

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

He Ascended and Sitteth

April 18th, 2021

Luke 24:36-53

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Good Morning everyone! It is so good to be with you all this morning. If you have a Bible with you, please open it to Luke Chapter 24 Verses 36-53. This is the final chapter of Luke's Gospel and verses 36-53 compose Luke's Final scene in his Gospel. Last words are very important. As people we have a tendency to remember endings. We remember Frodo and Sam on the slopes of Mount doom as Lava pours all around them and Seeing the eagles coming on the Horizon to rescue them, At least I do anyways. Regardless of your thoughts on Lord of the Rings, it is clear that Endings are significant. Conclusions matter and most authors tend to reflect that. They will put key information and reminders in their ending so that their audience will remember what is important. And that is exactly what Luke does here. As we look at the ending of Luke's Gospel this morning, we will see what Luke has to say about the Facts of Jesus' ascension, the reasons for Jesus' ascension, and what the ascension means for us.

Hopefully now you have your Bibles open to Luke 24:36-53. Please turn your attention there with me. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

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 ⁴⁸ 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. Luke 24:36-53

This is the Word of the Lord, Thanks be to God.

The Facts of the Ascension

As I stated earlier. Last words are Crucial. And it is clear in this text that Luke’s last words are dedicated to proving the Truth and historicity of Jesus’ resurrection and his Ascension. Remember that this is a major part of Luke’s Gospel. In his introduction to the Gospel Luke writes

“it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” Luke 1:3-4

“that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”¹

¹ Luke 1:3-4 (ESV)

That is significant. Luke is writing with the express purpose of providing a Clear and accurate record of what happened. As Tim Keller said in a sermon on Luke 24

“The whole chapter has the earmarks of an eye witness account.”²

Luke’s whole purpose is to give an eyewitness perspective on the events of Jesus’ life so that we can be CERTAIN that they ACTUALLY HAPPENED. They are Historical FACT.

Luke includes the Road to Emmaus Story before our text today, he includes the fact that the resurrection was first discovered and announced by women earlier in the chapter, he includes Jesus appearing to the Disciples in Jerusalem, and he includes them touching his body and Jesus eating food.

Luke includes all of this SO THAT WE CAN BE 100% sure that this actually happened.

And if all of this happened, we can be confident that the next part of the story, the ascension, happened as well. We can be 100% sure that Jesus rose from the dead and that he Ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. Luke gives us the EYEWITNESS testimonies of these FACTS.

Eyewitnesses have been the most consistent way to prove something throughout human history. They are sufficient to prove if someone is innocent or guilty in the Justice system and more than one witnesses are required *multiple* times in Scripture as a means of proving a claim against someone. If two witnesses are enough to declare someone guilty of murder, as they are in Numbers 35, then I am POSITIVE that the multiple eyewitnesses of the Ascension of Jesus are UNDENIABLE PROOF that this event actually happened.

And we can be confident Jesus ascended BODILY into Heaven We see this explicitly in verses 39-43

“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.”
Luke 24:39-43

² Tim Keller “Jesus Vindicated” delivered at TGC 2013.

Have you ever thought about why Luke records Jesus asking for food and then eating a piece of fish before the disciples? It seems like a rather odd thing to include doesn't it.

Luke is recording the aftermath of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT EVENT IN HUMAN HISTORY and he stops and says "oh, by the way, Jesus also ate some fish in front of the disciples."

Seems like a weird detail to include, doesn't it? Unless, of course, Luke is trying to demonstrate the fact that Jesus did not rise from the dead as some spiritual entity, he was not a ghost or some incorporeal being. No, Jesus rose from the dead with a HUMAN BODY.

And that Means, as Luke also records, that Jesus ASCENDED BODILY. The resurrected Jesus is the same as the ascended Jesus. Jesus did not become a spirit after ascending. He retains his physical resurrection body and is PHYSICALLY seated at the right hand of God the Father.

