

Jesus's Ministry before the Ascension

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[0 : 0 0] this morning i want us to ask one very simple question that relates to the two passages that we read about jesus post-resurrection appearances and the question is one which i'm sure you probably ask yourself a natural one that arises when you read the accounts that are given of jesus between the resurrection and the ascension that was a 40-day period between the resurrection of jesus and his going back up to the father that's what i want us to concentrate on this morning particularly these two passages i know that there are other passages like luke and matthew but i want to ask one simple question and the question is why was there this 40-day period why did jesus not return to the father immediately after he rose from the dead why stay in the world why be in the world for 40 days we know that he appeared to his disciples during that time we don't quite know how many times he appeared i count five but you're perfectly free to come back at me and say no you're wrong maybe there were six here here it is that's fine but i count five we know that he appeared we also know that there was a difference between things after the resurrection and before his death for example there were no public miracles after the resurrection there was no sermon on the mount there were no walking on the water there was no raising from the dead there was no feeding of the 5 000 and he seems to have only appeared to a select number of people at select moments of time there wasn't the public nature of his ministry the way there was before when he was good when he would tirelessly and endlessly go around towns and villages teaching and preaching and calling people to faith in him calling people to follow him and at the same time he was healing the sick all the time that all stopped when he rose from the dead so there was a difference there's a contrast things weren't quite the same it's the same with the body in which he rose from the dead we'll talk about that in a few moments time but there was a difference between that body and the body in which he died i say well how do you know that well very easily because the body in which he died was capable of dying and we know that after the resurrection he will never die again and so there is a resurrection body the old theologian professor finlison said that there were three phases to jesus body now we're getting into the depths i'm going to come out of the depths in a few moments time there were three phases first of all there was a body of his humiliation and that was the body in which he died on the cross and then he says there was a second phase and that was the body of his resurrection the body in which he rose and he says there was a third phase the phase into which he ascended to sit at the father's right hand now that's one to think about but we're going to remain on the plain level from now on we're going to remain on the simple level i want to ask why why did he stay in the world why was there this 40 days now there isn't any

verse in the new testament that tells us here is the reason why but i believe the context explains why jesus remained in the world for 40 days between the resurrection and the ascension and i can think of six reasons and i'm going to just suggest these to you very briefly this morning six reasons first of all he remained in the world to expound the necessity of his death he remained in the world to expound the necessity of his death you go to another gospel and that's the gospel of luke and the last chapter of luke is chapter 24 and you remember the story on the the day that jesus rose from the dead there were two of his disciples making their way back to a town called emmaus which was a short distance from jerusalem and these two disciples were distraught they were despondent they couldn't they were confused they didn't know what to make of what they had seen because they had come to be followers of jesus and yet they had watched him dying on the cross and they couldn't figure out how someone who they took to be messiah could possibly be killed how can messiah be killed how can the king that god had anointed be taken by the romans and put to death they couldn't figure it out at all and what's more they couldn't figure out how when some of the disciples had gone to the tomb to anoint the body of jesus they had found that the tomb was empty

and it was at that moment that a stranger walked up to them began to talk to them and of course we all know the story the stranger was none other than jesus himself the risen jesus and he began to talk to them now here's what it said he says he interpreted to them from the scriptures why it was that he had to die they needed to know why his death was a necessity it was a sacrifice by which our guilt was placed on jesus the lamb of god and by which our sin would be removed and that very same remember of course how when they came to discover who it was at one moment in time they said did not our hearts burn within us and that very same day that very same evening he appeared to the rest of his disciples and that's john 20 and once again he opened their minds we're told he explained to them he taught them from the scriptures to understand that it was written that the jesus the christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and he did so by using the old testament which foreshadowed it prophesied the coming and the death and the resurrection of jesus christ the disciples could not get their heads around why it was necessary for messiah for jesus to lay down his life it was no accident it wasn't just some unfortunate turn of events it was all in the plan of god that jesus would be the lamb of god that he would lay down his life as a sacrifice for our sin so the first reason was to expound the necessity to explain why it was so necessary for him to die then the second reason was this to authenticate the reality and the nature of his resurrection to authenticate

