

# The Ascension

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[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome to Luke chapter 24. We've spent a long time going through this gospel, but now we come to the final part where Jesus is taken up into heaven.

Verse 50, Then 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.

I'm sure we all know that we can never judge the end of anything by its beginning. Many a thing which has begun well has ended badly, and many a thing that has begun badly has ended well. We're familiar with that in life. And there couldn't be a greater contrast, I don't think, between the birth of Jesus into this world, and his leaving of the world 33 or so years later.

[ 1 : 11 ] We know that he was born in an outhouse in Bethlehem. There was no room in the inn or anywhere, because there was an influx of people into Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and all the surrounding areas at that particular time.

And so Jesus, if any person had looked at this little baby, just looked at little baby Jesus naturally, and just not been aware of who he was, could never have believed of what this human, little human frame there was to become, and who he actually was.

But his departure was awesome, it was spectacular, and I'm sure to this day it is something that we often reflect upon. In fact, it is one of the things that gives the church its great hope and joy.

You'll notice that there's a joy. There's a joy in the disciples, because we read that they returned, verse 52, and when they had worshipped him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

It's one of the things that there's a growing sense of joy from the resurrection. As Jesus makes more and more appearances, and they're more and more fully convinced and persuaded, this is Christ.

[ 2 : 29 ] There is a sense of joy, growing joy. And we find this, that this joy is at the very heart of their life. They return to the temple with joy.

And you'll find that if you go through the book of Acts, that joy is one of the features in these early chapters. Even when they were imprisoned, even when they were beaten, there was still this sense of joy.

And there's still a sense of joy to this day, that Jesus has risen. If you're a believer here today, there is joy in your heart over the fact that the Savior, the Christ, is risen.

He's alive. He is seated at the right hand of glory. He is the head of the church. That inspires you. It gives you joy. You know today that we do not worship a dead Christ.

We worship a living Christ. If Jesus Christ was still dead, if Christ had not risen from the dead, we would still be dead in our sins. That's what Paul tells us. But he's alive.

[ 3 : 30 ] He's alive forevermore. And the fact that he rose up triumphant, that joy is within our heart. Many people don't have that joy.

There are many unbelievers. It doesn't mean anything to them. There's many people who try and push these things aside. They don't think upon them. They never dwell upon it. They cannot understand why people get excited by it.

But for the believer, it's at the very heart. It's part of the pulse of our spiritual life that Jesus rose and he ascended into glory.

And so something of that joy that is in the heart of the disciples is in our heart as well. Now the ascension of Jesus must have been quite a remarkable thing.

The disciples were used to a remarkable life as they followed Jesus. They had seen Jesus in many situations doing many things. They had seen Jesus walk on the water.

[ 4 : 30 ] They had seen him calm the water, the storm. They had seen him perform many healings. They had seen him open the eyes of the blind, cure paralytics, open the ears of the deaf, cause unable the dumb to speak.

They had seen Jesus heal the lepers. They had even seen Jesus raise the dead. Some of them had seen Jesus transfigured. They had seen Jesus be taken and put upon the cross and Jesus being buried.

But they had also discovered that Jesus was alive with them because he kept appearing to them. Just very shortly before this, one day they were all gathered in a room and Jesus just appeared in the room.

We were looking at that just last week. And so they were used to, as it were, extraordinary things happening with Jesus. And so what happens here on the Mount of Olives is a very fitting way for the Lord Jesus to depart from this world.

Now as we know, there was a 40-day period where Jesus, before this public, as it were, ascension, and when I say public, I believe it was public only to his own followers.

[ 5 : 50 ] I do not believe that people who might have been looking to the Mount of Olives, unbelievers would have seen this. I believe that this was something that was given for the disciples, for Jesus' followers there, that they were given this, they were given to see what was taking place.

