

The Ascension of our Lord

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[0:00] I'm sorry that messes with the sound at all. Thank you again for welcoming me and my family.

! My wife Angel told me don't forget to make the sermon all about Mother's Day.! She's a better mother to our kids than I could have ever hoped for.

So that's my Mother's Day sermon. We're observing Ascension Day today. Now, I don't know about your background, but Angel and I did not grow up Anglican.

The only feast days I observed were Christmas and Easter, and I did not call them feast days. In the past, if I heard you say you were observing a feast day, I'd think you were having a fancy potluck. And if you'd ask me to list the feast days in the church, I definitely wouldn't have listed Jesus' Ascension.

[1:15] The Ascension is when Jesus leaves us. So, wouldn't that be a day of mourning? If you spend any amount of time listening to the news or at a God-forbidden place called Twitter, it's easy to think, yes, Jesus leaving us is cause to mourn.

Just this past week, I had the displeasure of watching a crying newborn baby taken from its mother to be laid on the chest of a man masquerading as a mother.

Or of a father mistreating the six-year-old and the son not making it.

Does Jesus care about what's going on? And if so, why would he leave us in such a mess? Why do we celebrate Jesus leaving us?

Luke, in the first two verses of Acts, and that's where we're going to be this morning, he writes this, Now, Acts, as I'm sure you know, is the sequel to Luke's gospel, also written to Theophilus.

[2:53] And in his gospel, or in his first book, what did Luke write about? He just said, All that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up.

And I don't know what job you have, but typically, when you say, I began a task, what is the assumption? You're not done with it.

I have a list of projects that I've begun and that I'm still working on, and I'm sure you can relate. It's never-ending. And you and I probably agree that beginning something is not all that matters.

It's an important step, but without actually finishing the job, beginning it doesn't matter. As much.

Now, I'm a chronic starter of things, but I'm not too good at completing them, or at least completing them as well as I set out to do.

I do this a lot with books. I, regrettably, too many times have begun reading a book, only to set it down halfway done. I have a stack of partly read books at my house, and Angel can attest I keep buying new ones.

[4:08] Now, okay, not everything can be wrapped up neatly with a bow. Some books, or you might think movies or TV shows or even projects you're working on, they're not always worth finishing.

Sometimes you have to know when to stop and not finish. Sometimes you start something only to hit a brick wall, or to realize it's not the right thing to be doing at this moment.

So you move on to something else. But that's not the same thing as starting something that should be finished and not finishing it.

That's something else entirely. What did Jesus begin to do and teach? Is it worth finishing?

Notice back in verse 2 that Jesus did something and taught something until the day when he was taken up. So what? Did Jesus clock out early?

[5:11] It sure feels like it sometimes. The world's just as bad as it was when Jesus came, isn't it? Did he accomplish anything? Or did he begin to do something, but then left, realizing finishing isn't worth it?

But you might be thinking at this moment, Jesus, he did finish something, didn't he? You may remember what Jesus said moments before he took his last breath on the cross. What did he say? It is finished. What's finished? Was he just talking about his life being finished? Jesus' death wasn't an accident.

Peter, in Acts 2, says that Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. In that same context, Peter points out that Jesus' death fulfills what the prophet Joel said about the day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord. The day of the Lord comes.

[6:24] The great and magnificent day. The day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. The day of the day of the Lord. The day of judgment.

That's what it refers to throughout the scriptures. But who does God judge? Sinners. Sinners. Sinners. The world is full of sinners.

I mentioned a couple of them earlier. Sinners. And if I'm completely honest. I wouldn't mind for God's judgment to fall on people like that.

And to be sure, it will, if they don't call on the name of the Lord. We'll come back to that. You know, I don't have to look at the news to experience sin.

I just need to look in the mirror. No matter how hard I try, I've never been able to kick sin from my life. Every single day, I choose myself over my wife and kids.

[7:31] Even on Mother's Day, I'm thinking about myself. Sorry, angel. I mistreat people in my heart. You know, if my thoughts were on video for you to all see on social media, you'd cry out, Jesus, come back already.

But I imagine since you're here, you probably think the same way about your sin. See, the day of the Lord, then, is for you and me. It's reserved for all sinners.

But if that's the case, why does the prophet Joel say, And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved?

