



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

Preparation for Pentecost, Part II

The Ascension of Christ-

Acts 1:9-11

January 28, 2007

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| <p>I. The Witnesses to Christ's Ascension</p> <p>II. The Exaltation and Glorification of Christ [in His Ascension]</p> <p>III. The Promise of Christ's Ascension</p> |
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- Throughout the New Testament, only two explicit accounts of the Ascension of Christ occur: (1) Luke 24; and (2) Acts 1. However, it is certainly implied in other places, such as John 20:17. Further, the events of the resurrection and [ultimately] the ascension encapsulate the exaltation of Christ, a doctrine referred to in places such as Philippians 2:5-11 and 1 Timothy 3:16.

‘For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’
Philippians 2:9-11

‘By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness:

He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory.’

1 Timothy 3:16

- However, in Luke’s account of the Ascension of Christ found in Acts 1:9-11, several points stand out as significant: (1) the witnesses to the Ascension; (2) the exaltation and glorification of Christ in the Ascension; and (3) the promise of the Ascension – the return of Christ.

I. The Witnesses to Christ's Ascension

- ❑ Throughout the New Testament, nearly every major event is confirmed on the basis of witnesses.
- ❑ This truth demonstrates that each of these events, in accordance with the Old Testament Law, is historical. In other words, *legally*, it can be established and biblically demonstrated that every major event in the New Testament [each of which fulfills Old Testament prophecy] actually occurred. It was not merely hearsay.

‘A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.’

Deuteronomy 19:15

- ❑ As Luke presents the events surrounding the Ascension, he makes it clear that this essential event in redemption history was also confirmed on the basis of multiple witnesses.

❖ The Disciples

- ❑ The first group of witnesses to the Ascension of the Resurrected Christ was the disciples.
- ❑ Luke mentions five times in these three verses that the disciples saw Jesus Ascend into heaven [‘looking on’; ‘their sight’; ‘they were gazing’; ‘why do you stand looking’; ‘you have watched Him go into heaven’].
- ❑ Once again, this apostolic witness to the Resurrected Christ and His Ascension is fundamental in the establishment of the Early Church.

❖ Two Men in White Clothing

- ❑ The second group of witnesses to the Ascension was two men in white clothing.
- ❑ It seems rather clear that these men were angelic witnesses...heavenly messengers.
- ❑ Throughout the Scriptures, angels often accompanied miraculous events, acting as interpreters, if you will. Recall the events of the first Resurrection Sunday at the empty tomb (Luke 24:4-9) [‘...He is not here, but He has risen...’].
- ❑ Here, in Luke’s account, the angelic witnesses speak, ‘interpreting’ this event as it unfolds before the disciples’ eyes.

- First, they address the disciples as ‘**Men of Galilee.**’

‘And which was said by them [the angelic witnesses], not to reproach them with their country, but partly to let them know that they knew them, who they were, and from whence they came; and partly to observe the rich and distinguishing grace of God in choosing such mean and contemptible persons to be the apostles of Christ, and eyewitnesses of his majesty.’

John Gill

- Secondly, the messengers state, ‘**why do you stand looking into the sky?**’
 - These words from the angels seem to mildly rebuke to the disciples because of their focus on the physical presence of Jesus [and His physical kingdom].
 - In other words, it is as though they are saying, ‘Do not look at Jesus with your physical eyes, but with your spiritual eyes.’

‘The angels’ intent was to call back the apostles from desiring the carnal presence of Christ.’

John Calvin

‘reproving them for their curiosity in looking after Christ with their bodily eyes, who was no more in common to be seen this way, **but with an eye of faith**; and for their desire after his corporeal [physical] presence, which they were not to look for; and as if they expected he would return again immediately, whereas his return will not be till the end of the world...and besides, they were not to remain on that spot, or stand gazing there; they were to go to Jerusalem, and abide there, as Christ had ordered, till they should receive the Holy Spirit in an extraordinary way; and then they were to preach a crucified Christ, and declare that he was risen from the dead, and was gone to heaven, and was ordained to be the Judge of quick and dead.’

