

# The Ascension of Christ

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[ 0 : 00 ] We are going to turn now to the book of Acts and to chapter 1.

Acts chapter 1 and we may just read from the beginning. Acts chapter 1 and we may just read from the beginning.

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Acts chapter 1 and we may just read from the beginning. Therefore, when they had come together, they asked him, saying, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

And he said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in his own authority, but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

[ 1 : 54 ] Now when he had spoken these things while they watched, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?

This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven.

I want us to think for a wee while today on the passage we read in Luke 24, verses 50 and 51, and also and particularly Acts 1, 1 to 11, and to think about the ascension of Christ.

Now in terms of the calendar, the church calendar that is, the traditional calendar, this is actually the day of Pentecost.

So we're about ten days behind or so, but the point is, that's for another day. Here we have something that I would describe as a neglected doctrine in the Christian faith.

[ 3 : 16 ] Not that it is denied necessarily, but it is often overlooked, and it's passed by without much real thought on it. And even in the theologies, you know, the various systematic theologies, there's not much room given in many of them to study on the ascension.

And yet it is an important doctrine. It is a strategic doctrine. It is the transition from the beginning of Christ's exaltation at resurrection, until he enters upon his session at the right hand of the Father. So it is a doctrine that promotes hope in the believer. However, it is a doctrine that encourages us to act to faith and to generous service for Christ here in this world.

So what I want to do to begin with as we look at this account of the ascension of Christ is to remind you, as it were, that the great commission was given by the Saviour, not in Jerusalem, not on the Mount of Olives, but away up in Galilee, overlooking Tiberias, near Capernaum.

And the Saviour gave that great commission. You have the record of it in Matthew 28, 18, following. And he prepared his disciples.

[ 4 : 56 ] He outlined their task. He assured them of power. And he assured them of his presence always, in all the days, and so on.

And then he led them back down to the south, back to Jerusalem, and out to Bethany, going east, and then on to the Mount of Olives, as we're told here in this passage in Acts.

And yet, if you think about it, only 40 days before this event, Jesus had been taken from the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives, from Gethsemane, and tried by different people, judged by different people, until ultimately Pilate passed the official sentence, and he was taken and crucified.

And it's good to remind ourselves that, and Luke records this, he presented himself alive, verse 3, after his suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them, that is, by his disciples, during 40 days, and so on.

And Paul tells us, interestingly, in 1 Corinthians 15, from verse 1, that Christ was seen by the apostles, and by 500 in one place.

[ 6 : 31 ] And it is generally recognized that that was most probably back up there, on the slope overlooking the Lake of Galilee, above Capernaum, where there is a natural amphitheater and plenty room.

He was seen there, as the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Now, you see, back down, and east of Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, the time has come to complete, as it were, the transition from earth to heaven.

And Luke furnishes us both in his, in the last passage, in Luke's Gospel, 24, which we read, and here, in the book of Acts, he furnishes us with information on this transition.

We simply want to draw on these passages, and to notice some things, to help us, to encourage us, to enable us to hope in the Lord, and to be active in his service.

Knowing what he has accomplished, not only in his resurrection, but in his ascension, has direct influence upon our lives.

[ 7 : 54 ] We have, as we were saying in prayer, a moment ago, we have a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens. He is in glory, he is ruling, as a great king priest.

He is ruling over all things, and he is there for us, to empower us, by his spirit. And so, when we look at this account, of the ascension, of the risen Jesus, the first thing to notice, is how Jesus resisted, what I may call, curious questions.

This question, of the disciples, is one that has occupied, the church, over the centuries. And it, in a sense, shows you the, the aptitude, and the attitude, that people have, for mysteries.

most folk, who read, who are readers, like a good mystery. And, notwithstanding, Jesus said, this is a no-go area.

People, Christian people, have spent, a lot of time, and energy, trying, to speculate, and resolve, their speculations, on when, the kingdom, will be restored.

[ 9 : 14 ] You see, in the passage, verse 6, the disciples, were eager to know, about the restoration, of Israel, or, the kingdom, to Israel.

Verse 6, Lord, will you at this time, restore the kingdom, to Israel? That's their curious question. And to them, through, the rabbinical teaching, that they had, absorbed, to them, when Messiah, would at last, arrive, he would, he would set up his base, on, Jerusalem's holy mount, and he would reign, there, over all the nations.

That's the way they thought. But, this is something, that has persisted. It's not something, that is relegated, to history past.

There's a large movement, movement, within Christian, Zionism, dispensationalism, some pre-millennialists, who hold tenaciously, to this, that Jesus, will return, and set up his camp, in Jerusalem, the temple, will be rebuilt, before that time arrives, and he will rule, over the nations, from there.

And that's a view, that is held. But you see, Jesus, responds, to the question, of his disciples. And his response, is important to us, in relation, to his ascension.

