived with body and soul, that he entered, in a sense, this tennis ball.

He entered the realm of space and time, the created order. And he did all the things that he did to ultimately save us, that at some point in time, the resurrection appearances come to an end, which is part of the point of the ascension.

[24 : 56] And Jesus leaves space and time and body and soul, he goes outside of space and time where God is. And if you say, well, how on earth does that work?

Then all I can say is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15. You fool. How on earth can we possibly talk about what existence is like outside of space and time?

You know, we can't even, it's a famous problem in philosophy that you can't even talk about time without using an analogy of distance and length. Isn't that freaky?

I think that's mind-blowing. So how on earth could God use any words that would mean anything to our minds framed by space and time as to what it's like for the God, the Son of God, body and soul, to leave space and time to be where there is no space and time where God is?

I don't know what that means. But one day I will. I will. Now, that's all pretty cool.

[26 : 10] But you know what? For some people, just hearing what I've just said, all it would do is create fear within them. I just saw this really spectacular quote in the paper the other day. It was quoting a Canadian academic.

It was written by, the article was by a non-Christian, really very, very, very, very deeply thoughtful guy. I love reading him. And he was talking about this new work by a Canadian teaching the States trying to talk about terrorism.

And Andrew, could you put up the first note? Hey, bien. I'm going to, this is a quote. It's just NB because it's not my point, although I've just slightly adapted it. Here's what I saw in the paper just recently.

If God is, actually they use God with a capital G and I demoted that God. Sorry, it's a Christian church, so I demoted him. it for this purpose. But if God is on our side, everyone else is godless and worthy of death.

If God is on our side, everyone else is godless and worthy of death. Now, in our bones, we believe that.

[27 : 18] I mean, for a lot of people in our culture, if I, the more you come to prove that Jesus might actually have risen from the dead or that it's intellectually compelling, for many of them, it's not, oh, you know, tune my heart to sing thy praise, but a feeling of dread.

Now, this quote was in the context of explaining Islamic terrorism or Islamists, anyway, you know, I don't, I'm not, you know, that terrorism from that root, but the fact is he didn't say that.

He made it in a very general comment and that for many, many, many, many people in our culture, this is how they view religion. It's why, no matter how compelling arguments would be, they do not want, part of the reason they do not want it to be true, but let's be honest.

If I was like God and I could do things like God and get away with it, people would die. And I'm not especially wicked.

I'm probably only average wicked. I think every single one of you too, if you think about it, my body count might be way higher than yours because you're a better person than me.

[28 : 41] And why is it that we talk about murderous looks? And there is something deeply human in this phrase.

That if I had the power of God, if I thought that God was on my side, then those who are the godless are worthy of death. And we would kill some of them.

I would kill some of them. So would you. There's something very true about that statement. So, and the other thing about it was we have to be honest is that some people who call themselves Christians and maybe really even are Christians have acted in this way.

God is on their side. The godless, therefore, are worthy of death. So let's just look a little bit here at the Bible and see do Christians need to be corrected by modern academics, by secular culture?

Do we need to be corrected? Because if we get too serious in the Bible it's only going to cause deep problems. Muslims. I just read a very, very fascinating book by a former Muslim and one of the things that he says is that part of the problem right now going on in Islam it's by Nabil Qureshi and is that in Islam there's the Quran then there's the Hadith and then there's Sharia with fatwas that go along with it and all three of them sort of govern how Muslims sort of understand themselves and that when people are asking for Muslims to go underneath a reformation the problem is that the Quran is vastly more murderous and bloody than the other two sources.

[30 : 36] In other words he says ISIS is the reformation and that for Quran for Muslims we need to hope that the other sources which are far more humane end up governing and historically have governed how most actual Muslims that you'd ever meet actually would live that those become more powerful but for Christians is it that as we get more closely into the Bible that this will be true?