Well, as Peter points out, the day of the Lord has already fallen on someone else. While Jesus was on the cross, what happened from noon to three o'clock?

The sun turned to darkness. What was that all about? Well, after the darkness, Jesus cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And God should forsake you and me.

[8:48] But on the cross, Jesus took God's judgment upon himself. And so when Jesus said, It is finished, he was telling the truth.

Your sinful nature, all your sinful thoughts, desires, and actions were laid on Christ. God's wrath has been satisfied.

You don't have to fear God's punishment anymore. You call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But Jesus' death isn't the end of the story, is it?

Acts 1, verse 3. 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.

Now, we're observing Ascension Day today, but technically today is the seventh Sunday of Easter. Every year we spend multiple weeks talking about and celebrating Jesus' resurrection.

[9:53] See, Jesus didn't just take the punishment for sin on the cross. He also rose from the grave. And he had to, because the wages of sin is death.

And so if Jesus is going to pay that debt fully, he has to also defeat death. And he did. He paid the debt fully.

And he rose again. So now what? What do we do with that? Okay, I don't need to fear punishment for sin, but I still sin.

You know, all of this happened 2,000 years ago in Israel. Jesus didn't show up physically to me for 40 days and convinced me by many proofs. How do I know that all that Jesus accomplished does something for me today in Syracuse 2024?

Well, Luke says all of this was just the beginning. You remember, at the very start of Jesus' ministry, he taught that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

[11:08] Repent and believe in the gospel. That was the summary of his message. Now, after Jesus' resurrection, he's still talking about the kingdom of God. But if the kingdom is at hand, and Jesus began to teach about it, why is Jesus' next step to leave?

Look at verses 4 through 5 with me. It says, And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, 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. Now, Jesus is going to leave, but he commands the apostles not to leave Jerusalem.

Now, most of the apostles are from Galilee. So, what's with them needing to stay in Jerusalem? Well, that'll become clearer in a bit, but they're supposed to wait there.

And wait for what? He says, The promise of the Father, which you heard from me. Now, they first heard about the promise of the Father from John the Baptist.

[12 : 28] Before Jesus came onto the scene, John said, I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

What is this baptism? What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? And some say, there are two baptisms for the Christian. The first is water baptism.

What you receive when you come into the church. Baptism of the Holy Spirit, though, is something different. Now, I can, for a split second, sympathize with this view.

After all, there are two baptisms here in the passage, a water baptism by John and a Holy Spirit baptism. But the idea that there are two different baptisms for Christians today misunderstands what Jesus is saying here and what John's baptism was.

Why did John, why did John baptize in the first place? John himself said that he baptized with water for repentance. Why did he do this before Jesus came onto the scene?

[13 : 46] The Gospels tell us that John was the one prophesied in the Old Testament who would prepare the way of the Lord. Okay. So, how did John's baptism of repentance prepare the way?

Well, what's repentance? It's turning, it's turning from your sin to God. And, and when does a person do that?

When, when will a person do that? When, when do you know it's time to go see your doctor? When you're sick.

When something's wrong. And sometimes you don't know if you're sick, right? There are illnesses that aren't immediately felt, like some cancers in their beginning stage.

Sometimes people don't know. But if you don't know you're sick, then, of course, you, you, you won't go to the doctor. There's, there's no, there's no, no need.

[14 : 50] But if you do know, you go. Or, you should go. So you can be made well. See, John the Baptist came telling everyone, you're sick.

not from physical illness. He said, you're sick with sin. And what should you do? Depends. Come into the river Jordan and acknowledge that, yes, you are sick.

Because there's a doctor who's coming who can make you well. but you must go to him.

And he has another baptism for you. John's baptism is not like our water baptism in the church today. It was a temporary baptism, a preparatory baptism to get people ready for Jesus.

And when Jesus comes, there'll be a different baptism, a baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now, Jesus says, that's coming. But, but, why?

[15 : 59] Why at this point? Why does it have to be when Jesus is going to, is going to leave? Well, Jesus told the disciples about the Spirit a few hours before he was condemned to death.

Jesus assured the disciples he was going to the Father, but he wouldn't leave them alone. He wouldn't leave them as orphans. He would instead send another helper, that is, the Holy Spirit.

And he said, the Spirit will teach the disciples all things and through the Spirit, he says, the Father and Jesus will come to live in them. Now, what in the world does that mean?

