

# 50 Days of Wonder: He Ascended Into Heaven

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray. Father, as you open our hearts to hear your word this morning, this evening, in Christ's name, amen. Amen.

Well, good evening, folks. Let me add my welcome to Jordan's. My name is Aaron, if you're new here today. I... Thank you.

I... David Short... David Short sent an email to the staff No, just a me and Joanne McKinnon, who's like the person who does the service sheets, with the name of the title of the sermon, which I can't remember what he called it this morning.

What did you call your sermon this morning? Because you preach at the eight. I was called 50 Days of Wonder. 50 Days of Wonder. Beautiful, lovely, fantastic, right? Great title. And so David sent it to me and somebody at the office that I realized I'd named that I shouldn't have, and said, it said, here's the title.

And I responded with this. What did I write down here? I said, I counter-offer with, counter-offer with the body, the book, and the boing.

[ 1 : 10 ] As a joke. It was a joke. I never believed that anyone would actually think I was serious.

So I was quite shocked tonight. About five minutes ago, when I read that somebody had... It was a joke.

It was a joke. So there you go. Now if you go to... Oh, so we're starting a short series, five weeks, on, well, 50 Days of Wonder is actually probably a good description of it.

It's the ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit. So we're looking at, sort of going Luke 24, just one week in Luke, the end of Luke, and then the first couple of chapters of Acts.

They're very, very pivotal and important chapters for us. This week though, Luke 24. Now if you go to a greeting card store, you're going to get... You get Christmas cards, right?

[ 2 : 12 ] You can buy a Christmas card. You can actually find Easter cards as well. But you can't find, I don't think, ascension cards. There's no like, happy ascension, it's great, it's ascension, hey, come to ascension thing, you know.

But it's a really big day in the church calendar. But it doesn't get a ton of attention. And why is that? Because it is a really big deal. I mean, Jesus didn't just disappear straight after the resurrection, did he?

I mean, he stuck around for a while, a chunk of time. And then, he floated up into the sky. That's verses 50 to 53. That's an impressive thing.

That's an unusual thing. Surely, surely it means something. It's not just an elaborate send-off, I don't think. Like, you know, back in the days when I'm married, a wedding couple would drive off in their car and people would tie, you know, cans to it and it would clunk along the road, like a kind of a fun sort of thing.

It's no like, and for my last thing, let me show you this cool trick. You know, it's nothing like that. The ascension is really important. The ascension matters. But why does it matter?

[ 3 : 27 ] And before I get there, let's just, let's just quickly look through verses 44 to 49 that leads up to this very important event, the ascension.

Luke 24, 44. Then he said to them, these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

He's talking about the whole Bible. So why didn't Jesus just disappear after the resurrection? Well, it seems pretty clear he wanted to show them his body and he wanted to teach them.

And what he taught them was this, that the whole Bible, as it existed back then, the whole Bible, all of it, is about him, which is a lovely corrective to us thinking the Bible is all about us, which is a great temptation for us, I think.

So he taught them from the scriptures and we don't know how long it took. It was a fairly extensive Bible study, I imagine, pretty long. And the gist of it is in verse 46 and he said to them, thus it is written that Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

[ 4 : 48 ] So if we broke it down to the bare elements, the sort of really active words there are suffer, rise, proclaim. Suffer, rise, proclaim. Let's look at them individually. Bound up in that word suffer is the passion of Christ.

It's the cross. It's the working out of forgiveness for us. And isn't it wonderful? Isn't it reassuring that the first word of the gospel is forgiveness?

Now the fact that Christ had to suffer for us to be forgiven means that we are more sinful than we know and more accepted than we can possibly imagine. And isn't that awesome that Christ wants us to know that first?

As a side note, I think the liberal gospel cheats people because it replaces the joy of resting in Christ's work with this idea that you know Jesus, God accepts me as I am.

God accepts me as I am. That's not true. God doesn't accept you as you are. It's like a thing we like to say, right? God doesn't accept you as you are. God accepts you as Christ is if you're a Christian.

[ 6 : 00 ] Okay, so the key words here suffer, rise, proclaim. I'm going to go through this really quickly because I want to get to the ascension. Rise. What does rise mean?

Why is it important to get that across? Well, it's because our great enemy is death and it's the great consequence of sin. It's the great separated death and we can't escape it.

Except except that Christ rose again. He defeated death. It means that death does not have the final word in our life. It's a great comfort to know that Jesus rose, isn't it? Suffer, rise, proclaim.

