

“THE ASCENSION AND EXALTATION OF JESUS”
ACTS 1:6-11

Last Sunday, we began our study in the Book of Acts, Luke’s narrative that gives an account of the thirty plus years from the time Jesus ascended into heaven until the Apostles spread the news about Him throughout the Roman Empire. It is a description of how many of the promises Jesus made in His earthly ministry were fulfilled in and through the lives of His followers, most notably the promise that they would be empowered by His Spirit to proclaim the liberating, life-giving good news about Jesus and expand His kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Luke begins by informing us that after Jesus rose from the dead, He periodically appeared to His disciples during a span of forty days, performing miracles and instructing them about the kingdom of God. Then Jesus commanded them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit which would soon be imparted.

But I’m not sure the disciples’ understood the connection between the kingdom of God and the baptism of the Spirit because, **verse 6**, ⁶ *...when they had come together, they asked [Jesus], “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

Even after all Jesus had taught them about the kingdom, even after His extensive instruction recorded in Matthew 24 in which He stated plainly that there would be a prolonged, indeterminate period of time between the inauguration of the kingdom at Jesus’ first coming and the consummation of the kingdom when Jesus returns a second time, the disciples still expected that Jesus would immediately establish a physical, political kingdom in Jerusalem. They were thinking about the *political* power that would come with the restoration of Israel’s kingdom and the end of Roman occupation. But Jesus had been talking about the spiritual power that would come with the baptism of the Holy Spirit that would be the means by which the His kingdom would advance worldwide.

Look what Jesus says in **verses 7-8**. ⁷ *...“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

Jesus reiterates His promise that His disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them; that is, when they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. We will discover that this is not political or military power, but power to proclaim God’s message, do God’s will, and accomplish God’s purposes. This is how the kingdom will expand until Jesus comes.

At this point, the disciples would not yet have been able to grasp what an extraordinary gift the Holy Spirit would be. They might have imagined the Holy Spirit being a supplement to their lives and ministry. They might have imagined Him to be someone who fortified or energized them and their ministry.

But as we will discover when we get into chapter 2, the gift (or baptism) of the Holy Spirit gave followers of Jesus capacities and capabilities that were superhuman. Because when He came, He would reside in them and be their new operating system. They would be capable of having His mind and His heart and be aligned with His desires and His will. They would be possessed by Him to the degree that He would literally use their mouths, hands, and feet to say and do what He wanted.

But right after saying this, something happened to Jesus. **Verses 9-11**. ⁹ *And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by*

them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.”

This is the most comprehensive account of what is commonly referred to as the *ascension* of Jesus. In verse 9 Luke tells us that He was “lifted up,” that is, He literally left the ground and made a vertical ascent into heaven. We know it was heaven because of what the two mysterious beings told them at the end of verse 11. Mark’s account of this event tells us that after Jesus was taken up, He took His place at God’s right hand (16:19)—that place of honor, authority, and supremacy. Some theologians call this the *exaltation* of Jesus, for it seems that this was His formal coronation procession. Unaccompanied, He ascended from earth on a glorious cloud, which carried Him to heaven’s throne room, undoubtedly filled with the jubilant shouts and thunderous applause and deafening adulation of countless angels, and then took His seat on the throne and began His reign.

Jesus’ work on earth was done. His death on the cross had defeated the powers of sin and Satan. His resurrection from the dead had destroyed the power of death. Jesus had won the victories over all the enemies of mankind so that He could say in Matthew’s Gospel, just prior to His ascension, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (28:18)*. That is a statement that has reference to His absolute sovereignty, His position as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Thus, Jesus’ ascension and exaltation, described in this single verse, is one of the most consequential events in history! Because from this time on and forever more, everything changed in the spiritual realm in terms of the authority structure in the earth realm. When Jesus took His seat on the throne in heaven, He reclaimed dominion over the earth, the dominion that He possessed when He created it, but the dominion that was forfeited when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. When Satan, disguised as a serpent, was successful in convincing them to rebel against God, he was given dominion over this earth realm. He is called in Scripture, the ruler of this earth, or the god of this world.

But when Jesus died on the cross, His blood was the payment (the ransom) that purchased men and women for God, redeeming us from Satan’s rightful claim over us and releasing us from his powerful grip. Furthermore, His victory at the cross restored Jesus’ dominion in the entire earth realm, so that all of Jesus’ enemies, including sin, Satan, and death, are presently in submission to Him and one day will be eradicated altogether.