Well let's look we stopped at verse 3 let's continue at verse 4 and while staying with them that was Jesus and by the way one of the words for staying that little simple sentence could be translated in three ways by the way in Greek and one of the ways to translate it would be that he was eating with them like yet another proof that he was actually physically alive he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father for which he said you heard from me for John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now and you know it might very well be that for the apostles they think whoa we're going to really have power now now we're going to be able who knows what they thought then verse 6 so when they had come together they asked him Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel now when they're asking in this question they're basically asking God are you going to come is Jesus are you going to become the head of Israel and is Israel going to basically take over the world that all of the world will bow the knee to Israel and by the way when they're asking this question if you read the gospels you know that they thought they would all have they weren't thinking they would be on the top they weren't thinking they'd be the top dog they were thinking that Jesus would be in the top chair but guess who would be in the chair just underneath them them and then Israel and then the world so that's how they think they're asking him that question verse 7 and if you think about it for a second isn't that question like this that's implicit in the question something like that

God's on our side those who are not are godless and how does Jesus answer he said to them verse 7 it is not for you to know times or seasons that the father has fixed by his own authority now just pause here for a second he basically ignores the question basically he's saying that's not what's going to happen and the other thing which is really really significant here is that it's not just that people people who think that God is on their side they also you know the most of the death in the 20th century that's been caused by tyranny has been by people who think that utopia is on their side that they've understood the flow of history and because they know how history is going to go the workers the peasants the educated that the people who are Chinese if you're in Vietnam or whatever the wrong groups they can be put to death and Jesus here is completely rejecting any type of millennial utopian knowledge given to his people

Donald Trump Hillary Clinton Bernie Sanders the person who will serve you coffee at Tim Hortons and the next street person and me all equally know the future as well as the philosophy faculty and sociology and psychology and political science faculty and MBA faculty University of Ottawa and Carleton we all equally know the future which is zero the one thing that Christians know is that Jesus will return beyond that nada that's that's all we know so you see right here that the biblical text is starting to cut the legs out from that human desire expressed in that quote but it gets even more look at verse 8 but okay so we want they want to have political power and they want to have knowledge of the future Jesus says you're not going to have either of those things but and I don't know maybe they're going okay but there's going to be something better there's going to be something better you will receive power when the

Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth let's be honest folks for many of us when we hear that rather than getting lots of power and superior knowledge we just get the Holy Spirit we say we just get the Holy Spirit oh dang I was hoping for something a bit better let's just be honest but Jesus is giving us something better if we trust him in verse 9 and when he had said these things as they were looking on he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight and while they were gazing into heaven as he went behold two men stood by them in white robes their angels and said men of Galilee why do you stand looking into heaven this Jesus by the way this is going to be really significant because it introduces a phrase that's going to be all the way through the rest of the book of Acts and all the way through the book of Acts constantly the apostles say this same Jesus whom you crucified it's tying it to the entire book of Luke this Jesus okay I'll explain the significance in a moment this Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven could you put up the first point as the next point

[36 : 27] Andrew here's what the Bible's trying to teach this is one of the reasons why this deep fear that we have in our culture that the Bible the Christian faith that what Jesus does it completely undermines it because you see the cultural expectation we have in our culture is that if I was like God people would die that is so deeply rooted in our culture that if in what it means to be a human that if I was God if I was like God if I had God in my pocket if I could walk around and God was right with me and he would do whatever I wanted because he is my ally people would die and we cannot understand that the God who really does live and exist and he saw human beings like you and me and he decided he would die out of love for us and what we're seeing here with the end of the ascension is we see this one powerful act of grace by one person to redeem every person who receives him by faith alone what we have to understand is that it's all just one mighty act of God

Philippians 2 5 to 11 puts it all in a very very wonderful way and it's God the son of God and he sees profound human need he sees the murder in our hearts he sees the desire for us to be God in our hearts and seeing who we are as we really are he sets aside his glory and divine prerogatives and it's one mighty act to save us created in the womb of the virgin Mary taking into himself our human nature even such unbelievably frail and weak human nature as what a human being is like in the womb of a woman taking that into himself without giving up being God and going through the process of birth and living as a child and living as a lower working class person in an oppressed people group and doing his three years of teaching in his sinless life it's all one mighty act of God and his death upon the cross where God himself dies for humanity that wants to be God and he sees we cannot leave ourselves and he dies for us

God himself as Jesus as man dies for you and me and then he tastes all there is to taste of death and then he rises from the dead on the third day and then he ascends into heaven it is one mighty act of grace one mighty act of God to redeem any who put their faith and trust in him and it completely subverts to use modern post-modern language it completely deconstructs and subverts the fear and desires of our heart if we are but willing to recognize that they are there within us the other day and that's by the way that's why we don't need secular philosophy to improve Christianity what we just need is to be gripped by the gospel Jesus calls us to be witnesses not rulers and by the way that's a wonderful wonderful comfort so I've shared with you there are many times too many times for me to share with you when I've tried they know I'm a Christian and people it's almost as if some people this is not a bad thing it's a good thing it's almost as if they're waiting for me to come in because they've got an objection to the Christian faith that they don't think