Okay, proclaim. So if suffer is tied up in this whole idea that we're more sinful than we know and more accepted than you can imagine and death has been defeated now proclaim, verse 47. And that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name for all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

The mission of the church is to tell people what Jesus has done, to point people to Jesus. And there's verse 49 it says, Behold I'm sending the promise of my Father upon you but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

[ 7 : 09 ] And here we find the only imperative in the whole passage I think and that's wait. Wait, it seems like that's the only command is wait. So Jesus says I'm going to empower you to do this thing I want you to do to go proclaim.

I'm going to empower you. And that's Pentecost we'll get to that in the next couple of weeks. But for now he says wait until that power comes because something has got to happen first and what's that thing that's got to happen first?

It's the ascension. So let's get at it. 50 to 53. Now he led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

While he blessed them he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God.

So let's return to an earlier question. Why does the ascension matter? Basic details first. Did it actually happen?

[ 8 : 12 ] Is it a flowery way of sort of saying you know he he kind of just wasn't around after that? No.

No. I don't think it is. I say that because the beginning of Luke Luke starts his gospel with these words in as much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us.

Just as those who are from the beginning are eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us. It seemed good to me also having followed all things closely for some time past to write an orderly account for you.

So he's at pains to get across right at the beginning of his gospel that he's recording historical events. He's going to write down stuff that actually happened. We can trust the witness of Luke here that at the end of Jesus' time on earth his feet left the ground and he rose up and disappeared and disappeared into the sky.

People watched it happen. Luke records it. Perhaps that's one of the reasons that the ascension isn't a big deal or we try not to make it a big deal because it does sound kind of weird or silly or something.

[ 9 : 35 ] Maybe that's why we don't like to sort of think about it too much. So why did it have to be like this? This is such an unusual thing. Why didn't Jesus just disappear?

Wander off into the morning fog? Quite romantic like in a movie, right? Or just dissolve or something. Because it was really important that Jesus still had a body for a start.

It was really important he still had a body. It's really important that there's no hint that Jesus kind of unzips his man's skin and kind of comes out of it and is this disembodied thing that you know dissolves, floats away.

It's really important he has a body. Why is that? Because it's such a great source of hope for us. It's one of the things at the core of our comfort that he has a body. It means Jesus is physically present with God.

Somehow, mysteriously, he is physically, fleshly present with God and he's there interceding for us. Romans 8 says that he's praying for us.

[ 10 : 41 ] He knows what it means to be human because he is human. A human with flesh is praying for you. He knows your temptations, your life.

Christ understands because he's still a man. He's God but he's still man. He's still flesh. You know in those kind of old spy movies these guys would say things like they talk about their man in Washington or their man in Tokyo or something like that.

Sort of saying if you go to those places I've got a guy who will look after you. It's kind of like that but a million times more. Jesus is our man in heaven.

He's there praying for us in heaven. The Jesus that was on earth, the same Jesus is up there. a human being. A human being is running the universe.

He knows you. He loves you. He knows how you feel. He knows the joys. He knows the sorrows of human life. That's a great consolation for us.

[ 11 : 42 ] That's a great comfort for us. That's one reason. Why else does the ascension matter? We know he's praying for us. A human is praying for us. He knows what it's like to be us.

What else is he doing that makes it matter? What else? What is Jesus doing? Praying for us?

Well, according to Hebrews 10, he is sitting. Hebrews 10 verse 11, and every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins.

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. What's Jesus doing now? He's sitting. What does that mean?

Well, it's a picture of real life. It's like when you've completed a day's work. You sit down. There were no seats for the priests in the Old Testament temple because their work was never done.

[ 12 : 43 ] But Jesus, having completed his work, his earthly ministry, he's done it.

He sits. Why does the ascension matter? Jesus has done everything necessary for you to be saved, for you to be in a right relationship with God, for you to have peace with the Creator.

There is nothing you can add to that, which means you too, like Jesus, can rest in that sacrifice. Do you rest in that sacrifice?

Why are you antsy about it? Are you antsy about your salvation? Do you try to add to it in small, useless ways?

Folks, rest. Jesus thought the job was done. He sat down. So, Jesus is praying.

[ 13 : 46 ] He's sitting. What else is he doing? And how does it help us understand why the ascension matters? Well, what's Jesus doing right now? He's ruling. The right hand of God is the place described in Hebrews 10 as the place of leadership.

This word, ascension, the reason it's called ascension is not because Jesus went upwards. It's less about him going upwards and more about what that represents.