Because we often read, we come across this, that their eyes were opened, their eyes were opened, they were able to see. Anyway, that's something else just now. But in this 40-day period, as Jesus was reappearing, and he appeared to, of course, to the 11, he appeared to the two on the Emmaus Road, he appeared to Mary Magdalene, he made a lot of appearances.

Paul tells us that he appeared to 500. But in all these appearances, Jesus was teaching, he was encouraging, he was exhorting, he was restoring, for example, Peter, and he was preparing the church for the great work that was to take place as they were to go out with the gospel.

And that's what we're told at the beginning of Acts, in verse 3, that he presented himself alive, to them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

You see, the early church had to be witness of Jesus and then witnesses to Jesus and for Jesus as they went out into this world.

[ 7 : 22 ] And they went out of this wonderful news that Jesus was alive and he spoke to them about the kingdom. I would love to have been part of that college. In a sense, here is, this is a finishing school.

They spent three years in his company. And in these three years, they had witnessed. It was a very hands-on three years. They had witnessed many things.

They were involved in many things. They were involved in some of the miracles. For instance, the feeding of the thousands. Jesus got them to distribute. And it must have been an amazing thing for the disciples.

Well, it should have been an amazing thing for the disciples because they were the ones who were distributing. We're digressing here for a second. But the five loaves and the two fish, remember how through that, Jesus caused that to become a feast for thousands of people.

And the disciples were used in the distribution. And you know this, it didn't really mean too much to them. It's quite extraordinary.

[ 8 : 27 ] If you and I had been involved, if you had been one of the 12 people going around and you'd be saying to yourself, this is extraordinary. Rather than diminishing, it's growing. There's more. There's more.

There's more. How come? And remember, they picked up 12 basketfuls afterward. Do you know, it tells us in one of the Gospels that the disciples considered it not this miracle because their hearts were hard.

They were in the presence of Christ observing his miracles and yet remaining largely unaffected by them. All that was going to change.

And that's what the Lord does with us because there are many things that kind of pass us by. There are many things we hear and sometimes they kind of float by. They go in but they don't take, they don't cause a great effect.

But later on, ah, we say, yeah, that kind of makes sense. Now I'm beginning to understand. And I think in this 40 day period, a lot of that was taking place as Jesus was teaching them and we see

there that he was speaking to them about the kingdom of God.

[ 9 : 37 ] He was showing them in all that happened to himself in his incarnation, in his coming into this world and being born and in his living out his life, in everything that he did, in his ministry, in his fulfillment of the law, in his death as a sacrifice for our sin, in his rising again, in everything, Jesus would have been teaching them and all the bits and pieces would be beginning to come together and they were beginning to understand.

So this would have been some college these 40 days where Jesus was teaching them and instructing them about the kingdom, preparing them to go out.

And we know that this is essential when God is picking particular people to go out with the word. They have to have a period of learning. Like for instance, Moses had to have that before he went, became the great leader.

Paul himself had this period of learning. So what an insight they were given. And of course, when the Holy Spirit came in power, the Holy Spirit opened their mind to understand.

And let us remember that we live in a day where the Holy Spirit's power is known. Because since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was always at work.

[ 11 : 04 ] But at a new level in this world after Pentecost. And we should ask the Lord to open our minds. You know, this is what God wants us to do.

The Word tells us, open mine eyes. The psalmist said that. That I might discover wonderful things out of your law. Do you do that when you come to the Bible?

Or do you just sort of flick through it and read it out of habit? Or do you actually say to the Lord, Lord, look, I really would like to know. I would like to understand. Remember that God is the greatest teacher.

The Lord has given in this world many great teachers. And it's wonderful to sit under great teachers. But the greatest teacher of all is the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit can open our heart and mind as we listen to teachers and as we indeed come under the Word that the Spirit would open our mind so that we can learn personally.

It will go in there so that we can come to understand. This is what the Holy Spirit does for us. And so, all these times Jesus was teaching them.