So, Luke demonstrates for us the Facts of the Ascension of Jesus and THE FACT IS that Jesus REALLY AND TRULY rose from the ascended into heaven and he did so in a REAL HUMAN BODY.

But I think this leaves us with the question of why? Why did Jesus Ascend? Why didn't he simply rise from the dead and conquer the world then and there?

Luke also provides us with three reasons why Jesus ascended.

Reasons for the Ascension

The First reason we see is that Jesus Ascended:

1. In order for the Spirit to come

We see this in verse 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.” Luke 24:49

This same idea is echoed in John 16 where Jesus tells us about what the Holy Spirit will do when he comes.

“But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” John 16:5-7

So, Jesus needed to Ascend in order for the Spirit to come and cloth the disciples with power from on High. Luke tells us that the disciples are to be Jesus’ witnesses and they are to wait IN Jerusalem until the Spirit comes.

Clearly, we need the Spirit in order to be faithful and effective witnesses for Jesus. I don’t think you needed me to tell you that.

I think that each and everyone of us here knows that we would be absolutely useless in sharing the gospel and witnessing to the world in our own power and ability. Can you imagine how terrifying it would be if other people’s salvation relied upon OUR ABILITY? I think that would ruin me. Thankfully, Jesus tells us that the Spirit has come and will clothe us with power. It is the Spirit who enables us to be witnesses and it is the Spirit who determines the effectiveness of our witnesses. All we have to do is tell the truth of Jesus.

So, it is good that Jesus Ascended so that he could pour out the Spirit upon the church. The second reason Jesus Ascended is:

2. In order to Usher Humanity into God’s Presence.

This is Major event. The Ascension of Jesus Christ is a PARADIGM-SHATTERING, WORLD- CHANGING EVENT. For the VERY FIRST TIME since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden a human being is welcome in the full, undiluted presence of God the Father Almighty. That is incredible!

Remember that Luke is demonstrating here that Jesus Ascended into heaven AS A HUMAN BEING. He is as fully human as he was before he died. Jesus is RIGHT NOW sitting in Heaven at right hand of God the Father.

He has made it so that human beings are now welcome in the presence of God.

The whole story of the Bible is one of God making a way for human beings to enter into his presence once again. They were driven out by the fall and have been unable to gain FULL ACCESS to the Father. Until Jesus comes and dies on the cross and the VEIL separating God's presence from the world is torn in two. And Jesus Ascends as the very first human to experience the fullness of God presence and we can look forward to that as well.

Listen to these words from Ephesians 2:4-6

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” Ephesians 2:4-6

God has raised us up with Christ and seated US WITH HIM in the heavenly places.

We have a home in heaven to look forward to. WE BELONG with God in Heaven. As Jesus reminds us in John 14:2-3

“² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” John 14:2–3 ESV

So, we see that Jesus ascended to make a place for us in the full presence of God for all of eternity.

Now, the third reason Jesus Ascended is:

3. In order to sit at the right hand of the Father

This one might be less obvious on the surface, but we seen in verse 51 that Jesus was carried up into heaven. Now Luke doesn't explicitly mention that this means Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father, but the consistent teaching of the New Testament is that is exactly what Jesus ascending into HEAVEN means. That is why we say in the Creed that we believe Jesus "ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty"

We have already seen this in verses like Ephesians 1:20

"that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places" Ephesians 1:20

and we see it in other places such as 1 Peter 3:21b-22

"through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him." 1 Peter 3:21b-22

So Jesus has Ascended BODILY into heaven and is seated IN HIS RIGHTFUL place at the right hand of the father with all authority being given to him.

Hebrews 8 also tells us

"Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. Hebrews 8:1-2

Jesus Then is serving as OUR REPRESENTATIVE in Heaven. Just as Moses and Aaron would enter into God's presence to intercede on behalf of Israel, so Jesus is PERMANENTLY in the presence of the Father interceding on behalf of the Church.

Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father functioning as the perfect Priest and King. He is our Priestly mediator, and he is the king of all creation. We saw this in 1 Peter 3 just now.