[ 10 : 48 ] True, he doesn't dismiss it, out of hand. He doesn't, dismiss the idea, of a restoration, of the kingdom, to Israel. But, what he does do, is he establishes, that, the important thing, for the people of God, is to follow his teaching, and to act upon it.

Not to speculate. Not to, pontificate, on the times, and the seasons. You may recall, not so long ago, just a few weeks ago there, on the national news, that there was, an American group, claiming, that the world, was going to end.

I forget now, the precise day, but it's past. No one knows. The Saviour said it, more than once.

No one knows, these things. No one knows, the day or the end. That it will come, there's no doubt.

So said our Saviour, again and again.

And this question, about will you at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel, is one of those, curious questions, it's not going to get an answer, the answer we want.

[ 12 : 04 ] The apostles, had an answer, and they had, to accept the answer. Now you see, Jesus doesn't, dismiss the thing, we've noted that.

He doesn't dismiss, the idea, that there will be, a return, of the kingdom, to Israel. But his whole, emphasis, was not, on a this world kingdom, but on a, spiritual kingdom, into which, the people, would be gathered.

And it's quite clear, from his teaching, that the Jewish people, Israel, the nation, largely was cut off. Lost the privileges, of the kingdom, because of unbelief.

The kingdom, he said, do you remember, and the, the scribes and Pharisees, were furious. The kingdom, will be taken, from you, and given, to a nation, to the goyim, the nations, bearing, fruit, of repentance.

That doesn't mean, there would be, no Jews saved. No, it doesn't mean, that at all. but it means, that the focus, has shifted, and shifted, for a long time. But, the very fact, that Jesus, doesn't say, there'll be no restoration, entitles us, to hold the view, as we do, and the apostle Paul, certainly did, that the day, would come, when there would be, a restoring, of the kingdom, to Israel.

[13:39] Or rather, a return, of the Jewish people, or mass, to the faith, of their father, Abraham. And they would receive, the Lord Jesus Christ, as their Messiah, as their Savior.

But the interesting, thing here, you see, is that Jesus, cuts off, all curious, questioning, into what is simply, not ours to know.

There are some things, they're simply, not ours to know. In Deuteronomy, there's a verse, the secret things, belong to the Lord. And the things, that he has made known, to us, and to our children, and the focus, has to be, not on the hidden things.

The Gnostics, in the New Testament, that's what they were about. The Illuminates, and other lot, they were, they were claiming, specialist knowledge, of the mysteries, of God.

They were going beyond, what was revealed. As if, come with us, and we will show you, we have something better. No, no. We have, scripture in its entirety.

[14:57] Doubtless, we receive new light, from the scriptures. We're talking about this, at the prayer meeting, on Thursday past. Isn't it wonderful, how you read a passage?

Ha! And suddenly, I think, pops up, and you say, I never noticed that before. I've read this passage, hundreds of times. I never saw it before. And I was saying to the folk, it's worse for me, because I'm in the scriptures, all the time.

In the Greek, and in the Hebrew, and in the commentaries too. And suddenly, when you're sitting, with your own Bible, in your mother tongue, having prayed, for a blessing, the Lord brings, something up to you.

New light. But it's new light, on the good old, faithful, living scriptures. We see, what we never saw before. And that's an ongoing, and an enriching, and an ennobling thing.

Because they're revealed, and God reveals, and continues to reveal them. And in that sense, we can leave the secret things.

[16:07] I know, fine of course, Psalm 25, and verse 14, tells us, the secret of the Lord, is with those who fear him. But that's, that is a reference, to his counsel, to his covenant, dealings, with his people.

And he brings out, things that we don't, easily see. But there are, secret things, that are out of bounds, things. And this is one of them.

And Jesus, tells his disciples, that very thing. There are secret things, in theology. And there are, there are, there are simply no, there, there's no great value, in speculating on them.

People try to work out, God's plan, in eternity, and the order, of his operations, in the eternal counsel. There's no real, spiritual, soul, food, benefit, in all that.

These things, are locked up to us. Just the same, as there's no, way, for us to, imagine that, for a moment, we can know, all there is, to know about God.

[17:28] Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is, an area, of, of, of, incomprehensibility, of that, which is beyond us. But the wonderful message, of the Bible is, we can know him.

And we can know him, more, and more. But we don't, we don't, we don't whinge, or we shouldn't whinge, because we're not going to know him, as he knows himself. Do you see what I mean?

No, there are no, go areas, we have to accept. Same with Providence. There's no answer, to why, this one is, afflicted, with this, disability, or this, debilitating illness.

There's no real answer, that satisfies us. It belongs, to the Lord. It's enough, for us to say, this is his will. I will submit, to it, and get grace, from him, to cope with it.