[ 12 : 10 ] And then Jesus, we read there that he led them out as far as Bethany. That's what we read there. And he led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

And again, as has often been suggested by people that Bethany took them out as far as Bethany. A lot of people suggest that, and we mentioned that on other occasions, that there was a mentioning there of Bethany as it were as a mark of Jesus marking that home, that special home.

Probably it was a home I would imagine. And again, I don't like to speculate, but the very fact that Scripture mentions this home so lovingly, it seems to be a home and it's a home that Jesus frequented, that he often went to.

It was a home that he loved, that home in Bethany, the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. And we also know from Scripture that Mary was the most spiritually minded follower that Jesus had.

Mary understood things about Jesus, about his work and his mission that John didn't understand, that Peter didn't understand, that James didn't understand.

[ 13 : 24 ] These hand-picked disciples who followed Jesus all the time, they hadn't grasped what Mary had understood. And Mary displayed that tremendous grasp when she anointed the feet of Jesus.

And there was grumbling in the room when she did that. And Jesus said, let her alone. Against the day of my burial hath she done this. Mary understood when the others didn't.

And so many have suggested that it is as a mark of our Lord, as it were, marking the tremendous love, devotion of that particular home in Bethany.

But that's, again, we cannot be too sure on it. Anyway, we find that Jesus leads them out as far as Bethany. And we find that at this time, before Jesus parts from them, the disciples ask him again, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel to Israel?

You see, they were really taken up. They were obsessed with the restoration of the kingdom. They believed that at the time of the Messiah that the kingdom would come in power.

[ 14 : 38 ] They believed it would, now they were thinking at temporal levels that it would be a time of independence. A time of economic and military and political strength and might.

But Jesus has to show them, no, the kingdom is spiritual. It's going to be a spiritual growth. It's a growth that's going to begin here in Jerusalem, but then it's going to spread out through all the world.

And it's very interesting that as they ask him this question, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, it's not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

And I think we need to get that rebuke ourselves. There's a gentle rebuke from the Lord there. And we're always wanting to know as well.

There's something about us we are always wanting to know the future. And we want to know this and we want to know that and we've got to remember that the Lord has revealed to us sufficient.

[15:43] You know, sometimes we can become obsessed with trying to work out things that are not revealed at all. And we can spend forever on purely speculative matters.

And in many ways, we're wasting our time because the Lord has revealed so much to us. The word is full.

This is all his revelation. And so there is so much already that has been revealed and yet so often we're wanting to know other things. And the Lord says there are things that the secret things belong to the Lord.

There are things that he's not going to show to you. And let us say how thankful we are to the Lord that he hasn't revealed everything to us. If God were to have made known to us the whole of our life, when we were little, there are things that have already taken place and things that may yet have to take place.

And if we knew these things beforehand, we'd be saying to the Lord, no, Lord, you mustn't allow this. You've got to change that. Because there are, and I'm sure many of you in here, you have endured sorrows and pains.

[17:04] And you're saying to yourself, if I had known beforehand what I had to go through, I couldn't have borne the knowledge prior to it actually happening. And so God in his wisdom has hidden many things from us, but he has also revealed much to us.

But that doesn't mean that the Lord doesn't make known sometimes to people. There's a verse, we sang it in Psalm 25, the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.

And we know that sometimes the Lord, by an impression and through the word, will make known to us in some way, some things. But always, it will be never against, never against his word.

But anyway, we read that he lifted up his hands and blessed them. How beautiful that the final meeting that they had with Jesus should be in such a moment.

speaking to them and in the very way of a benediction. Talking to them, his hands lifted up, blessing them. What a wonderful, what a wonderful moment.

[18:12] They would have often looked back on that parting. Oh, wasn't that a wonderful moment? My friend, let me say something at a purely practical level. Life, as we know, is full of meetings and partings.

May our partings always be in peace. Because we don't know whether this will be a final parting or not. We never know.

We normally assume it won't. So let us seek to make our partings be peaceful. These disciples would have always looked back and thought, what a wonderful moment.

