

# The Holy Spirit Must Come and you Must Go (Ascension Day)

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Date: 25 May 2017

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[ 0 : 01 ] Well, I want to welcome all of you to this Ascension Day service, and it's wonderful to hear that last anthem as well about the glory of God. It's a blessing for us all to be together today.

Ascension Day is one of the great days of the Christian year, very, very important day. It's a day that means many, many things to us, and I want to talk about that.

I know that a lot of you have come here and had very busy days. You've been fighting traffic to get in here to the service. You've had your minds distracted by many things.

Ascension Day service really brings us in to see Jesus, to see His glory, to see what we are all about in this life, and to know His grace and His goodness in our life as well.

So this is a great opportunity for us to do that as we pray and as we sing and as we reflect in God's Word. And I want to briefly look at Acts chapter 1, verses 1 through 11.

[ 1 : 08 ] You can turn to that on page 909. And I am conscious of the fact that the poor choir has to listen to me from behind, from back. So I'll try to turn back and forth if I can.

But Ascension Day is not something that just talks about some theological concept that is far away, that is irrelevant to our lives. It is something that absolutely, radically changes us today, right now. And it gives us this certain hope in our future that means everything. That actually changes everything about our lives. And the way that it changes our lives, you can see right away in verse 1. It says, In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach. And that word began is very important because He's talking about His first book, which is the book of Luke, the Gospel of Luke.

And it means that in that first book, the Gospel of Luke talks about the beginning of Jesus' ministry. And then this book, the book of Acts, is all about what Jesus continues to do and to teach.

[ 2 : 21 ] It's a much longer ministry. It seems odd, though, because why is it, how can that be if Jesus, as we look down at verse 9, ascends into heaven and no longer is on earth?

How can Jesus continue His ministry? How does He teach throughout Acts if He is not present? Well, of course, the answer that you all know is that it's through men and women who have become filled with the Holy Spirit, who believe the witness of the apostles, and they go into all the ends of the earth.

That's what Acts is about. So it changes the shape and direction of each of those people's lives that we see in the book of Acts. And it changes everything for us as well, the fact that Jesus has ascended.

And I want to just pull that out in three ways. How does the ascension change us so that we are ministers of Jesus' own gospel, of His own ministry?

Well, first of all, it means that Jesus rules all things and He's going to come back again. So if you look at verses 2 and 3, you see that Jesus spent 40 days after His resurrection teaching His disciples about the kingdom of God.

[ 3 : 44 ] And He was teaching in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the disciples got very excited about this. They were hearing that Jesus came into a world and is coming into a world with them that is dominated by sin and darkness and death.

They see it in the personal rebellion against God in an awfully big, large-scale evil like the evil that we saw in Manchester this week. They heard that Jesus brings His light into all of that darkness. And when people know Him as their King and ruler of all creation and of the universe, people are actually coming into that kingdom. So can you imagine being part of those teachings of Jesus, listening to Him speaking in that power of the Holy Spirit?

Well, they get very excited in verse 6 and it says, well, is it now that you're going to bring the kingdom fully in all of its glory so everybody sees it? And Jesus says, no, it's not for you to know exactly when that will be.

But in verse 9, at the end of those 40 days, in the midst of His teaching and commanding them that they are going to be actually taken apart in all of this work of Jesus in the world, He is lifted up, verse 9, and a cloud takes Him out of their sight.

[ 5 : 05 ] And we see here that they gazed into heaven as He went. And we don't know what they were thinking. They were probably thinking, I hope He comes back very quickly. Why does He have to leave?

But they also might be asking, what does it all mean? What does this mean that Jesus leaves in a cloud like that? Well, there's two things to see here. First of all, the lifting up of Jesus is a sign of His being exalted.

It's a sign of exaltation. And the cloud, as you remember from the Bible and the Old Testament, is always a sign of God's presence and His glory. Remember that happening in the book of Exodus. Remember Jesus when He was transfigured in front of the disciples. They see Him in all His glory. There is a cloud that is there. But what this means is that Jesus is exalted, that He has the glory of God.

And by the way, when it says that Jesus is going to come back in the same way, it doesn't mean that the tape kind of is reversed and you see everything just coming backwards from what they saw. It means that Jesus is going to come bodily one day.

[ 6 : 14 ] And He's going to come in all of His glory the same way that He left. But there will be a difference. You know, it's going to be a very public coming again.

Every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God. That's what Paul says. So everybody will see that Jesus is exalted and that He is God Himself.

He has the glory of God. And we build our lives around this fact. We are strengthened by the certain hope that we will see Jesus on the last day in the same way that His disciples saw Him leave at the ascension, in that same way.

And so the ascension means that God the Father glorifies Jesus completely, utterly, with His glory. And that's what we were singing about today in the hymns and in the anthems.

And then 10 days later on the day of Pentecost in Peter, Peter is in Acts 2, Peter is going to preach about this. He preaches a powerful sermon and he says to people who were actually involved in the crucifixion, people in Jerusalem at that time, he says, let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus who you crucified.

[ 7 : 37 ] And you see what Peter is saying to them. What has happened through the ascension is that the crucifixion is what those people thought of Jesus and His ministry.

And the ascension is what God the Father thinks of Jesus and His ministry. God the Father exalts Him. God the Father gives Him all of His glory.

So no matter what the world thinks, Jesus is Lord. He sits at the right hand of the Father and He rules over all universe, all things, good and evil.