But the real, inside knowledge of it, is simply, inaccessible, to us. And to return, to the question, will you at this time, restore the kingdom?

[18:42] Will you at this, seize it? It's simply, not accessible. And what Jesus does, is he focuses, at attention, on the duty, of his people, in this world, in terms of activity.

You see what he says? You will receive, power, from on high, to be, my, witnesses. Verse, eight.

As to the, the chronology, and the season, there are things, that are out of our orbit, that are inaccessible.

But, you, verse eight, shall receive, power. You'll get, what you need, to do your work, in this world, to be my witnesses, a testimony, to my saving grace.

That's, what's important. And, we need, therefore, to focus, on the anointing, of the Holy Spirit, upon the believing, people, of God.

[ 19 : 52 ] we come in, if we're in Christ today, we come in, through the door, of regeneration, by the power, of the Spirit of God. And, we go on, in that same power, of the Spirit.

And, we need, what we might call, a fresh anointing, and empowering. It's an ongoing thing. In Ephesians 5, and verse 18, Paul says, go on, being filled, with the Spirit.

Be not drunk, with wine, wherein is excess, but go on, being filled, with the Spirit. Galatians 5, 16, keep in step, with the Spirit.

This is the way, not to be cluttered, with the desires, of the flesh. Keep in step, with the Spirit. If we live, he says, verse 25, Galatians 5, if we live, in the Spirit, let us, therefore, walk, in the Spirit.

This is what, Jesus says, we are to concern, ourselves with. You shall receive, power, when the Holy Spirit, has come upon you.

[ 21 : 06 ] Wait, verse 4, for the promise, of the Father. You shall be, baptized, verse 5, with the Holy Spirit, not many days, from now.

And we are living, in that sense, post-Pentecost. We are living, in the age, of the Spirit. In the age, of the Spirit, whose delight, it is, to glorify, Christ, and equip, the people of God.

There is, where our focus, needs to lie. This is the way, to be faithful witnesses, in our words, and our work, for Jesus.

He, therefore, puts an end, to these, curious questions. He resists them. He is not going, to give way to them, but to shift, our focus, onto what, is most important, the empowering, work, of the Spirit.

And the second thing, in this very context, is that he, Jesus, blesses his church. And, borrowing here, from the passage, in Luke 24, verses 50, and 51.

[ 22 : 21 ] Bear in mind here, first of all, that the apostles, represented the whole, church of God, in the world, at that time. And in a sense, they are the foundations, stones, of the church, for all time.

Isn't that, what Paul says, in Ephesians 2, verse 20, we are built, upon the foundation, of the apostles. Christ, Jesus, being the chief, cornerstone.

That's why, we are an apostolic, church. That's why, we belong, to a holy, apostolic, church. That's why, we belong, to a holy, apostolic, catholic, church.

The church, universal. That's why, we belong to it. Because, we are built, on apostolic, doctrine. And, therefore, what we need, to do, at this point, is to, as it were, go back, to that passage, in Luke, and to, as it were, see, that the great, high priest, of the, apostolic, confession, is standing there, with his hands, upraised, to bless them, as he leaves them.

With uplifted hands, he is blessing his own. Blessing them, with all, the spiritual blessings, as only he could. Blessing them, by imparting, to them, his love, and mercy, and grace, and fellowship.

[ 24 : 02 ] And, there isn't a blessing, so rich, as what Christ, gives us. And, he is there, with hands, appraised, blessing them, as he goes. But, it is also, and, this is what Luke, highlights here.

It is an empowering, blessing. You shall, receive power. I think, we need to make, more of this, than we do.

And, we need to see, as it were, a practical, a consequence, to us, of his ascension. He empowers us, he blesses us, with the empowering, work of the Spirit. So, that we can be, more effective, witnesses, for Christ, himself.

One of the things, that staggered, the authorities, if you read, in the, in the, early chapters, of the book of Acts, one of the things, that staggered, the, the, the authorities, the Jewish authorities, was the boldness, of the apostles.

[ 25 : 13 ] After the Spirit, came upon them, in power, they were bold. They were emboldened, by the Spirit. They wouldn't, shut up.

They couldn't, shut them up. They couldn't, make them stop, talking about Jesus. When, that one, or this one, was healed, a notable, miracle took place.

They traced it back, not to their own power, or holiness, but to the, exalted Jesus, to the one, who had ascended, up on high, and gave gifts, to men.

That's what they did. And you see, there's a practical, inference to be drawn, from this. If we are weak, if we lack, confidence in the Lord, if we lack, the confidence, to, to, to, declare our interest, in him, or to witness for him, the power is he, he enables us.

I think, one of the refreshing, things about, the, the CWI, speakers, there just, on Wednesday last, was, quite evidently, these, two young women, Flora Lamb, and Andrea Seiden, were emboldened, in the Lord.

