

Many of you will remember, we began an exposition of this book (common called the book of Acts) last week. By way of review, I want to say a few things about its author and purpose: First, its author. If you remember, I said, whoever wrote this book also wrote the 3rd Gospel, which has historically been accredited to Luke. It's for this reason, the final chapter of the Gospel of Luke and the opening chapter of Acts, overlap.

Second, its purpose. The primary purpose of this book is to describe the ongoing works of Christ in and through His apostles. The "former account" that is, the Gospel of Luke, recorded "all that Jesus began both to do and teach." Thus, this second account, the book of Acts, records all that Jesus continued to do in and through His Apostles.

Thus, having seen verses 1-8, and the promise of the Holy Spirit, we come this morning to verses 9-11, and Christ's Ascension. And I suggest to you brethren, this is one of the benefits of preaching consecutively through books, we eventually cover all the doctrines of the Bible, because, if truth be told, the Ascension is something that is easily overlooked.

We hear much about His incarnation, public ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and second coming, but precious little about His Ascension. But as we shall see, this specific aspect of Christ's work is just as important as all the rest. And so, I want to examine Christ's Ascension under three headings: historically, theologically, and practically considered.

- I. Historically Considered
- II. Theologically Considered
- III. Practically Considered

I. Historically Considered

1. Here I want to briefly consider verses 9-11, and point out five facts from the historical account of Christ's ascension.
2. (1) It was after 40 days, v9—"Now when He had spoken these things"—this refers to the things mentioned in the previous verses.
3. But we learn from v3, that the timeframe that existed between His resurrection and ascension was 40 days.
4. Why is this relevant? Well, as you may know, according to Lev.12:2-6, every first-born male was dedicated in the temple 40 days after their birth.
5. Lk.2:22-23—"Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD')."
6. Thus, just as it was 40 days between His birth and entrance into the physical temple (in Jerusalem), so it was 40 days between His resurrection and entrance into the spiritual temple (in heaven).
7. Herman Witsius—"As on the 40th day after His birth, Joseph and His mother brought Him to Jerusalem, and presented Him to the Lord in the temple; so on the 40th day after His resurrection, which was a kind of second nativity, He went to His heavenly Father, and appeared before Him in the temple not made with hands."
8. (2) It was bodily, v9—"Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."
9. The phrase "He was taken up" describes the ascension as a passive act on His part—as He was sent so He was taken.
10. John Dick—"Our Lord ascended in human nature. The man Christ Jesus has left the earth, and entered into that invisible region of the universe, where God sits on the throne of His majesty."

11. Thus, fundamental to the ascension, is the local transfer of the person of Christ from one place to another; from earth to heaven.
12. This means, there's a real place, somewhere within God's creation, where the glorified Christ presently resides.
13. Charles Hodge—"Heaven is therefore a place. In what part of the universe, it is located is not revealed. But according to the doctrine of Scripture it is a definite portion of space where God specially manifests His presence, and where He is surrounded by His angels, and by the spirits of the just made perfect."
14. (3) It was visible, v9—"Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched"—they watched Him depart.
15. In other words, the ascension was witnessed by the apostles, just as His crucifixion and His resurrection.
16. (4) It was glorious—this is seen in two things: first, a cloud received Him out of sight; second, He was accompanied by two angels.
17. (a) A cloud received Him out of sight, Ps.104:3—"He makes the clouds His chariot, and walks on the wings of the wind."
18. It's for this reason, clouds are also associated with His second coming, Mk.13:26—"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory."
19. (b) He was accompanied by two angels, v10—"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel."
20. These men have universally been understood as angels, who are dressed in white to underscore their purity.
21. Psalm 68:17 says Christ ascended with many angels, and Matt.25:31 says He will return with many angels.
22. (5) It was temporary—by this I simply mean, in the same way He left them, He would return for them.
23. V11—"Men of Galilee, who do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."
24. Just as He left bodily, visibly, gloriously (on clouds and with angels), so He shall return bodily, visibly, and gloriously.
25. Herman Witsius—"By the Ascension of Christ we understand, the second step of His glorious exaltation, by which, on the fortieth day after His resurrection, and in the sight of His disciples, He removed His already glorified body from the earth, and in particular, from mount Olivet on the side which lay towards Bethany; and advanced it, through the air and the visible heavens, into the highest heaven, to remain there in glory till the day of the last judgment."