it's not just in the 21st century that proof is important proof has always been important because seeing is believing and seeing was believing to the disciples if you go through the gospel of john one of the themes in john is seeing is believing when john the disciple went into the grave of jesus expecting to find the body of jesus there and when he saw that there was not only was the stone rolled away but that there was no body there he believed that's what we're told he saw and believed and here is one more example of where the disciples get to see the evidence of the risen lord jesus and that gave them the absolute confidence that they would need to go out into the world a hostile world a world that hated them and the last thing they wanted to hear was the message of jesus many of them were put to death in the process of telling the good news that jesus died and rose again so what gave them the confidence to face the danger and the death that they faced confidence was in the proof the living proof the visible proof that here is this jesus he stood amongst them that's what we read he stood amongst them they could see him they saw the marks in his hands and his feet these were the marks of someone who had been on a cross but yet this man was alive now that was impossible there was no coming back from the cross the cross was a place of death it was a one way sentence no one ever came back from the cross it was impossible for anyone to walk around with the marks of the cross in their hands and in their feet and yet here was this man who they recognized to be none other than jesus of nazareth and he is alive here is the living proof that jesus is alive they tell me that david livingston the famous missionary and doctor he died in africa many of you have read his stories one of the most famous scotsmen that ever walked the face of the earth they tell me that when he died his friend stanley wanted to take his body back from from africa to be buried in westminster abbey but there was some question over the identity the exact identity was this really david livingston's body and somebody remembered that he had been attacked by a lion in the jungle and this lion had broken his arm badly and it had been reset really badly and so they looked at his arm sure enough that was the proof that this was really the authentic david livingston and here is the proof that this is really the authentic jesus of nazareth let me tell you why i'm a christian this morning i'm not a christian because i happen to have been brought up in a christian home i know many people who were brought up in christian environments and who are not christians today it's not just following a tradition it's not just something i feel comfortable with there are lots of things in the world that can give us comfort let me tell you why i'm a christian today because jesus has risen from the dead and as such he has the key to life and death if i wasn't a christian today i would be asking one single question and the question is this who has the key to life and death because to me that that's what answers everything that's the most basic question of all who in this world in the whole of human history has the key to life and death there's only one person no other religion no other system no other philosophy can give me the key to life and death only jesus has risen from the dead and it's an actual historical reality in which there were eye witnesses these men saw the risen there could not be any mistake this was real i know how impossible it was just as impossible for them as it is for us it was just as unbelievable for them as it is for us you don't have to be you don't have to live in the age of iphones and the internet to to understand what's impossible coming back from the from the dead is impossible in any generation and in any culture and yet here he was here was living proof that this