[ 26 : 32 ] And, they talked so naturally, about the things, they said, to, to, to, to Jewish people, and others too. And it was quite clear, they were confident, in the Lord, the Lord strengthening, his empowering.

And to my mind, they kept the chase, they got straight, to the nitty gritty, somebody smiling, it was there. There was no, sort of, speculative stuff, on God, on the God of the Jews, the God of, the Christians.

It was straight in, with the point. Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus is the Savior, who came for, the Jew first, always the Jew first.

And he came, and his death, is about the remission, of sins. His death, is about the way, of peace. His death, is about the deliverance, from guilt, and a guilty conscience, and so on.

And, so many of the people, that were, visiting him, at that, day, mind, body, spirit, festival, where they had, their, their stand, were, for all that they were, into all the pseudo religions, were feeling guilty, in their consciences, and then, ill at ease, in their spirits.

[ 27 : 48 ] And these young folk, could speak, with boldness, and courage. And I submit to you, they've got the message, here. This is the blessing, that Jesus gives us, and we're to avail, ourselves of it.

We're to make it, our own by faith. Faith, needs to lay hold, not only of Christ himself, but his benefits, not only his saving benefits, but the benefits we gain, to be witnesses, for him.

And we are to note, that, this is, what they experienced, great boldness, when the spirit, did come, upon them, according to the promise.

And we are living, beyond that, coming of the spirit. The power is available, to us. Faith is to receive. But there's one thing, I want to mention, here, before I leave this.

I mentioned, that the Savior, was there, blessing them, with upheld hands. And surely, it's an encouragement, to us, that, that, what they saw, was Jesus, nail-pierced hands, uplifted, upon them, in benediction, in blessing.

[ 29 : 16 ] The last thing, if you like, they saw there, was that very thing. His uplifted hands, behold it is I, he said, in the upper room.

And here he is, on the Mount of Olives, making his way, from them. And they're seeing, his nail-pierced hands, embraced in blessing.

It is through, the crucified, and risen Savior, we obtain the blessing. And it's still that way. What was done there, has abiding significance, for us.

It is, to be laid hold. And then lastly, and just briefly, Jesus disappeared, from their sight.

You see, all this, that we've looked at, was part and parcel, of what was taking place, in the transition, of Jesus, from the, the state of, of, of exaltation, in being raised, from the dead, to him going up, into the glory, at his father's right hand.

[ 30 : 36 ] And we're told, that suddenly, as Jesus continued, to bless them, with upraised hands, a cloud, appeared in the otherwise, cloudless sky, and lifted them in.

And, received him, from their sight. And, this was done, as a mist, in the divine purpose.

It is the, ought, of the divine decree. Ought, not, the Christ, ought, not, Messiah, to suffer, and die, and rise again, before, he enters, his glory.

You see, there's the ought. There's a must, there's a necessity, divine necessity here. It's all happening, according to the divine purpose.

And this, this exaltation, his ascension, up into heaven, was, was the culmination, of what, to place in these 40 days, he is now, ascending, upon high.

[ 31 : 49 ] And, here is an infallible proof, to his disciples, that heaven, is receiving him, the work is done, and he can ascend, into the presence, of his father, and the glory, that was his, before the worlds, were made.

And, he is ascending, as the Messiah, of God, as the Son, of the living God. We were singing, in these Psalms, and we'll, we'll come back to it, in Psalm 24, about God, has gone up, with shouts.

The great, and glorious, work of Christ, is being approved, by the, the, the heavenly beings. He is ascending, upon high, with shouts, and the blast, of the trumpet, and so on.

I mentioned, Ephesians 4, a moment or two ago, quoting, from Psalm 68, verse 18. Christ, ascended, upon high, taking captive, a host of captives, he has earned, his people, and he will receive them, and he will give them gifts, to fit them, to gather others, to himself.

And here is an encouragement, to us, to live, in the light, of his ascension. It is an ennobling thing, it is an empowering thing, to us.

[ 33 : 30 ] He tells us, you will receive power. Don't worry, about, the secret things, lay hold, of the things, that are there, to help you, be, a better Christian, a bold Christian, a witnessing Christian, and one, who is looking forward, and hastening, the return, of the Christ.

You shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit, has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses, to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

But you see, the final word is, men of Galilee, why do you stand, gazing up into heaven? There is work to be done, and, this same Jesus, who was taken up, will come in like manner.

We can look forward, you see, and hasten to his coming, but meanwhile, we get on with the work. We pray, we plead, we witness.

That's our business here, in the light, of an ascended, and a seated, a ruling, saviour, who will return, again, in the appointed time.

[ 35 : 00 ] Well, may he bless us, and may we find, that he is encouraging us, to lay hold, upon the power, that is ours in Christ, through faith, and the ministry, of the Spirit, of God.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.