And what does it have to do with the kingdom of God that he's been talking about? Well, the disciples may be wondering that too, but overall, their minds are on the kingdom part.

Look at verse 6. So when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? Now, this question makes sense.

[17 : 01] Think about it. Jesus has been talking about the kingdom of God. What is that? We don't talk much about kingdoms here in America. You know, we don't call New York the kingdom of Kathleen Hochul.

Some people might think of it that way. someone's kingdom is the extent of their rule and authority. And when we're talking about a kingdom, we don't mean someone serving a constitutional republic.

We're talking about the rule and authority of a monarch, of a king. Absolute rule, absolute authority. What about the kingdom of God?

Like, how far does God's rule and authority extend? How can the apostles just be thinking about Israel here? Well, the apostles know that God's the creator and ruler of the world, but where did God promise to set up his throne on earth?

He promised that there would always be a king in the line of David. And for Israel, the apostles too, there's no distinction between the kingdom of God and the restoration of the kingdom of Israel.

[18:14] To them, the kingdom of God will be manifested physically in Israel. And so, the Jews, of course, they differed on how that would look, but everyone was waiting for God to defeat Israel's enemies, for him to set up a king in David's line, and to rule earth from Jerusalem.

Now, expecting all of that, we now have Jesus in the line of David. He died, he rose again, he's the son of God, they believe him to be the Messiah and the king.

So what's his next move? I mean, clearly, wouldn't it make sense to set up his throne on earth?

That's like the next step. But Jesus answers him in verse 7, it's not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

Not an answer I would want. Still not an answer I want. Now, you might remember the disciples asked once before about when the kingdom of God would come to earth, and do you remember Jesus' response?

He said that even he didn't know the time, only the Father, only the Father knew. So, there will be a time when the kingdom of Jesus speaks of will be physically present here on earth, but when that's going to be, it's not for us to know.

[19:45] But, this is my question, is why wouldn't it be now? I mean, the world is in disarray. Hey, Jesus, he kind of needs you to come and rule and reign, bring things back to order, do away with all evil and all of our enemies.

Why all this talk about waiting in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit? what is that? What exactly is going to happen in Jerusalem?

Verse 8, Jesus says, 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 end of the earth.

See, the apostles don't get it now, but they will soon. In a few days, they'll gather in the upper room and the promise of the Father will finally come. The Holy Spirit is going to descend and then they'll understand.

Understand what? It says they're going to be Jesus' witnesses. That's what they're going to understand. Now, when you think of a witness, maybe in a court setting, what do they do?

[21:01] They give a testimony of what they know and what they've seen. This is why Jesus presented himself alive to the apostles by many proofs.

They too are going to give a testimony of what they know and what they've seen. The apostles saw Jesus die and rise from the grave and they know that by calling on his name, all people in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth will be saved.

Now, how does that square with what Jesus taught about the kingdom of God? Now we're talking about being witnesses?

If an ambassador of England were to come to you today and say, Charles is king, what might you say? He's your king. He's not our king.

That's good for you. But what are the apostles to say? Jesus is king. What do you do with that?

[22:14] The Spirit will give the apostles power. Power. There will be an authority that will accompany their witness. And what's going to be the result?

when the Spirit comes, the apostles are going to learn just what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God. And the baptism of the Holy Spirit is pivotal to it.

But before that happens, before the Spirit comes, Jesus has to leave. So he does in verse 9. When he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight.

This is really fascinating. I was thinking about it this week. Have you ever wondered why Jesus did it this way? Like, where's heaven? Is it in the sky?

No. It's not in this world. Like, why did he ascend into the sky? Some people say that he did this so that the apostles have no doubt in their mind that Jesus is really gone?

[23 : 25] It makes sense, because during the 40 days after his resurrection, he disappeared and reappeared quite a bit. Now it's clear that he's gone. Now I think there's probably some truth to that, but I wonder if there's more.

I mean, I'm sure Jesus could have said, hey, I'm going to the Father now, this is the last time I'm going to disappear, I'm not reappearing, and then he goes. I wonder if in ascending into the air, Jesus might be preaching one last message about the kingdom of God.

Perhaps we read it in the epistle this morning, in Ephesians 1, verse 20 says, God seated Jesus at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

And he put all things under his feet and gave him his head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Soon after that text, in Ephesians 2, Paul mentions where Satan's kingdom is.