“who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.” 1 Peter 3:22

Jesus is ALREADY RULING OVER ALL CREATION. He has already conquered. We are simply living in the already but not yet. A time where Jesus' full conquering presence is being held of for a time in order that God's patience and mercy might lead to more people being saved. But do not doubt for a second that Jesus is the one in charge!

He is the king. He is on his throne at the right hand of the Father and ALL POWER AND AUTHORITY has been given to HIM.

Jesus Ascended in order to claim his rightful place at the right hand of the Father where he will rule over all creation and where he will intercede on our behalf, he ascended in order to pour out the Spirit on the church, and he ascended in order to make a place for humanity in heaven.

So, we know now that Jesus Truly and Bodily ascended into heaven and we know why. The only question left is what does all of this mean for us?

What does the Ascension mean for us?

The first thing has already been mentioned and that is simply that:

1. Jesus is interceding for us.

We just discussed the fact that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father as our High Priest and he is interceding on our behalf, but I want to really lean into this for a moment.

Consider these words from Hebrews 4:14-16

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrews 4:14-16

Did you hear that this Morning? “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.”

What a powerful reminder that is for us.

We can WITH CONFIDENCE draw to near to the God of the Universe. We can, through Jesus, approach the one who dwells in UNAPPROACHABLE LIGHT. You can do that, and you can find mercy there.

You can find unconditional grace and forgiveness from God through Jesus Christ. Through repentance and faith in Jesus you will find ALL THAT YOU NEED at the throne of grace. Can you say amen to that?

This is a time where many of us are feeling our burdens pretty heavily. Many, if not all, of us are experience Covid fatigue. We are tired and weary.

Yet, the Ascension of Jesus Christ promises us that we can come to the Father with our burdens and as Jesus invites us

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

That is the beauty of the ascension for us. Let us come to Jesus in prayer. Let us bring our burdens, our needs, and our praise to him. Let us come to him in prayer often and without ceasing.

The Second thing that the Ascension means for us is also something we have already mentioned it means that:

2. We are Jesus' representatives on Earth

We have already mentioned that we are the ones who are responsible for being witnesses of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to the world. Simply put, Jesus ascended into heaven and left US with a job to do. He has given us the responsibility of being his ambassadors here on earth. We are to represent him in all that we say and all that we do. We are called to be salt and to be light.

I want to emphasize for a moment though, the word witness. That is the word used by Luke. The Greek word is μάρτυς. It is translated as Witness 34 of 35 times in the New Testament. The Dictionary of Bible themes defines a witness as

“Individuals who, having observed something take place, are able to give an accurate and full account of what has happened.”³

That is exactly what the disciples were called to do. They were called to give an accurate and full account of what happened. That is what the Gospel is. It is the good news, the full and accurate news, of Jesus Christ. And So, brothers and sister, we are called to be witnesses of Jesus, to be his ambassadors, to give a full and accurate account of Jesus. We must live in a way that reflects and honors Jesus well. And we must Share to Gospel. It is not simply a recommendation. It is not optional. As the Dictionary of Bible Themes also tells us about what it means to be a witness

“The theme of giving account is also of major importance to evangelism, which rests upon believers explaining the impact of Jesus Christ upon their lives.”⁴

³ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

Evangelism rests upon BELIEVERS explaining the impact of Jesus Christ upon their lives. Not Pastors, not trained Evangelists or apologists, BELIEVERS. Each and every Christian needs to be able to explain the impact that Christ has had upon their life.

So, my friends, we have seen in this Chapter that Jesus Truly and BODILY rose from the dead, we have seen that he TRULY and BODILY ascended into Heaven, we have seen that we are to be his witnesses to all nations and people and we have seen that we have a great high priest in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father who we can come to with our burdens and weariness and we will find grace and mercy in our time of need.

As we close in worship, let us draw near to throne of grace. Let us lift up our hearts in prayer and in worship to Jesus, our Great high Priest who ascended to heaven and sitteth at the right hand of the Father. Let's pray.

⁴ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).