That final parting was so wonderful. And so we read, while he blessed them, he was parted from them. We read in Acts there that while they were gazing into heaven and while he said they were looking on him, at verse 9, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight.

This word lifted up is a word that speaks that this was, we believe, an act of the Father. It wasn't something that Jesus did himself, but that he was lifted up.

[19:27] And it's also interesting that it says he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. That doesn't mean that he went up in the air and it was like in the way that you see a plane go through the clouds and then disappear.

It was that he was lifted up and the cloud, as it were, became the chariot. Not your normal cloud. This cloud that appeared here symbolized the glory and the presence of God.

And it was, no doubt, this cloud was like a, I suppose, just like a stool or something that he would stand on.

He was lifted up anyway, and then by this cloud, and he disappeared. So this cloud would be underneath him. This cloud was a chariot, just in the way that a chariot of fire took Elijah up into heaven.

So Jesus ascended. He was lifted up like that. And we find the disciples worshipping him. And you know, it's a magnificent scene.

[ 20 : 30 ] You know, as I was looking at that, and I was thinking of all the different incidents and all the different appearances and all the different things of Jesus' life, I was saying, what would I most like to have been present at in the life of Jesus?

Sometimes it's worth asking these kind of questions. You're sure, just at a personal level. Would I like to have been with him when he walked on the water? Or would I have liked to have seen him calm the storm?

Would I have liked to have been there in the feeding of the 5,000? Would I like to have been on the Mount of Transfiguration and see him being transfigured? Well, I think of all the things, personally, I would like to have been on the Mount of Olives when Jesus was lifted up and part.

I think he is one of the, to me anyway, it's one of the most powerful scenes in Scripture, carried up into heaven.

This cloud took them out of their sight. Sometimes people ask, why did there have to be this public ascension before the disciples? Well, Jesus was showing there while he had been appearing and reappearing that now the time had come where he was going to finally depart from them in a physical way.

[ 21 : 48 ] And he was, he wanted the disciples to know that there was now going to be a new order. And so Jesus disappears and goes up into heaven.

But, you know, it also tells us that just as he went up, these angels came, men of Galilee, the angels said, why do you stand looking into heaven? And this Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

Isn't that an incredible thing? There's going to come another day when Jesus is going to descend from heaven. Now, I've suggested, and I might be wrong, it's only my own personal opinion on this, that while Jesus went up very publicly, he went up, I believe it was only his followers that were able to see him.

But when Jesus returns, everybody will see him. We're told that every eye will see him. The believer and the unbeliever.

And there will also be a difference because while Jesus ascended, and he ascended in the resurrected body, he will return in the resurrected body, but he will return in an altogether glorious resurrected body.

[ 23 : 10 ] Because we believe that there was another level after the ascension, as Jesus ascended, where he received all the glory and the honor. And we're given a picture, two pictures of the altogether glorious ascended Jesus in the Bible.

One is when Saul of Tarsus is on his way down to Damascus, and Jesus reveals himself. And it's too much for Saul. He falls to the ground.

He falls, and he can't bear the presence, the brightness, the brilliance of Jesus. And the other time is John, the Apostle John, in the book of Revelation.

John is given a vision of Jesus. And John falls down as one dead before him. So the two glimpses that two of God's choice saints are given are so overwhelming that they cannot bear.

Their reaction is almost as death. So there will be this difference when Jesus returns. He's going to be spectacular. And it's going to be so different to when he first came into this world.

[ 24 : 21 ] But he will descend. And we were told in Revelation, he will come with clouds. Which to me, just as he went up on a cloud, I believe he will also descend with his feet in a cloud.

But it will be spectacular, awesome, and everybody will see. And it will be heralded in the most extraordinary way.

One question before we move on, the time is nearly gone. What would your reaction be? Here's an important question to ask. Supposing on our way home today, Jesus was to return.

And that rather than the ascended Jesus, we see the descending Jesus coming down on this cloud in all his glory. What would your reaction be personally if you saw Jesus return?