John Gill

- This is why Jesus said, in the Gospel of John, ‘...it is to your advantage that I go away...’ John 16:7
- The disciples will no longer be focused and dependent upon the physical, visible, and localized presence of Jesus Christ. [Note: The presence of Jesus Christ *with* His disciples was similar to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.]
- When the Spirit comes, He will not be *with* the disciples and future believers [as the Incarnate Christ was and as the Holy Spirit was in the Old Testament]; rather, He will abide *in* them.
- The sending and indwelling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost will indicate that salvation is accomplished and applied...the totality of the work of Redemption is finished!
- After Jesus leaves and the Holy Spirit comes [at Pentecost], this will usher in the New Covenant where salvation will encompass and spread throughout the world to both Jew and Gentile.

The “saving reign of God cannot be fully inaugurated until Jesus has died, risen from the dead, and been exalted to His Father’s right hand...Before the triumphant in-breaking of God’s saving reign, before the inauguration of the new covenant, millions ignored the claims of the true God. Pentecost transformed that limitation, and millions have been brought to happy submission to the Lord Jesus Christ and to growing obedience by the power of the Spirit whom he bequeathed.” D.A. Carson

- ❑ Because of Christ's ascension, His presence is no longer localized to a specific time and specific place. After His ascension, the Son [and the Father] sent the Holy Spirit to indwell each believer [on the basis of Christ's finished work]. Therefore, because of the finished work of Christ and the will of the Father, each believer is indwelt by God Himself, allowing Christ to rightly state, 'I am with you always, to the close of the age' (Matthew 28:20). Such a statement would not have been truthful had Christ not ascended.
- ❑ The words of the angels ['why do you stand looking into the sky?'] also serve a similar purpose to the voice of the angels at the resurrection ['Why do you seek the living One among the dead?']. Each of these events [the Resurrection and the Ascension] were not 'ends' in and of themselves in that they are once-for-all events in redemptive history that point to a 'final' reality – the salvation and transformation of God's people.
 - In short, the angels are telling the disciples to **GO** and proclaim what they have seen and heard...what they have been witnesses to.
 - For, the 'end' of these events [the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ] is the salvation of God's people through the proclamation of the Gospel.
- ❑ The angels, then, say to the disciples, 'This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven...?'
 - In other words, the 'Jesus' that ascended before the disciples eyes was the historical Jesus, NOT some ethereal force or nebulous spirit that merely *appeared* to be Jesus.
 - As the angelic witnesses said, it will be 'this Jesus.' That is, the same Jesus with whom the disciples lived, traveled, and ate...the same Jesus they saw crucified...the same Jesus who appeared to them following His resurrection...and the same Jesus they witness, in bodily form, ascending into heaven.
 - Tragically, many today make statements like, 'Well, *my God* would [or would not] do _____.' Or '*My Jesus*...'. However, the Scriptures clearly reveal who the true Christ is. The Gospel accounts record this for us.
 - Therefore, for the disciples, 'This Jesus was one that they knew well. And it was This Jesus that they lived with and saw Ascend before their very eyes.
- ❖ Therefore, the significance of the witnesses to Christ's ascension cannot be over-emphasized. For, in accordance with the Law, the presence of these witnesses demonstrates that the event of Christ's Ascension actually occurred.

WE WORSHIP A TRUE AND LIVING [AND HISTORIC] LORD!
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II. The Exaltation and Glorification of Christ [in His Ascension]

A. Exaltation

- ❑ The Ascension of Christ is a point of Exaltation for the Risen Lord.
- ❑ Although only Luke [in his Gospel and in Acts] explicitly speaks of the Ascension, it is referenced throughout the New Testament in places where Christ is said to be ‘exalted’ – such as Philippians 2:5-11 [‘...For this reason also, God highly exalted Him...’].
- ❑ Furthermore, here in this account, Luke states that He was ‘lifted up.’
 - In his Gospel, John often uses this same phrase to indicate the point of greatest exaltation of Christ [in John’s Gospel it was the ‘lifting up’ of Christ in the crucifixion – the greatest demonstration of obedience to the will of the Father].