II. Theologically Considered

1. Here I want to summary three primary theological reasons or purposes behind the ascension of Christ.
2. (1) To receive glory and honor—Christ's ascension is a part of His exaltation as His resurrection and session.
3. If fact, we can say, that His ascension is a necessary result of His resurrection and necessary for His session.
4. In short, Christ left this world because the work He was sent to do was finished—His humiliation complete.
5. Thus, when Christ returned to heaven, He received glory and honor that was promised Him by His Father.

6. We have to remember, the person who ascended to heaven was the GodMan who was truly God and Man.
7. And so, while it's true, Christ is exalted as the GodMan, we must remember, strictly speaking, it was His human nature that was humbled and His human nature that was glorified.
8. But it's not wrong, in fact it's necessary, for us to ultimately say it was the person of Christ who was glorified.
9. Christ return to heaven as a triumphant Victor, who has defeated all of His enemies and won the victory.
10. He was born 33 years earlier for a specific task, and He now returns 33 years later as a victorious King.
11. Ps.24:7-10—"Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates? Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory."
12. Psalm 24 recounts something and foretells something: first, it recounts the entrance of the Ark in Jerusalem.
13. 2Sam.6:14-15—"Then David danced before the LORD with all his mighty; and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the Ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet."
14. Second, it foretells the ascension of Christ—in other words, as the Ark was a type of Christ, its return to Jerusalem typified Christ's return to heaven.
15. Dan.7:13-14—"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. hen to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed."
16. Phil.2:9-11—"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should now, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
17. 1Tim.3:16—"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentles, believed on in the world, received up in glory (Jn.17:5; Phil.2:9)."
18. This verse is a short Apostolic Creed or Confession—it recounts most of the major historical events of Christ.
19. God was manifested in the flesh (incarnation); justified in or by the Spirit (resurrection); received up in glory (ascension).
20. He was received up into glory—heaven is referred to as "glory"—it's a place where God's glory is manifest.
21. Thus, it was only fitting that Christ be received up in glory, as He is the glorious and victorious King.
22. On earth He was mocked, ridiculed, slandered, despised, rejected, dishonored, beaten, spit upon, and crucified.
23. But in heaven He honored, loved, adored, and worshiped by all—He's treated in a way that fits Him.
24. Do you remember what the apostle said about the righteous saints of old—"of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb.11:38).
25. Well, if the world wasn't worthy of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Rahab, how much more wasn't it worthy of Christ.

26. (2) To make intercession for the people—having offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin, He know must return to the Father to make intercession for the people.
27. This of course was typified in the OC, once a year on the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest enter beyond the veil.
28. If you remember, the temple was divided by a curtain into two parts—the holy place and the most holy place.
29. Once a year, the High Priest took the blood of the sacrifice beyond the vail and sprinkled the Ark of the Covenant.
30. This second and smaller room was a picture of heaven—a picture of the special presence and abode of God.
31. Thus, just as the High Priest carried the blood of bulls into the most holy place, Christ carried His blood into heaven.
32. Heb.9:24—"For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."
33. Thus, let me make something very clear—when Christ entered heaven He did not carry literal blood with Him.
34. But notice what Paul said—"He appeared in the presence of God for us"—Christ Himself entered heaven for us.
35. Christ, the sinless GodMan, who shed His blood for us and satisfied God's law, appeared in the presence of God for us.
36. Thus, Christ's appearance in heaven for us is how He makes intercession for us—He appears before God for us.
37. As the Father looks upon Christ lived, died, and rose for His people, He views us for the sake of Christ.
38. (3) To send His Spirit and gifts upon His people—by this I mean, Christ returned to heaven for our benefit.
39. Jn.16:7—"I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you."
40. Here our Savior expressly says, one primary reason for His ascension was to send His Spirit at Pentecost.
41. But remember, while the Spirit is the greatest gift that Christ gives, the Holy Spirit comes bearing gifts.
42. Again, this was shadowed or typified in David bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the city of Jerusalem.
43. 2Sam.6:18-19—"And when David had finished offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts. Then he distributed among all the people, among the whole multitude of Israel, both the women and the men, to everyone a loaf of bread, a piece of meat, and a cake of raisins."
44. Thus, our Savior returned to heaven to pour out the Holy Spirit, who would give various gifts to His people.
45. Eph.4:7-11—"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.' Now this, 'He ascended'—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things." And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers (Ps.68:17-18)."
46. Here Paul identifies some of the gifts the Holy Spirit gives—He gives various officers (some of which were temporal and others permanent).