You remember? He's the prince of the power of the air. Every kingdom of this world is under the air.

[24 : 49] And I don't just mean physically. Every kingdom is under the sway of Satan. Satan's dominion shows itself in human kingdoms because sin is lodged in the human heart.

All kingdoms and people are under this dominion. sin. But now, Jesus, after dying for sin and defeating death, he ascends into the air above Satan's kingdom.

Really, into Satan's kingdom as a picture. And Satan is now under Jesus' feet. Jesus' dominion is now here.

But how is it here? Like, how does Jesus take over Satan's kingdom if he leaves? Jesus, interestingly, says in John 16, 7, it's to your advantage that I go.

Your advantage that I go. For if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you. if Jesus doesn't leave, he can't sin the Holy Spirit.

[26 : 05] Why not? You and I are dead in our sin. How is Jesus' death and resurrection 2,000 years ago going to apply to us today in America?

Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus didn't come to defeat an earthly enemy, at least not yet. He came to free us from our sin. The problem is in here, in our hearts.

All physical kingdoms, you know, they're under the influence of Satan, not because we're all victims, but because we're all sinful. Jesus has to start here.

He must cleanse us from our sin. He must rule our hearts before he sets up any earthly kingdom. And how will he do that?

By sending the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives the apostles power to preach Christ, and through their preaching, the Spirit grants repentance and faith.

[27 : 17] And if you put your faith in Christ, you're baptized by the same Spirit. He lives within you. and, we already saw, if the Spirit lives in you, the Father and the Son live in you.

Paul calls the Holy Spirit in Romans 8 the Spirit of Christ. Jesus began his work by dying on the cross and rising again, but he continues his work through the Spirit who comes to you and applies to you what Jesus accomplished.

Jesus hasn't left his work incomplete. He's still working. He's working in you to confess your sin, to repent, to learn to trust him, to obey his word, to come more like him, to love others.

But that's not all. What did Ephesians say toward the end? And he put all things under his feet, and gave him his head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him, who fills all in all.

Where is Jesus' kingdom on earth? Well, we know it's here in our hearts, but it's more. It's here in this room, physically, because you're here.

[28 : 51] Jesus said in John 14, truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father. How do we do greater works than Jesus?

Because he goes to the Father. Greater works doesn't mean bigger and better miracles than Jesus. It's not like you should be going out and walking on water. more. But what does Jesus tell his apostles here in Acts?

You will be my witnesses to the end of the earth. Jesus says this to a few disciples, less than those of us in this room.

But now, because of the work of the Spirit, through the witness of the church, the number of Jesus' disciples, you can't count it. Across time and space, you can't count it.

Jesus' rule, his authority, his power extends throughout the world through the preaching of the gospel. And nothing, and no one, can stop it.

[30:02] Even when it seems like the power and authority really is on the side of Satan, and it oftentimes does feel that way. But one day, it'll be clear who's in charge.

The last two verses in Acts say, 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 who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. It's really no wonder why the disciples stand gazing into heaven.

I mean, yeah, it's pretty miraculous just watching a guy into heaven, but Jesus also is their master, their friend, and he's leaving them.

Perhaps you too. I feel like sometimes you stand gazing at heaven, wishing that Jesus would just come back already. Life is hard, the world is dark, and still under, in many ways, the power of Satan.

[31:14] I know that I have the spirit, and I know that Christ is on the throne, but I really just want him to come back. But, you know, I don't know when he will come back, but I do know, we all know, that he will come back.

and when Jesus comes back, then God's kingdom will be established physically on earth. My sin, your sin, will be completely gone.

The evil in this world will be wiped away. But until then, we are here, and the spirit is here too, to help you and me, to bring other sinners to repentance.

We've not been left alone. God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit lives in you. And because of that, this is his temple.

He's here. And Jesus is on the throne. So, let us go forth into the world rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[32:32] Alleluia. Alleluia. Let's pray. Jesus, we need your help each and every day and in every aspect of life.

temptation and when we fall into sin or whenever we go through hardship or suffering or loss.

Whatever we face, Lord, in this life, we really do look forward to you coming back.

Lord, in the meantime, would you help us submit to your kingdom in our own hearts and would you give us boldness to share the good news of your kingdom to this world.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.