Knowing that you're going to have to appear before him. Would it be one of joy? And saying as the book of Revelation finishes, Even so come Lord Jesus.

[ 25 : 32 ] This is the moment I've been waiting for. Or would your reaction be, No. I'm not ready to meet with you, Jesus.

What would your reaction be? Think about it. And if your reaction is one where you say, I'm not ready to meet with Jesus, then I would urge you, even here and now, to deal with that by asking Jesus to come into your heart, into your life, even just now.

So we find that Jesus is now the ascended Christ. And what does that mean for us today? Well, it means that Jesus, in his ascension, final ascension, means that he has completed all the work that the Father gave him to do.

Every day of his public ministry, Jesus was fulfilling perfectly, absolutely, everything that the Father gave him to do. Every step he took was a step of obedience, fulfilling it, and completing all the work. And in that, Jesus' ascending shows, I have vanquished all the enemies. sin, death, grave, hell, all these enemies, their power is broken.

[ 26 : 54 ] And again, Jesus, ascending up, is speaking to us of where he's going. He's ascending into heaven to intercede for us. He's again ascending into heaven as the head of the church, and he has promised, the promise that he has given of the Holy Spirit coming.

And the Holy Spirit, of course, we know, has come into our hearts, first of all, convincing us of our sin, showing us Jesus, helping us to believe in Jesus, helps us live for Jesus, and helps us witness for Jesus as we go through this world.

The Holy Spirit is constantly ministering in this way. And again, Jesus has ascended to heaven, and he's going to do something else. We kind of mentioned that on Wednesday.

He's going to prepare a place for us. Part of that preparation involved the cross. All of this was tied up in the preparation, but he's gone there.

Remember, we're looking at it in Peter. It says, we are kept by the power of God unto salvation. But also, it says, it talks about this place that is, this place that is unfading in its glory, this place that is undefiled, kept in heaven for you.

[ 28 : 17 ] We saw the twofold keeping, the believers being kept here, and heaven being kept for the believers. Your place is marked in heaven. You are being kept for that place in heaven.

And when the time is right, God's time, remember, there's a time set, the Lord will return for you. He's going to take you back to that place to be with himself forever.

And so, as the Lord Jesus leaves the land of the crucifixion and now enters the place of coronation, the disciples head back to Jerusalem.

And we find them constantly in a spirit of worship and joy, and they're continually in the temple. very interesting that Luke begins in the temple and ends in the temple.

If we cast our minds back a long time ago, we find Zachariah, the priest, worshiping God in the temple. That's how Luke begins when we got the promise, remember, where the angel came to tell about John the Baptist's birth.

[ 29 : 24 ] That's how the gospel begins. It closes in the temple, praising God, worshiping God, serving God. I hope that we have been edified as we've journeyed and followed the life of Jesus through this gospel.

And you know, it's quite extraordinary when you think of this little baby that was born in Bethlehem and the global significance of that birth and that down throughout the centuries to this day, hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, have had their lives changed and transformed so that people out of every race and color and culture and language have been brought into the kingdom, are one in Christ Jesus.

as we have followed the life of Jesus through this gospel, let me ask you one very important question.

Have you followed it simply, theoretically? Have you followed Jesus simply by following through the pages, being interested in the narrative, picking up bits here and there, or are you actually following Jesus in your heart?

I hope that you are following Jesus in your heart. That's what he wants. It's very clear from the gospel. The invitation goes out to all.

[ 31 : 03 ] Are you today following Jesus in your heart and in your life? Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we pray that as we come under and have been under the word, that our lives will be enriched and blessed by it.

Have mercy upon us, O Lord, and do us good and lead us in the way of truth. Lord, bless and pity us, shine on us with thy face. We pray to take us all home safely.

We pray thy blessing upon the cup of tea and coffee afterwards and ask to encourage each one. Lord, do us good and again comfort those whose hearts are heavy and sore through loss and crosses and bereavement.

Wash away from us all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.