I’m not sure the disciples were aware of these incredibly profound implications of what they were witnessing as they stood on the Mount of Olives with a panoramic view of Jerusalem. I’m not sure they grasped the significance of the cloud that enveloped them—a cloud so thick that it hid Jesus from their sight, a cloud may well have been the *Shekinah glory*, the visible manifestation of the presence of God that we read about several times in Scripture. This may have been the same cloud that traveled before Israel by day in their wilderness wanderings, the cloud that hovered over the ark of the covenant in the Holy of holies, and the cloud that surrounded Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration when His face shone forth like the sun.

I’m not sure the disciples were capable of processing the profound theological implications of what they were witnessing. I think they were in a state of shock, for apparently it was without warning that Jesus was suddenly taken up before their eyes. I think they just stood there, with their mouths open, staring at the sky, when suddenly two men dressed in white robes stood beside them, verse 10. There is little doubt that these were angels, perhaps even the same angels that had appeared after Jesus’ resurrection, for they ask a similar

question. After the resurrection they asked, *“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, He is risen, just as He said.”*

Here they ask, **verse 11a**. *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?”* This is a kind of mild rebuke. The disciples, it seems, were always one step behind what God was doing, and these angels couldn't help but point it out. **Verse 11b**. *“This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.”*

This is not the first time the disciples had heard that Jesus would be going to His Father in heaven and then return to earth. During the Last Supper Jesus informed them that He was going away and that where He was going they could not come (John 13:33), and they knew—it sunk in for perhaps the first time—that He was referring to His death. He also said to them, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in God, trust also in Me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you also may be where I am”* (Jn. 14:1-3).

Jesus didn't elaborate on how this would all take place. Apparently, it was enough that His disciples knew that He would return. Likewise, the angels don't elaborate on it either, other than to say that it will be Jesus Himself who comes back, and that He will come back in the same way they just saw Him leave. In other words, He will be coming on a cloud of glory.

In Luke's Gospel Jesus was giving His disciples some instruction about what would happen at the end of time. He said, *“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory”* (21:27). Then, in Revelation we read, *“Behold, He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him...”* (1:7).

Be assured, Jesus' return is the breathtaking climax of history when He shall come from heaven and consummate His glorious, visible kingdom. This will be the moment when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. This will be the beginning of a brand-new era, where sin will be eradicated, sorrow will cease, all of God's enemies will be vanquished, evil will be exterminated, and righteousness and peace will reign forever and ever.

What can we learn from this passage in terms of application? I would like to propose three things:

First, the ascension and exaltation of Jesus, the event these few verses in Acts 1 describe ought to profoundly influence the way we imagine Jesus. I had a very pleasant dream about Jesus on Tuesday night, and, to my knowledge, it is the very first dream where I have had a personal encounter with Him. In my dream Jesus showed up at a place where me and some of my extended family members were. He was neither impressive in His appearance, nor did He have a particularly winsome personality. He was kind, He was polite, He was kind of no-nonsense, He was content to be in the background and was in no way trying to be the center of attention. In fact, He would have gone pretty much unnoticed had I not introduced Him to the other people around us and tell them who He was. That was after I asked Him some questions about an event in the Old Testament, in which He calmly, matter-of-factly replied, “Yeah, I was there. I was in that event.”

That is all I remember about the dream. Like I said, it was a pleasant dream, and while I was impressed with Jesus' demeanor and humility and His humanity, while I enjoyed my brief, personal encounter with Jesus, I would not dare let that dream shape my perceptions of Him. I'm certainly not going to try to keep the memory of that dream alive as though it has some kind of special significance. The fact is, while there *may* be some similarities in my

dream to the way Jesus was when He lived on earth, that is certainly not what Jesus is like right now.

He is in His kingly, exalted state. While He still has a body, He is surrounded by an unmistakable aura of divine glory that is so impressive, so attractive, and so awesome (in the real sense of the word) that those who reside in heaven cannot take their eyes off of Him. They cannot help but stare at Him in wonder, and cry out, *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come”* (Rev. 4:8).

He is the one John describes as ¹³ *“...one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around His chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of His head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and His voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In His right hand He held seven stars, from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and His face was like the sun shining in full strength”* (Rev. 1:13-16).

John tells us that when He saw Jesus He fell down as though dead. Please do not gloss over this. John was arguably Jesus’ best friend when Jesus was on this earth. But his response when he sees the exalted Christ is not to say, “Jesus! So good to see you! Hey, let me give you a big hug!”

No, he involuntarily falls at His feet as though dead. Why. He was scared—so scared that we call it being “scared to death.” Why? Because this is the first time John has ever seen Him when He wasn’t camouflaged by His humanity. He is seeing Him now in His full, undiminished deity, and no man on earth can see undiminished deity without reacting like John.

When you think of Jesus, when you imagine Him as you are praying to Him or as you worship Him, think of Him and imagine Him as He is right now—in His kingly, exalted state. Because there is nothing like Him, nothing that can compare with Him. And if you have a hard time thinking of Him in this way, ask Him to reveal Himself to you. That’s a prayer He will happily answer.

