

The Ascended Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn back to the chapter that we read. We're going to refer to both of the chapters, Luke 24 and Acts chapter 1. We could just read a few verses in Acts chapter 1. Verse 6, they gathered around Jesus and asked Him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, it is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has sent by His own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth.

After He said this, He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight. If we followed what was known at one time and what is known in some traditions as the church calendar, what day would this be? And if you're of free church stock, you probably won't know, because if you're like me and you're brought up in a free church home, we didn't follow the free church with the Christian calendar. Now, I'm not saying I'm not going to argue for or against this morning, but if you do follow the Christian calendar, then you will know the time of year that this is. I suppose the most celebrated event in the Christian calendar, if you follow it, is Christmas. There's no evidence, of course, that Jesus was born on the 25th of December, but nonetheless, it gives a good opportunity, I believe, to share the reality of Jesus coming into the world and why He came in the first place. We also know roundabout when Easter and what that represents, the time that

Jesus was crucified and His resurrection from the dead three days later. Of course, the timing of Easter has always been quite controversial. If you've ever googled it, how do you know, how do people know the right date of Easter? You'll realize, you'll quickly discover that it is not as easy as you might first imagine. So, Easter was so many days ago, what is today? Or rather, rather, I should say, what was last Thursday? Last Thursday was Ascension Day, and that is a time when some people choose to remember this event, the event that we have just been reading about in Luke chapter 24 and in Acts chapter 1. I wonder why the Ascension is not as well focused in our minds as the birth of Jesus and the death and resurrection of Jesus. And I hope that if nothing else today, that this will bring it back into sharper focus, because I don't think that we give it the attention that it deserves. We kind of treat it like a kind of epilogue, if you like, don't we? We don't really, we don't go to it the same way as we go to the birth and the death and the resurrection of Jesus. Now, I'm not saying, of course, that we shouldn't concentrate on the whole life of Jesus, but that is what I'm saying. The whole life of Jesus includes this, what we are thinking about today. I guess it's a bit like if you've ever watched the

Lord of the Rings trilogy, you'll remember the last bit where Frodo gets rid of the ring. I know I'm not giving any secrets, because you've all seen it, and where the ring disappears. And you think, well, that's it. Frodo's exhausted, and he's taken back by this great bird. And you think, well, that's it.

Where are the credits? And the credits don't appear, because we've still got half an hour left in the movie. And you think, well, what is this half an hour all about? Because the story's finished. I hope that's not the way we treat the gospel, where the ascension of Jesus just, it's relegated to some kind of epilogue, a non-essential. But everything is essential in the gospels. And the ascension was part of the ministry of Jesus. It was these closing moments of Jesus' life in this world. I know he had died for sin, and that his work of redemption was complete.

[4 : 42] We know what he said on the cross. It is finished. We know the significance of the resurrection, that moment when God raised his son from the dead, and thereby placing his stamp of approval on everything that Jesus had said and done. But now there is this. And I want you to see with me how marvelous and how significant and how meaningful this event is by looking at just three things very, very quickly. First of all, this event marks the departure of Jesus, the completion of his time here in the world. That's the first thing. So we're going to look at some of just the events that mark this departure. And then we're going to look behind. I want you to think of the cloud into which he disappeared as a kind of curtain. So that as he disappears, that's the last the disciples see of him on this side. But the New Testament goes on to tell us what happened on the other side, once he gets beyond the cloud, wherever that is.

Because what it tells us is that once he passed through the cloud into heaven, into the presence of the Father, that was the moment, that was a really significant moment that was prophesied hundreds of years before the coming of Jesus in Psalm 110, where God says to him, as a consequence of all that he has done, sit at my right hand. So the second thing that the ascension brings to our attention is the enthronement of Jesus. And then lastly, I want us to see the significance for us of this great event, which is our guarantee. It's the guarantee of our salvation. It is the guarantee that we have a high priest in heaven today, and we worship not a dead Savior, not a Savior of the past, but a Savior of the present today. And it's the guarantee of his second coming, as the angels so powerfully expressed to the disciples.

Let's look at some of the events then that there were just before he ascended to heaven.

His work of redemption was complete. He had risen from the dead. He had appeared to his disciples on several occasions during that 40-day period between his resurrection and this present moment.

Now comes the time when he is going to be lifted up from them, and he is going, like I was saying to the children, he was going to say goodbye for one last time to his disciples.

[7 : 49] And if you read Luke 24, as I'm sure you were when we read it, you'll find that even at this late moment the disciples still are filled with their own agenda. It's almost impossible for the disciples to escape their own culture and their own preconceived notion of what Jesus might do.

Because you remember, as they were making their way to the place, he said, is this the moment where you are going to restore the kingdom to—it was Acts chapter 1 that he said, the Lord, they said, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? And that betrays such a misunderstanding within the disciples, even at this late stage in their knowledge of Jesus.

Their faith was tied up with the hope that one day God was going to defeat the Romans and give them back the promised land of Canaan. It was hard for them to tear themselves away from their own preconceived notion.