jesus had risen from the dead and so like i said before he rises in a human body he is still every he's still as much human as he always was he came into the world to take our human nature to himself and he rose from the dead as god and as man he is still one of us and you know what even now having gone to heaven having ascended and having sat down at the father's right hand wherever that is whatever that means he is still one of us he is still he did not leave his human nature in this world when he ascended he's still a great high priest we can still identify with him and he can still identify with us you know it really one of the one of the most um uh one of the loveliest expressions of that is in where um he's on the sea of galilee and he he makes food for the disciples and when they get out of the boat he says come on have breakfast he wants to eat with them he wants to sit down with them because he's one of them he wants to to to to to to reveal himself to them wants to make himself known to them this is the god of the universe you remember in the very beginning of john where it said when he gives this mysterious description in the beginning was the word and the word was with god and the word was god he was in the beginning and all of creation was made through him this is a description of god and this god the word became flesh and dwelt among us it's the same man who is saying to his disciples come on a breakfast come on a breakfast because he's one of them because he's in our nature he is god and man and always will be the third reason is this jesus stayed in the world for 40 days before his ascension to reiterate the calling of the disciples verse 21 in chapter 20 let look at it with me in the upper in the room where the disciples were met and the doors were locked and they were afraid of the jews they were afraid of the jewish leaders jesus appears to them and he said to them peace be with you as the father has sent me even so i am sending you here is a reiteration of what jesus originally said to his disciples way back at the very beginning on the lake of galilee when he said i will make you fishers of men in fact there's a further reenactment in the next chapter chapter 21 jesus appears to them as they've gone back to the sea of galilee and they've gone back fishing now some people think well that doesn't show very much faith in the disciples were disobedient in going back fishing they should have remained there they should have they should have remembered what jesus said to them at the very beginning and they should have had the faith to believe that jesus well it's all very well saying that it's so easy to criticize the disciples isn't it so easy for us without understanding two thousand years later for us to see the weaknesses and peter and james and john i don't want to do that this morning because i don't know if i'd have been any different they went back fishing it was a natural thing for them to do but that wasn't the end of the story jesus had other plans for them they were not going to spend the rest of their lives fishing they were going to spend the rest of their lives preaching the gospel and the way that jesus reminded of them of that was to take them all the way back to the beginning to one of the times where he had first met them and they had caught no fish they had spent all night and they hadn't caught anything jesus joined them and he tells them to let down the nets and when they do that they catch this incredible number of fish so many so many fish that the nets were breaking and the boats were about to sink and it was just one of these incredible instances and the same thing happens at the end of the story in order to remind them of their calling their calling was that he was sending them to make disciples of all nations i can't help thinking also that when jesus sat with them on the shore of the lake of galilee and when they were eating the fish and the bread i can't help being reminded of the feeding of the five thousand and what that symbolized how that symbolized that one day the disciples were going to go out with the gospel they were going to share the good news of jesus to multitudes of people who would come to discover him for themselves this was their calling this was the work that jesus was sending them out to do and this was a reiteration of that calling but i can't help noticing also that their calling is empowered come back with me to that that verse that i read a couple of minutes ago when he said this verse 22 he breathed on this is chapter 20 and verse 22 when he said this he breathed on them and he said receive the holy spirit he breathed on them now we're in the upper room or rather we're in the room where the doors are locked and we are the disciples are met there and he is explaining to them why it was necessary for him to die he's telling them that he's going to send them out again with the gospel and then he breathes on them and he says receive the holy spirit what was happening there well i believe that this was a sort of prophecy about what was going to happen in a few days time shortly after he ascended to heaven the holy spirit would be poured out on the disciples on the day of [20 : 14] pentecost and they would then be empowered they would be indwelt by the holy spirit they would then go out with great extraordinary power and preach the gospel do you know how many people were converted when peter preached the gospel in acts chapter 2 3 000 people came

to faith in jesus as a result of peter's preaching that's what the power of the holy spirit means and i believe on this occasion let's just put it very simply i believe that on this occasion jesus was this is one way in which jesus was foretelling or prophesying that in a few days time that they would be filled with the holy spirit in whose power they would go out and they would make disciples of all nations but as well as that it was to characterize their calling to characterize their calling again verse 23 if you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them if you withhold forgiveness for any it is withheld what did he mean by that let's read that again if you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them if you withhold forgiveness from any it is withheld did this mean that somehow the disciples by themselves were given the authority to pronounce on a person that they met you are forgiven and another person they would say you are not forgiven and that would be verified and no it doesn't mean that at all only god can forgive sins the disciples had no more power to forgive sin than anyone else only god can forgive sin here's what i believe it meant this is given in connection with the gospel it is through the gospel and through the preaching of the gospel that there is forgiveness of sin and so as the disciples went out with the gospel some people would come to believe in jesus they would want to put their trust in jesus they would recognize that jesus is the son of god that he died for my sin and that by faith in him there is forgiveness and the disciples had every right to say to that person in so far as you have come to faith in jesus your sin is forgiven god says to you your sin is forgiven and i can say exactly the same thing to this morning not that i can forgive sin is forgiven but in so far as you have come to trust in the lord jesus christ as your savior you can be absolutely assured that your sin is forgiven but the same holds true on the other side when a person refuses to come to faith in jesus that person is not forgiven not because the church has power to forgive or not forgive but god says that he who does not believe is condemned already john chapter 3 that is the message of the gospel believe in the lord jesus christ and you will be saved it is 100% guaranteed you will be saved the last reason is found in the next chapter as we're sitting on the lake of galilee on the on the shores of the lake of galilee and the disciples are eating the bread and eating the fish and jesus is speaking to them and yet there is one particular disciple who jesus is going to single out he's going to focus on you know who that is there was one particular reason why jesus was going to focus on him because there was a problem something had been done something was a loose end that needed to be tied up it was peter you remember what had happened the night that jesus was betrayed how peter had and all the disciples they had panicked and they had deserted jesus but yet peter followed it from a distance until jesus was taken to be interviewed and peter waited outside and as he warmed himself by the fire the servant girl had come and she had asked peter well are you not one of this man's disciples as well and he had said no i don't know this man i have nothing to do with this nothing to do well i said well it was a lie it was incredible how having spent three years and only recently having said even if everyone else deserts you i will never deny you i will never i'm going to i would i would die for you a short time after that he was denying that he ever knew jesus and then it was too late because jesus was taken off he was tried he was executed he was killed he was put to death his body was laid in the tomb and there was no opportunity for peter to speak to jesus or explain to him or to say how sorry he was it was a sad moment in peter's life but then jesus rose from the dead what was going to happen now was the whole thing going to be forgotten about well thankfully no it wasn't that wouldn't have been good enough it looks like the first few times that jesus appeared to his disciples were not the right time but the right time came at this moment as they sat by the shore of the lake of galilee the moment came when peter when jesus turned to peter and said simon do you love me more than these i'm not quite sure what more than these means could have been the fishing boats could have been the other disciples we're not sure but the real question is do you love me now i'm not sure what i would have said to peter i might have wanted to say to peter do you realize what you did peter do you realize the extent of what you did do you realize how incongruous it is do you realize how much you've denied jesus the jesus who you claimed to believe in and follow what sense can you make it do you realize how serious this is do you realize the whole world is going to find out about this one day and you're going to go down in history as the disciple who denied jesus are you really sorry i want to see evidence of your sorrow and your repentance that's maybe how i would speak to peter and i'm glad it's not me it's jesus see how gently jesus approaches him jesus knows what's going on in peter's heart he knows the turmoil he knows the sorrow he knows the confusion of someone who has done something and said something

