

Taken from Sight

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Date: 11 May 1997

Preacher: Hilary Roath

[0 : 00] This is the AM service on May 11th 1997. The sermon is taken from Acts 1 verses 1 to 11.

It is preached by Hilary Routh and the sermon is entitled Taken from Sight. In 1988 I went on a study tour to Israel and it was an incredible sight to stand on the Mount of Olive with Jerusalem spread out before me.

It was not of course exactly the Jerusalem that Jesus saw, but I could see the old walls of the city and the way into the city which Jesus must have taken on many occasions.

And it is possible that he stood where I stood and he looked down onto the temple. I was looking down onto the golden dome of the Dome of the Rock, which is the centre of Islam.

Jerusalem was a place that Jesus must have known very well. And I think today's streets must still be very much like the ones that he saw.

[1 : 32] There would be the same vessel in the narrow streets, very much like those of the Via Dolorosa. And there are still soldiers wandering about.

Now there are Israeli soldiers. In Jesus' day they would have been Roman soldiers. The Mount of Olives on which he stood is still the Mount of Olives, even though it has a great hotel standing on it. And it was here, that traditional place of the Ascension, that I spent a few hours looking at, at Jerusalem.

And to stand there where Jesus must have stood, and to stand there where tradition has it, that he met and then left his disciples for the last time, was an experience that I'll never forget.

Of course, the first group that gathered there, the disciples, for them it was an experience that was obviously far greater than it was for me.

[2 : 52] He had appeared to them on many occasions. He had appeared and disappeared on many occasions over the 40 days. But now he met them on that mountain, and here he spoke his last words to them.

Luke first wrote his gospel. And then he turned his attention to writing a sequel, The Acts of the Apostles, in which we are looking at today.

He had told Theophilus all about the life of Jesus, and now he wants to update him. And he wants to give him all the exciting details and the developments that had been taking place since last he wrote.

In our passage today, Luke tells us about the promise of the Holy Spirit and Jesus' Ascension.

Because I think Ascension Day is a weekday festival, instead of a Sunday one, it seems sort of insignificant compared with Easter.

Yet its profound meaning is not insignificant in the New Testament. In John's gospel, there are at least 12 references to it.

[4 : 29] In Hebrews, the Ascension is the main spiritual truth. And in Luke and Acts, we see what it meant to Jesus himself.

Jesus stayed 40 days on earth after his resurrection before returning to the Father.

Why did he delay his entrance into heaven? And we find that answer in chapter 1, verse 3.

After his suffering, he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs. It was not just proofs. It was not just proof Jesus was concerned about, but strong, definite, definite proof that could not be shaken.

If Jesus had appeared just once, they would have been tempted to say that it was an apparition. But Jesus piled up the proof.

[5 : 49] Mary saw him. Peter saw him. The men from Emmaus saw him. The 11 disciples saw him. James saw him.

And 500 saw him at one time. So after 40 days, there was no doubt left in their minds.

Jesus was alive. He didn't leave them without proof. And on top of this, Jesus made sure that they were aware of what resources were going to be made available to them.

Don't go charging off into ministry before you are equipped, he tells them. In verses 4 and 5.

While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. For John baptized with water, and you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

[7 : 02] He reminds them that John the Baptist knew that his baptism was only half the story. And he sends them home to receive the best half.

Then in verse 6, the disciples ask Jesus a question. Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?

Will you restore the kingdom to Israel? Again, the disciples ask the wrong question. Jesus did not have a narrow, nationalistic agenda.

He was not about to kick out the Romans and establish his followers as the ruling government of the day. Even after all this time, the disciples were still missing the point.

He keeps explaining to them about the kingdom. Trying to get it into their heads that his kingdom is bigger than all of their political, religious or cultural expectations.

[8 : 26] They are relatively small. Concerns will be answered by God. It will be handled by him, but in his own time and in his own way.

And they are not to worry about a timetable. And Jesus goes on to try and shift their focus back.

Back to life in his kingdom. Life in his kingdom when the Spirit comes. They will be able then to spread the news of his kingdom all over the world.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

They are to tell their family. They are to tell their family. They are to tell their family in their own community.

[9 : 36] But they are not to be limited by this. They, with other believers, are to go all over the world. Telling what they know about Jesus and his kingdom.

And then we go on in verse 9. When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight.

A cloud took him out of their sight. A cloud may not be very significant to us in 1997.

But it was a cloud which often in the Old Testament especially indicated the presence of God. A cloud led the children of Israel by day on their journey to the Promised Land.

And in Exodus 16 we read, the glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud. And you may remember that it was a cloud that the voice of God was heard as Jesus was transfigured on another mountain.

[10 : 53] And we read there, there came a cloud which cast a shadow over them. They were afraid as they entered the cloud. And from it came a voice.