John 3:14: ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be **lifted up**.’

John 12:32: ‘And I, if I am **lifted up** from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.’

John 12:34: The crowd then answered Him, ‘We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever; and how can You say, “The Son of Man must be **lifted up**”? Who is this Son of Man?’

- ❑ The Psalmist also speaks of the LORD as ‘high and lifted up’ or ‘high and exalted’ [Psalm 18, 21, 46, 47, 57, 89.]
- ❑ Therefore, the language of Luke, here demonstrates this truth as well.
- ❑ Also, Luke speaks of Christ’s ascension in the **passive voice**. In other words, He **received the action** in His Ascension.
 - Luke states, ‘He [Christ] was lifted up...’
 - This further demonstrates that working of the Father in the Ascension/Exaltation of Jesus Christ. As the Apostle Paul states, ‘For this reason also, **God highly exalted Him...**’

Read Ephesians 1:18-23

Ephesians 4:10: ‘He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens...’

B. Glorification

- ❑ Luke demonstrates that not only was Christ exalted, or lifted up in the Ascension, but the event also revealed His glory.

‘When Jesus ascended into heaven he received glory, honor, and authority that had never been his before as one who was both God and man.’ Wayne Grudem

- ❑ This truth is revealed in the presence of the clouds during His ascension.

F.F. Bruce writes, “The cloud...is to be understood as the cloud which envelops the glory of God (the *shekinah*) – that cloud which, resting above the Mosaic tabernacle and filling Solomon’s temple, was the visible token to Israel that the divine glory had taken up residence there (Exodus 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10-11). So in the last moment that the apostles saw their Lord with outward vision, they were granted ‘a theophany: Jesus is enveloped in the cloud of the divine presence.’”

- ❑ Once could certainly argue that throughout the Scriptures, clouds or smoke were instruments of God’s grace, veiling the full sight and presence of Deity [the divine [God] nature] (Recall Isaiah 6). For had not the divine nature been veiled, the observers would most certainly have been destroyed, for ‘no one can see God and live’ (Exodus 33:19-23; John 1:18).
- ❑ **Not only were the clouds an instrument of God’s grace, but they should also humble our finite minds regarding the incomparable majesty of God’s infinite glory.**

‘[W]e are taught by them [the angelic witnesses] that our mind is not able to ascend so high as to take a full view of the glory of Christ; therefore, let this cloud be a mean to restrain our boldness, as was the smoke which was continually before the door of the tabernacle in the time of the law.’

John Calvin

1 Timothy 3:16:

‘By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness:
He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory.’

WE WORSHIP AN EXALTED AND GLORIFIED LORD!
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III. The Promise of Christ's Ascension

- ❑ In short, the promise of Christ's ascension is simple: **He will return!**
- ❑ However, here in Acts 1:9-11, Luke describes several aspects of Christ's return, for the angelic witnesses state, '...[He] will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.'
- ❖ **Once again, the Ascension was not the 'end' but pointed to a future reality, a future truth.**

- ❑ The angelic witnesses conclude their words to the disciples by stating:

'This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.'

- ❑ Therefore, from these words, we can conclude several things with respect to Christ's return [His Second Coming]:

A. He will return visibly

- ❑ Just as His Ascension was visible, and, hence, undeniable for those who witnessed it...so will His return be.

'BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.'