I'll be able to beat and sometimes I am not an apologetic ninja I don't go oh yeah and then karate chop them and just aha beat them I am Bible here isn't saying I am going to make you apologetic ninjas who will destroy every single argument that ever comes your way no it doesn't say that the power comes from the Holy Spirit that's where all the power comes from I just want you to be witnesses not ninjas witnesses the word is martyr the word is martyr now just the other day I was coming into I have to I have to be careful here at my time I came into one of my favorite coffee shops and a person was telling me about their I guess their latest theory and and she has a science degree and completely non-Christian really really you know a nice young woman and and for some reason she wanted to share with me that the only value that human beings have is that the energy that is within them and and that when they die the only value we have is the energy that we release back when we die and here's the thing

Andrew could you let's read verses 9 and 11 again and when he had said these things as they were looking on he was lifted up in a cloud took him out of their sight we'll just read verse 9 Jesus is taken up into heaven body and soul let's put this next point up Andrew the human person body and soul matters to God so the person body and soul should matter to God's redeemed people I mean the fact of the matter is it's actually sort of very sad and tragic and I didn't do a very good job responding to to this young woman but it's sort of very sad and tragic to think that the only way we can could conceive from a scientific point of view the value of a human being is the energy value in the body and we don't really live that way because the fact of the matter is if somebody had slapped her I'm sure she'd say how dare you treat me that way if somebody had you know taken her wages she'd work the hours and then somebody else had taken the wages or taken all the tips she'd say how dare you treat me like that and on one level we have this very fundamental sense that there's a dignity and importance to human beings and there's a dignity and value of human beings but for people increasingly in our culture we have no way of grounding that in anything like one of the saddest things about the conversation between the atheist and Os Guinness last Sunday night in this room was that he had no way to actually account for the value or dignity of human beings or even their freedom but look at this this text of the ascension it's so wonderful

[43 : 02] Jesus body and soul goes to be with God outside of space and time it shows that the body and what it means to be a person that it matters and that's why Christians throughout the ages as they've been gripped by the gospel not only do they want to go to the ends of the earth to share the gospel but we that as you're gripped by the gospel you know that being a person matters body and soul and that's why historically Christians they want to they want to start hospitals they want to start hospices they want to start schools they want to people who don't have have language but no writing they want to give them writing they want to give them the gift of books and the gift of learning and they've been at the and it's why Christians you know Martin Luther King and the whole civil rights movement and William Stringfellow and the abolition of slavery and how Christians and you know the birth of some basic social care issues in Canada which came out of the you know out of the you know out of the

Manitoba and Christians it's there's a concern for justice for treating people right for treating people well for the abol the body matters the person matters and because of that justice matters and feeding people matters and it's rooted in Jesus it's rooted in the gospel as we're gripped by the gospel we will have a greater concern for the integrity and the value and the importance of a person body and soul and in fact as well as that like you know the well-meaning people who try to say that Jesus didn't ascend bodily into heaven and didn't in 1 Corinthians 15 Jesus had a spiritual body and they're they're very well-meaning but sometimes they're often very well-meaning sometimes they're not sometimes they're just being troublesome and mischievous but they're potentially well-meaning and they don't understand that the 1 Corinthians 15 isn't saying that somehow Jesus' body became just spirit yet the spiritual body means you know my body and my spirit and my mind often don't work together like I wake up in the morning and I'd like to be a go up get up and get them but my knees just don't agree

I used to be when I was young I could get up in the morning go for a run I need to be up like for an hour and a half two hours just to get the things moving you know my mind wants to do something my soul wants to do something my body just doesn't agree gets in the way and the spiritual body is saying that the actual body is so completely at one with God with a redeemed spirit and so when a spiritual body is being taken up into heaven it means that Jesus is triumphant not only over all evil things but creation itself which no longer is the way that it should be that create the created order itself is drawn up into heaven which is why it is that Christians gripped by the gospel would care for the environment and would care whether animals are treated cruelly because the entire created order matters and is brought up into heaven to be with Jesus and one final thing in closing this is an adaptation by

