

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

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Scripture: Luke 24: 44-53, Acts: 1: 6-11

Luke 24: 44-53

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." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." ⁵⁰ And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Acts 1: 6-11

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "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." 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."

Just to recap: After Easter, we've been looking at Peter's restoration, at the road to Emmaus, and at the significance of the #40 in the 40 days, and about the period of waiting. Last week, Captain Abhishek reminded us about the problem of the drift and what happens if we drift away. So we see that this period, the 40 days from the resurrection right up to the ascension, is a time when Jesus is connecting with His disciples again and again. And one of the things that He is continuously doing at this time, is turning their eye to scripture. You could ask: Wasn't that what He was doing all through the 3 and ½ years that He was with them. And He did. But now, there's something different about what He was doing. He was actually helping them to see the resurrection from the lens of scripture.

So, we see that the resurrection is something that helps them to understand scripture in a totally new light. Before this, their eyes were closed. Luke 24:46 specifically mentions that He opened their minds. Earlier, they couldn't comprehend it completely, but now they are able to because He's opening their eyes to what is written about Him. Now that they've seen the resurrected Jesus, they are able to understand scripture. They come to this realization that scripture is not pointing to some event in the future; it is pointing to a person, and that this person is Jesus.

We go on to what the Ascension is all about. Matthew 28 has a very compressed account of the resurrection narrative, and so does Mark. Mark 16:19 reads, "Then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God."

In these narratives that we have heard today, there are four things that I want to bring out.

1. Where did He come from? This narrative points it out to us. Jesus Himself says in John 3:13 “No one has ascended into heaven except he who has descended from heaven – the Son of Man.” Also, John 6:62, “Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!” Note the word before.
2. The word ‘ascension’. Ephesians 4:8 reads, “When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and gave gifts to men.” The imagery is of a king ascending to his throne.
3. Jesus is at the right hand of God. There are many references to this in scripture.

Acts 2:33 “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God.”

Acts 5:31 “God exalted him at his right hand as leader and Savior.”

Romans 8:34 “Christ Jesus is the right hand of God.”

Colossians 3:1 “Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”

Hebrews 1:3 “after making purifications for sin he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

1 Peter 3:22 “Jesus Christ who has gone into heaven is at the right hand of God.

All of these talked about one thing – Jesus is ascended and He is at the right hand of God.

4. He will come back. Acts 1:11 which we just read, “This Jesus will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

So, what does this mean for us?

- 1) From local to universal.
What do I mean by that? After the resurrection and before the ascension, Jesus was in one place at a time. If He was in Galilee, then He was in Galilee, not in Jerusalem. If He was in Jerusalem, then He was not in Galilee. But His ascension takes it to a new level – a universal level. Ephesians 4:10 “The One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.” There is a universality. He is able to reach out across the world.
- 2) He is our advocate.
He is there to intercede for us. One thing that He enables for us is that our prayers are no longer monologues. He is able to respond to us. He has gone through every situation that we can take to Him.
- 3) He is the ultimate authority.
The ascension is like ascending a throne. It’s not just a dimension in terms of a physical dimension to a spiritual dimension, or moving from earth to heaven, but it is about Him ascending into heaven to take His throne, His rightful place.

You might have watched the coronation of Charles, and the steps he ascended to the throne. He must have ascended those steps many times before, but at that moment, he was ascending to take up his position as king. And that position as king is what we see Jesus taking but ascending to the throne on high.

What does that mean for us? His position as king is not just a future reality but it is a present reality for each one of us. Our intercessor is in a position of authority. What does that mean to us in our daily life. Many of us may have a supervisor or a manager who wields so much

authority over our work. The good news is that that authority is only one dimensional – in one area. The authority of Jesus over our lives is supreme, is constant, is overall authority that every other authority is subject to His great authority. The bible reminds us that our citizenship is in heaven and while we are on earth, we are citizens of heaven first and then citizens of earth.

Also, we often live in times of chaos. I was listening to a podcast about the fact that World War 3 might be on the horizon. Whatever the political situation, whether in our country or internationally, we can be sure that we do not have to be shaken by those situations, because our anchor, our hope, our present reality is in Jesus.

4) The human with the divine.

Ephesians 2:4-6 “But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

A couple of things we need to look at here.