Revelation 1:7

B. He will return in Person

- ❑ Next, just as 'This Jesus'...the bodily-resurrected Christ ascended before the disciples' eyes, so will 'This Jesus' – the Person of Christ – return.
- ❑ 1 Thessalonians 4:16 states, 'For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.' In their book *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, wrote, 'The function of the intensive pronoun [*Himself*] is to emphasize identity.'
- ❑ Once again, the Return of Christ will not be the return of a **force** or **impersonal spirit**; but, rather, it will be a **personal return** with a **PURPOSE**.
- ❑ **Christ HIMSELF** will return!

In his work, *The Nature of the Resurrection Body*, J.A. Schep wrote:

But all these and other changes which the ascension brought about have nothing to do with a change in Jesus' resurrection-body. It is in his risen, incorruptible, and immortal body of flesh that Jesus Christ in heaven exercises his all-embracing authority and performs his heavenly ministry as the exalted King, Priest and Prophet of the Church. Undoubtedly, his exalted position in heaven implies the possibility that he can display supernatural glories and appear in a splendor of light. So he appeared to Paul on the Damascus road (Acts 9:3), and so he will come at the end of the ages. But this gives us no right to regard the body of our risen and exalted Lord as being changed into a body consisting of some light-substance or glory. Much less does the manner in which he revealed himself to John in a vision give any ground for such a conclusion.

C. He will return from Heaven.

- ❑ In other words, heaven is a **place!**
- ❑ During His ascension, Jesus did not disappear, He ascending **into heaven** (Acts 1:11) right before the disciples.
- ❑ As Wayne Grudem writes, 'The fact that Jesus had a resurrection body that was subject to spatial limitations (it could be at only one place at one time) means that Jesus went *somewhere* when he ascended into heaven.'

'Evangelicals have traditionally believed...that heaven is **both a place and a state**...Heaven, as the dwelling place of God, the holy angels, and saints, was seen as 'above' the starry heavens. Thus Christ has passed through the physical heavens and has been raised 'higher' than them (Hebrews 4:14; 7:26; 9:11, 23, 24). In insisting that heaven is both a state and a place, Christianity has usually been careful to deny any knowledge of its particular and specific characteristics or of its precise relation to the physical universe.'

Peter Toon, *The Meaning of the Ascension of Christ*

- ❑ Let us not forget that heaven is a created place where God dwells, with His angels, and all whom He has called to Himself.

'Wherever and whatever this heaven is, it is the place of God's *special manifestation* as opposed to the whole creation, where He is *generally manifest*.'

Robert Culver

D. He will return in glory.

- ❑ The Second Advent [the Second Coming] of Jesus will NOT be like His first. During His first Advent, Jesus was born in a stable, raised as a carpenter, for '[there was] not beauty that we should desire him.' However, during His Second Coming, He will return in great glory (Matthew 16:27; 25:31).

- ❑ Therefore, because He is returning visibly, personally, and with glory, it will be both a great and terrible day. **For the glory of God is nothing less than the totality of His infinite attributes.**
- ❑ For it will be unspeakable joy for all who are in Christ; yet, for those who have rejected Him it will be the moment of the terrible judgment of a holy God against their wickedness and sin.

E. He will return ‘with clouds.’

Mark 13:26: Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory.

Mark 14:62: And Jesus said, ‘I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.’

Robert Culver writes of the ‘rather well known Old Testament cloud as sign of the presence of deity [God]. The cloud over Sinai not only signified that God was there but also served as protection for mortals against instant death. At least six times in the twenty-two New Testament occurrences of *nephele* (cloud) it is used to indicate the presence of deity.’

Exodus 13:21: ‘The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way...’

Exodus 40:34 states, ‘Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.’

Read also Number 9:14-23

F. He will return in the company of angels

- ❑ So great will His return be that angels will herald it, just as they did in the first advent.

‘he shall come in the same flesh, in the same human nature; he shall come in the clouds of heaven, and shall be attended with his mighty angels, as he now was; he shall descend himself in person, as he now ascended in person; and as he went up with a shout, and with the sound of a trumpet, so he shall descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God...’ John Gill

WE WORSHIP A RETURNING LORD!
