

What are the Contextual Implications of the Ascension of Christ?

Text: Acts 1:1-11

Introduction:

In our introduction to the Book of Acts, last time, we saw that verse 8 lies at the very foundation of the entire Book. The Lord Jesus Christ has died, been buried, risen again, and now prepares to leave His disciples, so that He might send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to work through them unto the building of His church. Christ, the Cornerstone, has been laid, and Acts, records for us, the laying of the foundation of Christ's church. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The kingdom of God was to expand to the entire world; a glorious temple was to be built, uniting Jew and Gentile into one glorious Body of believers. And when this work is complete, the Christ will return, consummate His kingdom, and sit upon the throne *not* merely of Israel, but the universal throne, which overshadows the whole world.

And so, the building of the church was to begin with the laying of the foundation, as the Apostles were clothed with power from on high, going forth with the message of the Gospel of Christ and His resurrected reign. They were to proclaim the forgiveness of sins in His Name; preaching the Gospel to all nations, baptizing converts in the Name of the Triune God, and teaching all to observe whatsoever He has commanded them. And today, in the year 2012, though the foundation of the church has been laid, way back when Acts was written, the infrastructure of Christ's church continues to be built, having spread out, as far as Merrick, Long Island, NY, and beyond!

And the glorious promise; the very significant and relevant promise, given by Christ to His holy apostles, and through them to all of His people in all successive generations, comes to us in a very powerful way through His ascension. "Go and build, and Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age!" "Indeed, I must leave, so that the Comforter may come, but through Him, I am with you...indeed even more than I was in the flesh." "The former account I made, O

Theophilus, of all that Jesus *began* both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up..." (Acts. 1:1ff).

Christ *continues* to work, brethren, in the present...He is with *us* even to the end of the age. If we do not grasp this reality, our faith will diminish, and we will be left to our own human resources for building His church, and we will not succeed. It is the confidence that we have, in the reality that He has been given all authority over all things in heaven and on earth, and that He is here with us (walking among the Lampstands), which gives us both the courage and the faithfulness to tear down strongholds, and to build His church in His Name. Behold, *He* will build His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. That is the hope, the confidence and the assurance that must and ought to drive this entire ship, brethren. If our confidence is in anything else, from super-hero theologians to superstar pastors to a wealth of all manner of resources, then our confidence is in but dust and sinking sand. Our hope and confidence are grounded in; are set upon, the only Rock, even the presence; the *very* presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And brethren, the very implications of Christ's ascension; the last thing, which the apostles saw, when Christ ascended into heaven, are meant to shine forth this reality in a most illustrative and powerful way...which is why we devote today's class to pondering the *mode* of Christ's ascension, given us in verse 9.

I. What are the Contextual Implications of the Ascension of Christ?

There are at least two major details, taken from Luke's accounts of the ascension of Christ, which are clearly meant to leave us with two very significant, memorable implications, concerning the now present role of Christ. Let me read both accounts to you again, before addressing them:

Luke 24:50- "And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven."

Acts 1:9- "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Now brethren, it is very interesting that the same author emphasizes two different things about the ascension of Christ, taken from the two accounts given in Luke and Acts. And it is even more interesting that we are given such details. It were as if the author wanted us to know that the Christ wished His apostles and us (the secondary observers) to remember two very significant and relevant things (in a very visible form) about the last time Christ was seen by His apostles. And both of these things visibly portray Christ's present active role on behalf of His church.

1) We are told that as Christ went up, He lifted His hands and blessed His disciples. It was during the period of His blessing them, that He was carried up, in the very midst of the act. [Consider example of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus---also in Luke's Gospel---what visible sign finally brought them to realize that the stranger who accompanied them was Jesus? The breaking of the bread].

2) We are told that a cloud received Him out of their sight, while they watched Him ascend to heaven.

What then are the significant implications found in these two descriptions of the ascending Christ?

1) Read Leviticus 9. When the priestly ministry began, following the offering of the various sacrificial offerings, Aaron raised his hands and blessed the people.

When Jesus raised His hands up and blessed His disciples, He signified that the ultimate and complete sacrificial offering was made, and now He was officially ascending into His High Priestly office, where He ever lives to intercede for us! In essence, He was saying, "Lo, I am with you always, blessing you and interceding forever on your behalf, even to the end of the age!" "Go and build My church, and fear nothing and no one!"

[See also Heb. 8:1-2; 9:11-14; 10:19-23]

Brethren, without having Christ as our High Priest, we are doomed, devastated and without hope. But having Him as our High Priest, we have nothing to fear...for, we always walk within the sphere of His present grace! His intercession is the very reason that yesterday's sins do not hinder you from receiving God's blessings today! Ever wonder how God could still put up with you, after you have failed again? The present intercession of Christ! His hands are ever raised over us, providing continual blessings, on the basis of His once-for-all sacrifice!

And so, one of the implications of Christ's ascension is unending grace, ever pursuing us, even to the end of the age!

2) Jesus was received up in a cloud, representing His universal reign over all things. All authority in heaven and on earth now belong to Him...He is with us with grace, but also with divine, unrestrained, unstoppable power! His grace deals with the sin within us, and His divine sovereignty deals with the opposition from without us! His ascending in the clouds indicates that though He is not presently with us in the body, He is interceding for us, and He is reigning over us! His Kingdom has already begun! Our God reigns, brethren. And so, we can go with boldness; we can go forth with the Gospel to uncharted lands, and face every danger, knowing that there is not a square inch of earth, over which, Christ does not reign! And He will return in like manner, with His angels, to gather up His people and to destroy all who have opposed Him!

Read Daniel 7:13-14; Mark 14:61-62; Acts 2:33-36.

Brethren, Christ's ascension provides us with a declarative illustration of His present role as our Priest and our King. But what about His present role as Prophet? When the Spirit comes and empowers His people, His Prophetic role is carried out by the proclamation of the Gospel, and the fulfillment of the great commission. We fulfill the prophetic role, brethren, by speaking His Words; by preaching the Gospel and teaching all things that He has commanded us. By His Spirit, Christ speaks through us!

Conclusion

Brethren, in short, the ascension of Christ, the last visible manifestation of His glory as a man (until He returns), declares loudly, "Go and build His church," for, He is with us always, as our High Priest, and as our All-sovereign King," even to the end of the age! Be His prophetic voice to the world; do not be afraid; be strong and courageous...for He is a very present help with you!

AMEN!!!