What it represents is an ascension to a throne. When Queen Elizabeth was throned in, when she ascended to the throne in 1953, she physically had to, if you watch it, it's actually probably a good thing to watch just to give you a bit of a feel for the enthronement of Jesus.

You can do what you like with that. She physically had to go up some stairs and sit on a big throne. she ascended to the throne. She walked up some stairs.

But the big thing that happens, the really big thing that happened, is the important thing, is not that she walked up these steps, it's that she ascended to a position. And that's what's happening here with Jesus.

[ 15 : 06 ] She ascended to the throne to become the Queen of England. Jesus disappears in the clouds, ascends to the throne of the universe. So it's not just an impressive vanishing act.

He's being enthroned. God's giving him the keys to the universe. You're in charge of the universe. Now think about that some more. This means instead of staying here in one sort of time place, he has a new relationship with the universe.

He steps out of time, out of space, to relate to it all, always. Now what does that matter to you, you might ask? Remember in John 20, I think we've preached on this before, Jesus appears to Mary after the resurrection, and she tries to grab a hold of him, and there's this really awkward kind of like moment, and he says, don't touch me.

You feel really bad for Mary, right? And it wasn't like, don't touch me or you'll melt or something will happen, you know? So it's, he says, don't touch me, I've got to go away.

I've got to leave. Don't try and hang on to me. So she was afraid that he would leave again, leave her again, and he's saying, you don't understand Mary, you don't get this.

[ 16 : 23 ] If I go, if you let me go, if I go, you'll never lose me again. You can go anywhere in the world.

You can be in prison. You can be trapped upside down in a boat in the middle of the ocean. You can be in Kamloops. You can be in the jungle.

You can be anywhere, in any situation, and I will be there. And I will be there with you. That's what the ascension means. Christ's rule is not limited by time and space.

His rule goes universal as he's enthroned. He's the king of the universe. So what is Christ doing now? He's praying for us. He's sitting.

He's ruling. What else? He is sending. In a passage, it says, Jesus says, wait. Wait until you're empowered by God, and then go to be my witnesses.

[ 17 : 24 ] Go and tell people about me. Have a look at verse 51 and 52 again. 52 again. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. Jerusalem and they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God.

So their friend, their Lord, disappears and their response is not, oh, he's gone again, this is terrible. No. Their response is worship and joy and obedience. See, they understand to some degree what's going on here.

They understand what's going on and they go back into the world like thunderbolts. They understand the ascension is not the absence of Jesus. It's the magnification of his presence through the power of the Holy Spirit.

They understand that he's not just the local Messiah, but he's the king of the universe. They got it. Folks, you've got to get the ascension here, okay? You've got to get the ascension. They are so gripped by this, they become witnesses with passion.

So much so that all of them, bar one, is killed for their faith. Folks, if you don't understand the ascension, your witness will be subdued. If you don't get that Jesus is with you through the Holy Spirit, that you are with him in heaven in some mysterious way, that he is the Lord of the universe, if you don't get these things, if you don't understand what Jesus is doing now, you will find the mission of God difficult.

[ 18 : 46 ] You'll find it difficult, but if you do get it, if you get a hold of the ascension, folks, you'll just be a powerhouse. There's a great story about George Whitfield, who was this amazing Anglican preacher in the 18th century, and he was one of the key players in the great American and English revivals, the great awakening.

So Whitfield was preaching one time in the States, and the congregation has just not been into it. And there's one guy in the front row who's fallen asleep, and so Whitfield stops the sermon, he says this, he says, If I had come to speak to you in my own name, well you might as well rest your elbows on your knees and your heads and your hands and sleep.

And once in a while look up and say, what is this babbler talking of? But I've not come to you in my own name. No, I have come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts.

And then he brings his foot down, bang on the floor, shakes the building and says, I must and I will be heard. And the congregation is startled, and the guy wakes up.

And he goes, I, yelled Whitfield, fixing his eyes on him, I have waked you, have I? I'm meant to do it. I have not come here to preach to stocks and stones. I've come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts.

[ 20 : 02 ] And I must and will have an audience. When you understand the ascension, when you understand where Jesus is, what he has done, what he is doing, it should send you out like a thunderbolt with great confidence and authority.

Folks, this is why the ascension matters. It's not a fun trick that Jesus did to end his time to show him to be powerful or something.

It's the consummation of his whole earthly ministry. It's our source of hope, direction, comfort, and power. Amen.