David Foster Wallace and it just struck me recently could you put up this thing I've just slightly changed something that he said most of the big things in my life do not love me that is really true you know I was listening to the radio a little while ago and somebody commented about how they just before they knew it they'd wasted five hours looking at funny cat videos on YouTube and I'm sure nobody here in this room has ever done anything even remotely like that and if you think about it for five hours the biggest thing in your life was looking at a screen and the people who invented all of that none of them love you and it just left you being alone and now some of us some of you have young babies and gosh they love you so it's not that everything that's a big thing in your life doesn't love you but you know how many of us give ourselves to politics how many of us give ourselves to culture how many of us give ourselves to money how many of us give ourselves to career how many of us give ourselves to the university how many of us give ourselves to

Netflix and none of these things there are big things in our life and none of them love you and that doesn't even count the fact that we get death's a big thing sickness is a big thing being alone is a big thing enemies are big things things and often if we are honest we seem like small little things in a world of big things and if we are honest most of those big things don't love us and this story of the ascension of Jesus tells a completely different way for those who are followers of Jesus to begin to learn to live if you could put up the point Andrew the real true living Lord of costly love is vastly bigger than any big thing in my life verses 8 to 11 and if you read through the gospels and read through the

[49 : 04] New Testament one of the things you'll understand about the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit is God himself the third person of the Trinity and one way to understand the Holy Spirit is the everlasting love of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father and that everlasting progression of love is one way to understand the Holy Spirit himself that the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives is the coming of love into our lives it's coming into our lives of the very very same power that created the universe that rose Jesus from the dead you know what we'll see with the day of Pentecost is that the Holy Spirit comes upon God's people in a new and powerful way you know if you've ever seen the movie The Lord of the Rings there's this wonderful scene towards the end where the orcs are attacking can't remember the place and they know they're going to win and one orc says out loud the age of men have ended the age of orcs have begun and of course they're wrong but when we read here in verse 8 we're seeing that God is saying the age of the

Holy Spirit has begun the age of witness has begun the in between time between Jesus ascending into heaven and his coming again that time has begun listen to verse 8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth and when he had said these things as they were looking on he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight and while they were gazing into heaven as he went behold two men stood by them in white robes and said men of Galilee why do you stand looking into heaven this Jesus this Jesus who has taken up from you into heaven will come away come again will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven we Christians need to learn that Jesus is big and everything we face is small and it's not that he's made me big but that the one who's ascended in triumph over all principalities and power and he's ascended over heaven in triumphant grace filled triumph that I can go through my day being held by him who's bigger than everything

I face I can go through my days and I can be like I don't know some of the kids who come down for communion you'll notice they don't come down for communion I mean they get a blessing not communion they come down on their daddy's shoulders they're the tallest ones in the room even though they're only two feet tall and that's you and me when we're with Jesus we can go through our day on Jesus' shoulders and he's bigger than anything we face he's bigger than anything you face in your past that still haunts you any bigger than any type of addiction he is bigger and we're on his shoulders want to just stand please Andrew could you put up the prayer to close you know the wonderful thing about all of this before we say this prayer I'm going to invite you to say this prayer with me is remember I tried to say that Luke believes and I believe and I think there's good reason to believe that this really happened so this isn't just a pleasant story to please you this isn't like you know like you hurt your knee and your mommy tells you something about how if she kisses it's going to make it better but you know we all know that a kiss by a mommy doesn't actually make the cut go away

I mean we know that right and this isn't just like a story like this is true like this really happened like Jesus is really present he really gives his holy spirit to ordinary fallen human beings like you and me when we put our faith and trust in Jesus and if you have never given your life to Jesus there is no better time than today to make even this prayer your conversion prayer please pray it with me Lord I confess that I live my life as if you are small and most other things in my life are big please make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel living for your glory please grow in me a deep humble habit of being and habit of action where you are big and everything I face is small father this is the cry of our hearts make us disciples of Jesus gripped by the gospel living for your glory father help us to not desire to tower over things but to bear witness to live for your glory to live for the good of people and for your great glory help us father to face each day with courage and humility and hope knowing how big our savior is who carries us that he is vastly bigger than even the biggest thing we face father thank you and all

God's people said amen