which is inconsistent and which is shameful and which bears no resemblance to what a disciple should have acted and that's why in these words i take such great encouragement because there are so many times in my christian life when i have gone astray and each time i have gone astray i've denied jesus in my thoughts in the things that i've said in the way i've acted on many many occasions and yet there is a jesus that comes to peter and he says do you love me of course he's taking account of the past but he's also reminding peter that the blood of jesus christ continues to cleanse us from all sin and he's pointing peter to the future a life of future fellowship and service and obedience to jesus and in the strength of that peter went on to serve jesus until the day he died we're all backsliders every one of us to one extent or another and this may be a moment when we need to come and rediscover the grace of god in the lord jesus christ the grace that reaches out the grace that restores our soul and makes us to walk in the path of righteousness may he do that may he continue to do that in all of our lives and may we draw strength from his restoration from his love and from his grace that is demonstrated to us in the death of his son the lord jesus christ well i count six reasons you can count more than that perhaps and by all means share them with me so the next time i preach on this there'll be seven reasons but i do find this not just fascinating but i find it enriching to my own soul and to my own relationship with the lord at the same time and i hope that our brief look at this passage has been helpful to you let's pray our father in heaven we thank you for the death and resurrection of the lord jesus christ and we thank you that he has done everything that was required and everything possible for our salvation our complete salvation for the removal of our sin for our sanctification and for one day our glorification glorification we thank you that the day will come for the promise that we have that that the day will come when the dead will hear the voice of the son of god and rise to live lord we pray that we will be ready for that day that we that all our thoughts and our concentration will be upon him that we will be so heavenly minded that we will be of immense earthly good in this world for you as we witness for you and as we as we bear testimony to the jesus who loved us and gave himself for us so bless the rest of this day to us we pray in jesus name amen we are going to close by singing in psalm 16 and this again is a psalm that looks forward to the resurrection of jesus but also extends beyond that to the joy that god has promised all of his people in glory we're going to sing from 8 to 11 it's on page 17 in sing psalms from 8 to 11 before me constantly i set the lord alone because he is at my right hand i'll not be overthrown psalm 16 from verse 8 to the end of the psalm and we'll stand to sing that i am in drop in jshed and I will stand to sing if the lord'senev took about the poor life that the lord of snow come in now amen Tanner was the god of came in now Thank you.

Thank you.

[34 : 05] Thank you.

Amen.