

Luke 24:36-53 / Acts 1:1-11 – Jesus Ascends

Some celebrations are more than a culmination, they are transitions. With the celebration of victory comes the commencement of a new role to play. When think of the Ascension of Jesus Christ, we must not only think of it as the culmination of his earthly ministry, the crowning victory, but also as the beginning of a new phase of his ministry. The amazing point of the Ascension is that Jesus, as a resurrected and glorified human, is in heaven. If in the Incarnation deity entered into the human race, in the ascension humanity (joined with deity in one person) entered into the realm of God. The implications of this for you and me are incredible.

The disciples' initial response to the death of Christ was complete devastation. Their response to the reports of His resurrection was disbelief (cf. Mark 16:14-15). They are hiding or grieving in the safety of their own homes. The disciples did come to believe that Jesus had risen again. But at first they thought of it only as a "spiritual" resurrection. They did not really believe Jesus was physically present with them. That truth was hard to grasp. By the end of this text, their fear has turned to faith, confusion to conviction, worry to worship, doubt to delight.

The Apostles road to bold belief

- Jesus presents physical evidence (Luke 24:36-43)
- Jesus presents scriptural evidence (vs.44-49)
- Apostles exhibit lifestyle evidence (vs.50-53)

Jesus takes them out from Jerusalem to Bethany a village on the Mount of Olives, about 1-2 miles east of Jerusalem. He blesses them and then He ascends into heaven, and they worship Him and go back to Jerusalem rejoicing and eagerly anticipating what would come next. It looks as if all of this happened in the same day, and that Jesus ascended to His Father shortly after His resurrection. However, the book of Luke is a gospel, and it tells us of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, but not the whole story. This is why Luke wrote a sequel, and in Acts, Luke expands the Ascension narrative and tells the story of the work of Christ in the world through His church, empowered by His Spirit.

One of the most significant words in the book of Acts is that little word "began" in verse 1. The gospel of Luke was the report of what Jesus *began* to do and to teach. The book of Acts records what our Lord *continued* to do and to teach through His body, the church. The Lord said "it is finished" (John 19:30) but not "I am finished". Redemption was purchased but the work of proclamation and application of those benefits was now beginning. The ascension of Jesus Christ was central to the initiation and continuation of this work.

In Acts we learn that for 40 days that our Lord continued to manifest Himself on the earth. During this period Jesus was convincing the disciples of His physical, bodily resurrection (vs.3 / cf.1 Corinthians 15:5-8). The remaining chapters of Acts reveal the central truth that the disciples were fully convinced that Jesus, though put to death, had risen from the grave.

Also during the forty day period Jesus taught and commanded the disciples (vs.3-5). There was much that the disciples could not understand about the life and ministry of the Lord until after His death and resurrection. Now He could speak plainly of His work upon the cross and they

could understand His teaching. But there still were truths that they could not bear. Only after His departure, after the promised Holy Spirit came upon them, would they comprehend the great truths of the gospel (John 16:12-15).

The forty days enabled our Lord to correct certain misconceptions (vs.6-8). The disciples had come to believe in a literal kingdom as a result of the teaching of our Lord, both before and after His resurrection. Understandably, then, the disciples put this question to our Lord (vs.6). Notice the text says “at this time.” That is the issue that our Lord calls to their attention, not the issue of the nature of the Kingdom. He is dealing not with their misconceptions about the Kingdom, but with their preoccupation with the time of its coming. That is where they were wrong.

He had told them that He would ascend before (John 6:62, 20:17), but the point was that the kingdom would be spreading, and that was their call, and it is ours also, the Great Commission. The ascension was the bodily separation of our Lord from His followers. But while they stood and wondered, it was not a time of sorrow. Our Lord’s departure inaugurated a time of even greater intimacy through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matthew 28:20).

The ascension symbolized the finish of the work of Jesus in His physical body on earth (Hebrews 1:3 / 1 Timothy 3:16). Jesus is now ascended to the throne (cf. Acts 7:55-56). While His glory was somewhat veiled by His humble surroundings at His Incarnation, His return was with glory and honor because of the work He had accomplished (Philippians 2:9). Jesus completed His mission to redeem fallen creation by bringing glorified humanity into heaven at His ascension, in His own person. We will follow Him there. In fact Ephesians says that we are already seated in the heavenlies, because we are in Him (Ephesians 1:20, 2:6 / Colossians 3:1-4).

The ascension was a confirmation of Christ’s person and work. He returned to the Father. In this His claim to have come from the Father was vindicated. While no one could actually witness the actual Incarnation of Christ inside the virgin, His return was visible to His followers. The ascension is also a confirmation of our faith and assurance (Hebrews 6:19-20).

The ascension serves as a link between the work of Christ in salvation and sanctification, the gospels and the epistles, what has been accomplished by Christ and what is still being done through His Spirit. Having completed His work on the cross in His flesh, He now intercedes for us (Hebrews 4:14-16, 7:25). Jesus is spiritually omnipresent, ministering in heaven, and we can all reach Him now (1 John 2:1 / Romans 8:34 – Jesus intercedes in heaven (intervention in our interest), the Holy Spirit intercedes in our hearts, vs.26-27). Jesus enriches the Church through the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33 / John 16:7-14). Jesus equips the Church (Ephesians 4:8-12).

The ascension also creates in our hearts a sense of expectation (Acts 1:11). The ascension declares that Jesus is the eternal Son of God and perfected and glorified man. This was not “plan B”, it was part of the eternal plan of God before creation. God determined to create human beings, enable them to triumph over evil, and exalt them to glory. This is the glory of Christianity; in Christ Jesus we have access into the heavenlies by faith. But the future is even greater. He is preparing a place for us (John 14:1-3), and we will have glorious new bodies, free from sin (Philippians 3:20-21). Because He ascended, so will we; we will stand in the presence of God, complete and perfect. He is glorified, and we will be glorified, glory to His name!