47. But to each of those He gave the peculiar gifts and graces necessary for them to fulfill their specific callings.
48. But we learn from 1Cor.12:11, that the Holy Spirit gives every Christian a variety of gifts to serve Christ.
49. Thus, we must not think that Christ only gave gifts on the Day of Pentecost and to that first generation.
50. It's true that the gift of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was unique and a once for all gift for His Church.
51. But Christ is still giving gifts in that, at conversion every Christian receives the Spirit, who carries with Him individual gifts and graces.
52. In fact, the best way to put this would be—while on earth, Christ secured salvation, and now from heaven, He applies salvation.
53. I think this is likely the meaning of our Savior words to Mary—"Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father (Jn.10:17)."
54. That is, do not attend to hinder Me from ascending to My Father, so that I can appear before Him on your behalf, and send gifts.
55. John Flavel—"By Christ's ascension, both His sanctifying, and His ministering gifts were shed forth, more commonly and more abundantly upon men. These fell from Him when He ascended, as Elijah's mantle did from him, so that whatsoever good of conversion, edification, support, or comfort you receive from spiritual ordinances, He has shed forth that, which you now see and feel. It is the fruit of Christ's ascension."

III. Practically Considered

1. Here I want to simply suggest five practical applications that result from the truth of Christ's ascension.
2. (1) If Christ is presently in heaven, then we must walk by faith not sight—this I trust is an obvious application.
3. Christ is no longer physically and bodily on earth, but He has entered into heaven and there He remains.
4. This doesn't deny that Christ is still among us by His Spirit, but it simply asserts He's physically absent.
5. Matt.9:15—And Jesus said to them, 'Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.'
6. In other words, while Christ was with physically with them there was no reason to mourn or fast (fasting includes mourning).
7. But there was coming a time, when Christ would leave, that the disciples would both mourn and fast.
8. Brethren, that time is now—now is the time to mourn, labor, strive, pray, fast, fight, wrestle, and run.
9. (2) If Christ is presently in heaven, then let us our hearts be in heaven, Phil.3:20—"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."
10. Sometimes people might say, if they are separated from someone they love—"My hearts in Texas or Florida."
11. Well, brethren, our love is in heaven—and it's for this reason we wait for His return or desire to go and be with Him.
12. This is why we can say, there's nothing on earth that deserves our chief and supreme love and adoration.

13. Oh yes, there are many things on earth we should love and adore, but nothing on earth deserves my chief love and adoration.
14. My heart is in heaven—that's where my chief and supreme love has gone, and nothing on earth can compare.
15. (3) If Christ is presently in heaven, then we have an advocate before God—He's now in the presence of God for us.
16. We must not mistake Christ's physical absence, as an indication that He does not care for His beloved people.
17. Perhaps I can say, Christ is in heaven caring for His beloved, needy, weak, hated, and mistreated church.
18. John Owen—"The continual appearance of the Lord Christ for us, as our high priest, is the foundation of the safety of the church in all ages, and that whereon all our consolation does depend; whence relief is derived by faith on all occasions. The consideration hereof being rightly improved will carry us through all difficulties, temptations, and trails, with safety unto the end."
19. (4) If Christ is presently in heaven, then we of certainty will follow Him—this is why it's important to maintain He returned to heaven bodily.
20. He's there now in our nature as our representative, and the fact that He's in heaven, ensures all of His people will follow.
21. If the Head is presently in heaven, then of necessity, every member of His body will eventually follow.
22. Heb.6:20—"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."
23. Notice Christ is described as "the forerunner" who's entered heaven "for us"—He's gone before us as a public person.
24. Everything Christ did He did as a public person—that simply means, all that He did He did as our representative.
25. When He lived, we lived—when He died, we died—when He rose again, we rose again—and when He ascended, we ascended.
26. Thus, Paul described the hope we have in Christ as an anchor, "which enters the presence behind the veil."
27. Think of a ship in a storm being tossed back and forth, but with a sure and sturdy anchor on the ocean floor.
28. So too, the church is presently within stormy seas of this wretched world, but she too has a sturdy anchor.
29. But this anchor isn't resting upon the ocean's floor, it has entered behind the veil, into the presence of God.
30. (5) If Christ is presently in heaven, then let no sinner despair of salvation—Christ has secured salvation and returned to heaven.
31. Everything a poor sinner needs is completed—all you must do is believe upon Him as the victorious King.
32. Yes, believe upon Him as the one who was incarnate, sinless, crucified, and resurrected—but believe upon Him as the one who ascended to heaven and now sits upon a throne.