And they said, yes, this is my son, my chosen. Listen to him. And I've no doubt that a cloud was, for those people who read these words originally, it was for them a clear sign that it was into the presence of the Father that Jesus returned.

No wonder they went back to Jerusalem. Filled with joy. We are told they were continually in the temple praising God.

And we go on in verse 10 and 11. While he was going, and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men with white robes stood by them.

They said, men of Galilee, why do you stand looking towards heaven? This Jesus, who had been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

[12 : 12] I've got no doubt that the disciples were completely mesmerized by this amazing sight.

And I can imagine that they were very glad of the angels' words of comfort and reassurance. Don't worry about standing and staring into space, they said.

Jesus is in heaven and will come back to earth sometime in the future. And this message from the angel confirms for us the reality of heaven.

And that amazing truth that Jesus Christ is not finished with us yet. Another trip is planned.

For a number of reasons, the ascension was an absolute necessity.

[13 : 21] There had to be a final moment when Jesus went back to the glory that was his. There would have been something wrong if the resurrection appearances had just petered out.

Christ's ascension was the culmination of his earthly life and work. And it was at his ascension that our Lord entered into the next phase of his work as priest and king.

And he now sits at the right hand of God. And all authority and power are his.

And the disciples could therefore depend on his presence. They could depend on his power. They could depend on his grace.

In all the work that he was sending them out to do. Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, says Jesus, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do.

[14:35] And greater works than these will you do because I go to the Father. During the earthly life of Christ, his work was done locally.

After he had been received into heaven, he could not be limited to Judea and Galilee.

He could not be confined now to those streets or even to the more open spaces of Galilee. Now, because he has ascended up to be with the Father, Jesus has abolished geography.

He has abolished geography. He not only can be with his followers wherever they are, he has promised that it will be so.

Where two or three meet together in my name, there am I in the midst. The ascension does not mean for Christians, Christ's physical remoteness, but his spiritual nearness.

[16:04] His spiritual nearness. In Ephesians, Paul tells us in chapter 1, verse 19, tells us of the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe.

The immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe. That same power that flowed into the lifeless body of Jesus flows in you and flows in me.

The eternal energy that raised Jesus from the dead is working in us. What for?

To raise us to sit with him in the heavenly places. To raise us to a place of authority.

As Christians, we are living on the greatest power that has ever manifested itself on this planet. The power that raised Jesus from the dead.

[17:17] Ephesians 1, verse 3 says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us, past tense, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Christ has blessed us in the heavenly places. The means that, this actually means that every blessing has already been given to us.

It has already been given to us. Christ has already made every provision through his death, through his resurrection, and through his ascension.

We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. But, if we don't know it, it won't do us any good.

If we don't know it, it won't do us any good. Some time ago, I put \$20 into the back of my purse, and I forgot about it.

[18:39] I couldn't spend it as long as I didn't know it was there. But when I found it, I could use it. It had been mine all the time.

It was as much mine when I didn't know about it as when I did know about it. And so, these blessings, this power, this authority, belongs to us, whether we know it or not.

We can also know what is ours, but then not act on it, or use it, and therefore not get the benefit of it.

A number of years ago, I read about a man who was found dead in his small, shabby, rented room. He was always dressed in wags, and he actually ate out of rubbish bins.

And when he wasn't seen for a few days, the neighbours went to look for him, and they found him dead. He had died of malnutrition, and yet a money belt was found around his waist, containing \$54,000.

[20:13] That man lived in abject poverty, yet he owned all that money. He had all that money.

He didn't use what belonged to him. We need to know what belongs to us, but just knowing isn't enough.

We need to act on it. We need to use it. This passage today, promises us power.

Power for mission. And it reminds us of the, really, in the very last words of Jesus, what our focus, as Christians, is meant to be.

tells us we should be telling the world about Jesus. We should be telling the world about Jesus.

[21:20] Other concerns may be important, but this concern is vital. We should be telling the world about Jesus. The first Christians saw evangelism as a natural response to their own conversion.

And sharing the good news was seen as their responsibility and the privilege of everyone. Telling others about Jesus seemed to be a very high priority in Acts, because it's the focus of almost every chapter.

And this is really most remarkable when you consider the pressure everyone was under at the time, the pressure to be silent.

But these verses also remind us of where Jesus is now. Jesus is with his Father in heaven. And heaven is our final destination.

Jesus is one day coming back to take us to heaven with him. And in our Luke passage we read we're told that after the ascension the first disciples went back to Jerusalem full of joy.

[22 : 55] Full of joy. Praising God. Continually praising God in the temple. And we too need to rejoice with those first disciples.

We need to rejoice with those who followed after them. We need to continually praise God for the birth, for the life, for the death, for the resurrection, and not least for the ascension of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen. Thank you. Godohts, very long. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. people And we know Lord of whom we ■■ a verse will happen and we can to the people of wisdom in the ■ ■■■ment as from everyone as from everyone who agreed to Brazil.

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