Second, the ascension and exaltation of Jesus ought to figure prominently in our understanding and presentation of the Gospel.

You should know that a major part of Paul’s gospel presentation wherever he went was the declaration that not only did Jesus die on a cross for our sins, not only did He rise from the dead three days later, but He ascended into heaven after forty days and is presently *in* heaven awaiting His Father’s instructions to return to this earth and take us to be with Him.

A gospel presentation is really not complete unless you talk about the kingdom of God and King Jesus who sits on the throne. Because we are not just saved from sin and death because of Jesus’ death and resurrection. We are also saved from Satan’s dominion. In the words of Paul to the Colossians, *“We have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light”* (1:13). And we have also been saved to eternal life in heaven in the presence of King Jesus.

Finally, the ascension and exaltation of Jesus ought to facilitate a fixation on the “Parousia.” It is not often that I urge you to learn new words to add to your theological vocabulary. But I would like to encourage you to do just that this morning, because this word describes such an important event for the Christian. It is the word *Parousia*, a Greek word that is translated “presence” or “coming” or “arrival.” In secular Greek literature it was used to describe the arrival of a king or a dignitary that was accompanied with all manner of pomp and circumstance. In the Old Testament it was used to describe the anticipated coming of Messiah, who would establish God’s kingdom and make all things right.

The word *Parousia* was part of early church's vocabulary, and it stood by itself as a concept that needed no explanation. When someone asked, "Are you ready for the Parousia?" or someone declared, "I wish the Parousia would happen today!" nobody replied, "What do you mean by *parousia*?" They knew it was a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus, the event they were all anticipating with great eagerness and enthusiasm, the event they were living for.

The Second Coming of Jesus is a major emphasis in the New Testament epistles. Indeed, the biblical writers portrayed it as the pinnacle of the believers' hope. Paul would say, "*Our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await our Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Phil. 3:20 NIV). And Peter said, "*Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed*" (1 Pet. 1:13).

The event of Christ's return is what we are living for, for it marks the beginning of when we start to really live. It marks the end of the reign of sin and Satan in this earth realm, the end of our sin-cursed hearts and minds and bodies, and the beginning of when all things will be made new and right—an existence where there will be no sin, no pain, no fear, no tears, no struggle, no viruses, and no death.

Are you looking forward to that day? Are you living for that day? Let me ask it in another way: Does the fact of Christ's ascension and the promise of Christ's return have relevance to the way you live right now? I think it should.

"In a German prison camp in World War 2, unbeknownst to the guards, the Americans built a makeshift radio. One day news came that the German high command had surrendered, ending the war—a fact that, because of a communications breakdown, the German guards did not yet know. As word spread, a loud celebration broke out.

"For three days, the prisoners were hardly recognizable. They sang, waved at guards, laughed at the German shepherd dogs, and shared jokes over meals. On the fourth day, they awoke to find that all the Germans had fled, leaving the gates unlocked. The time of waiting had come to an end" (Philip Yancey, CT, "*Global Suspense*," p. 120, March 2005).

If we really believed, like the Allied prisoners, that our redemption was drawing near and that Jesus could return any day, if we really believed that the victory has already been won and we lived in the light of that Good News, what a difference it would make in our lives.

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MAIN IDEA: AFTER PROMISING THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL PRESIDE OVER AN INDEFINITE PERIOD OF WORLD-WIDE KINGDOM EXPANSION, JESUS ASCENDS INTO HEAVEN WHERE HE REIGNS UNTIL THE KINGDOM IS CONSUMMATED UPON HIS RETURN.

THE KINGDOM'S CONSUMMATION (6-8)

THE DISCIPLES' PROVINCIAL PERCEPTION (6)

JESUS' WORLDWIDE PLAN (7-8)

TIMING IS THE FATHER'S PREROGATIVE

EXPANSION IS DONE BY SPIRIT-EMPOWERED DISCIPLES

JESUS' ASCENSION (v.9)

A CLOUD OF GLORY

A CORONATION PROCESSION

THE ANGELS' APPEARANCE (vv.10-11)

THEIR MILD REBUKE

THEIR ASTOUNDING DECLARATION

"JESUS HAS NOW ASCENDED TO HEAVEN"

"JESUS WILL ONE DAY DESCEND TO EARTH"

APPLICATION: THE ASCENSION AND EXALTATION OF JESUS OUGHT TO:

1. PROFOUNDLY INFLUENCE THE WAY WE IMAGINE JESUS
2. FIGURE PROMINENTLY IN OUR UNDERSTANDING AND PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL
3. FACILITATE A FIXATION ON THE "PAROUSIA"