Many, many years ago when I was an undergraduate, I went to the University of Minnesota down in the United States. And there was a big happening, one of the terms that I was there, where a Christian group bought a fraternity house and totally changed things about what used to happen in that fraternity house, obviously.

And one of the things they did was they put a huge banner over the top of that fraternity on the campus that said, Jesus Christ is Lord of the University of Minnesota.

[ 8 : 47 ] Well, there was at least a few people who weren't comfortable with that. And so a lawsuit was brought up against them and to try to take it down. Well, it was unsuccessful. But this was something that was very much in your face.

It probably wasn't all that helpful in bringing people to Christ, but it is true. It is true. Whether that university knew it or not, Jesus is Lord of it. Whether the world knows it or not, Jesus reigns from heaven.

We don't see Him. He is Lord from heaven. And we ought to all be immensely encouraged by this, that no matter what situation we are facing, Jesus rules over that situation.

Jesus rules over those people. Jesus rules over what surrounds us. And not only that, everything that we do and say, our acts of kindness, our encouragement, our forgiveness, our love, the things

we say about what God has done in our life, especially the things we say about Jesus Himself, all of those things are meant to bring people to know that lordship of Jesus and to know that His lordship brings grace into our lives and into the lives of the people around us.

This is what Ascension is telling us, that Jesus is Lord of the lives of the people in our life. He is Lord of the world that is around us.

[10:14] So when Peter told the group that he preached to that God had made the one that they had rejected Lord and Christ, that was the moment in that powerful sermon that the penny dropped and people were cut to the heart and they said, what do we do?

And that's when Peter says, you've got to repent. And for us, if we know that Jesus reigns at the Father's right hand, we are witnesses of Jesus' lordship.

Acts 1 and 8 says, we are to be about Jesus' ministry of revealing to people that Jesus does rule. And that rule means God's grace and mercy and healing and a whole direction for all who say, what do we do, Lord?

What do we do, Lord? That is a big calling. That's a calling that is on each of us. It's the calling of the Ascension. And you know, we cannot do this. We all are frail.

We all had a bad day driving through traffic. We are unqualified in many ways. It's really too great a calling for us to bring people to see the lordship of Jesus.

[11:22] But that brings us to the second change that I want to briefly say about what the Ascension brings to us. Jesus brings to us the Holy Spirit through his Ascension.

So back in John 16, 7, Jesus told his disciples, it is actually to your advantage that I go away.

Because if I don't go away, the helper, the Holy Spirit will not come to you.

But if I go, I will send him to you. And that's why right after this, just nine days later, ten days later, the day of Pentecost comes, where the Holy Spirit is given to everybody, to every person, and helps them to trust in Jesus.

It's only because Jesus goes bodily to heaven in the Ascension that he sends the Holy Spirit so that we are witnesses to Jesus. And not only that, Jesus is truly present with us.

I am with you to the end of the age. That's what the giving of the Holy Spirit means for us. So look at verse 8 again. Holy Spirit brings about two changes in our life.

[12:31] One is that you will receive power, and the second is that you will be Jesus' witnesses.

Now, all of you, if you believe in what I'm talking about, if you have that trust in Jesus Christ, it's only because the Holy Spirit has been poured out on you.

You have that Holy Spirit. Jesus has sent him to you. And he is a great gift from Jesus because he opens all of our eyes to see who Jesus is for us and that he is Lord.

And he makes us alive to him. And in that way, he makes us witnesses. And he gives us all that we need to faithfully be those witnesses in our work, in our families, with our friends, in all of our life, helping people to see Jesus' rule and bring them into his kingdom.

He gives us power to do that by the Holy Spirit. And I want to close with the last thing, the third meaning that ascension gives to us today. And very simply, it's something that we should remember as we are witnesses, that we have a high priest in heaven.

We have a great high priest in heaven. This is what ascension means for us. In Hebrews 7, we hear that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

[14:04] Now, that word intercession is very important. It's much more than just asking for things on behalf of the people. It is not just asking for things on behalf of God.

That's not only what Jesus is doing. He is also, in fact, primarily, he is intervening for our good, for our blessings.

He actively intervenes. That's what it means for him to make intercession. It's not just him praying to the Father. He is actively making his rule take place in this world now and today.

How can I forgive that person in my life? That's only because Jesus can intervene in my life, and I call on him for that help. How do I stand for God and honor him in that workplace where it is so toxic or in a place that people are doing things that are unethical?

It is only by the intervention of Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of the Father. How do I speak to my children about Jesus in a way that helps them to really know him as Lord?

[15:09] It is through the intervention of Jesus Christ who is interceding for us. How can I explain the gospel to people that seem hardened against him? It is by the intervention of Jesus.

This is how we are a faithful witness to him, because we have a great high priest in heaven. Jim Packer put it really well. He says, Jesus, in sovereignty, because of the ascension, lavishes upon us the benefits that his suffering has won for us.

And he does lavish his grace upon us because he reigns in heaven with God the Father now. It all means that we can be faithful witnesses by the power of the Holy Spirit, pointing people to the lordship of Jesus, knowing his intervening work in our lives.

We are not doing this on our own power. And so we can worship God, worship Jesus with all our hearts, minds, and strength, because ascension means that he is exalted and he is worthy of all our praise, all our honor, and all the glory that we can give.

Amen. Amen.