- He makes us alive in Christ. Question: Where were we? What was our lot before he made us alive in Christ?
- This is written as the past tense as a done deal, as something that has already happened. The context is from Ephesians 2:1-3 where Paul reminds us, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world, following the prince of power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

Wow! Before God, that was our situation. But doesn't it tend to be our situation today. It says we were dead in sin; we were following the course of a fallen world; we were following the prince of demons. We were living in the passions of our flesh and we carried out the desires of our flesh and our carnal mind. We were just like our neighbors. To summarize that – we were slaves, we were captives, we were dead in sin.

But then comes two beautiful words: “But God...” God shows us a totally new reality. I'm sure you have your own “But God” moments in your life: Where you were sinking but God picked you up; where you were in deep trouble, but God rescued you; you were sick, but God healed you. But let us focus on this God moment here which is so momentous. It is interesting for us to see because it anchors us in Christ.

In v.4 we see the nature of God. We see 2 things here: one is that He is rich in mercy, and the second thing is that He's abounding in love. His love for us swells up. The word of God tells us the depth, and the width of His love cannot be surpassed. Salvation is God's initiative, birthed out of His love for you and me. it's not some self-help program that we can aspire to. It's God's plan in a beautiful way

Pretty much every religion says you first work out your salvation. You work out your becoming good and then you will be saved. God says you have been saved, so you work out your good through the work of Christ.

Let's see what these realities mean for us.

- He makes us alive together in Christ. Spiritual death is replaced with spiritual life. This means that it is not just new morals, a new way of life. It is receiving new life itself.
- We are raised up with Christ and so we participate in Christ's resurrection. This means that sin is not my master; I have a new master. Hopelessness is not the reality that I live with, but I live with the reality of being in Christ.
- We are seated with God in heavenly places. It does not mean that we leave earth but that spiritually today, even though we are physically here on earth, the reality is that even now, we are at the right hand of God, with Jesus.

So, what does this mean for us? We are partakers of Christ's victory. This image of being seated across the Bible, shows a sense of completion. The work is completed.

My Identity in Christ.

For us, this means that my identity is anchored in Christ. It is no longer based on performance or the things that I have managed to achieve. But my identity is in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3-14 is very interesting. In the Greek it's actually one single sentence. The phrase "in Christ" or "through Christ" occurs eight times. This tells us that my identity in Christ is much more superior than any other degree or qualification that we could have.

Ephesians 1:4-5 says, "Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ, to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. That is what he wanted to do."

God loves us so much; He has already scripted your name into history – before the world was formed. That's who you are and it gave Him pleasure to do that. Every identity feature that the world gives us is transient, supplantable, replaceable. But this one identity is anchored in time, in dimension. Today, tomorrow, your identity is still the same in Christ. I'd love for each one of us to take that reality out into the world, into the places that we work, in the schools we go, wherever. I want us to be able to go with that knowledge, that confidence, that God loves me so much, and my identity is in Him.

A Grace-filled Relationship.

Our relationship with God is based on His grace, rather than our being able to earn it. We read earlier that it's His grace that has brought us to where we are. There is nothing that I can do to make me love God more than He already loves me. That is the reality that we need to remember in every situation that we face in the world.

The Reality of the Resurrection and the Ascension.

Our present life is lived from the reality of the resurrection and the ascension rather than from spiritual defeat. We just read those two passages – one talking about where we are, and the second talking about since when our names were there.

The Christian life is no longer about trying to live a better life. It is about being united in Christ. That is the new reality that we live with, because of which we are seated with Christ. It changes the very posture of our spiritual life. It changes the very way in which we approach our spiritual life. We do not approach God as outsiders who are trying to gain access, who are trying to be qualified enough to get access. Because we've already got that qualification, and so we step into that place of recognition.

What does that mean for you and me. It means that I do not need to live life on the terms of the world, but I do. And I'm able to live life on the terms of what the word of God tells me. this is the ultimate reality that I must hold on to. So, even as we look at what God does in our life, let's remember the word of God says: "He who has given us His Son, will He withhold anything?" That is said in the context of His giving us His Holy Spirit. So, you have the Holy Spirit and the word of God.

Ephesians 1 reminds us that the very resurrection power, the power of God that raises Jesus from the dead, is available to you and me. We are not bankrupt, we are not powerless, we have been given the power to live life the way God describes it in His word. So, we can step out of this place, going with the assurance that God is walking with us. God can change the course of events in our life, to what is given to us, as something that He gives in His word.

Let us pray.

Amen.