They could not think about doing God's work outside their own particular localized hope. But Jesus' answer to them is really important. His answer is, your priorities are all wrong because what's important is what I am promising you right now, which of course was the coming of the Holy Spirit. But you can't seem to be able to see this because all your thoughts and all your hopes are so confined and so localized. You can't think beyond your own ethnic situation. I suppose it's not difficult for us to see that, to appreciate that, you know, they didn't have the benefit of international travel, of international communication the way that we have.

They could only think within their own box. But very often, even in our modern world, we still think within our own box and we like to feel comfortable in our own situation, don't we?

[10 : 09] Jesus' answer is spectacular. Basically, he's saying to them, look, think outside of your box. Don't think, don't be so confined, but think about the world outside.

It's a bit like Peter when he was in the boat, wasn't it? Remember in the Lake of Galilee when Jesus walked to the disciples on the water and Peter wanted to come out of the boat and yet, as we would be, he was scared to do so until Jesus invited him to and he stepped out onto the water and then began to sink. I think we would have done exactly the same thing because of the weakness of our faith. It's such a reminder to us that our faith has to extend beyond our limitations and our comfort zone. And right now, I'm sure you'll agree with me that when we pray for the whole world, we're simply doing what Jesus promised. We're just simply asking for what Jesus promised in the first place, that the gospel would be, would extend to people of all nations and tribes and languages and cultures. And that's exactly what has happened. Look at what has happened. This little tiny group of people on the top of this mountain, they're just about to say goodbye to Jesus. And 2000 years later, and the message of the gospel has gone out to countries and nations and empires.

And today, people are coming to faith in Jesus as never before. There are countries and situations where men and women and boys and girls are discovering the gospel for the very first time.

And they're coming to faith in Jesus. And when we think about his ascension, I want us to think about the consequence, the gospel consequence of such a wonderful, wonderful event.

But then also, Luke tells us that the very last thing that he did was before he was lifted up, he raised his hands. Did you notice that as we read, that he raised, he lifted up his hands, and he blessed them. And that may appear to be a kind of incidental gesture on the part of Jesus.

[12 : 43] It was not an incidental gesture. And the disciples knew exactly what was happening and how Jesus was acting. And this just this little motion that Jesus made was full of significance, perhaps because we haven't been brought up in the Jewish tradition, that we need to be educated. And we do that by going back into the Old Testament and by reminding ourselves of what this gesture, what this motion meant. It was something that was done by the high priest in the Old Testament. And it was done at a particular time, and it was done in a particular way. Leviticus chapter 9 and verse 22, we read this that Aaron lifted up his hands. There you have it. Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people, and he blessed them.

And he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offering. And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. And when they came out, they blessed the people.

So what's happening is that Jesus is acting in the same way as the high priest acted after he had made the sacrifice on behalf of the people. Now, you know already where this is going.

You know already that Jesus is now standing in front of his disciples, and the sacrifice has been completed. And as a consequence of that sacrifice, as high priest, he's raising his hands to bless his disciples. And when the high priest did that, this is the words he would use. Some of you know it, the Aaronic blessing. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Now, when the high priest did that, that wasn't some kind of just, it wasn't just a formality. This was the high priest of the high priest. He was speaking on behalf of God, promising the people of Israel that as a result of the sacrifice that's just been made, they will be blessed. You remember what blessed means?

The whole word, it's one of the most important words in the Bible. It means the happiness that only God can give through the forgiveness of sin. That's what it means, taking the whole Bible into consideration. It's a particular kind of happiness. I don't need to tell you that you can get happiness in a whole variety of places, but that happiness doesn't last. It's a superficial happiness. But the happiness that God gives us is lasting and profound and fundamental. And it can only, you can only have it as you come to faith in the sacrifice that Jesus made when he gave himself on the cross and when he rose again from the dead. And here is a symbol of that blessing. Jesus as God himself, our great high priest, he's lifting up his hands. And the last thing that he does, he brings all of what he's done, every last event from birth to resurrection. And he's wrapping the whole thing up by lifting up his hands and he is pronouncing God's blessing on the disciples. And you know, that should be a real source of joy to us because that blessing applies as much to all of God's people in every generation, including the 21st century in Bon Accord in Aberdeen or wherever you're watching from, God has blessed us.

[16 : 45] We have the Word of God itself that says, by faith in Jesus Christ, your sin is forgiven. Now, I don't know about you, but it doesn't get better than that.

I mean, what more can God give us than to restore us into fellowship with himself, to be at one with us, to say to us, your sins are forgiven, whatever they are.

I wonder if there's anybody who's with us or anybody who's watching who's saying to me, well, you don't know me. You don't know the depth. You don't know the ugliness, the corruption of me. No, I don't, but God does. And there is no corruption. There is no ugliness.

There is no shame. There is no darkness. There is no guilt that God can't take away by the blood of Jesus Christ. That's the blessing of the gospel. That's what God has said to us. He has assured us, he has guaranteed us that our sin is forgiven. So I hope you're beginning to see the significance of this great event. It kind of brings everything together of what Jesus did in one motion.

And he's pronouncing God's blessing. The Lord bless you and keep you. There's so much more I could say about this, but we're going to move on to the second thing, which is Jesus' enthronement. Because we're going to be behind the curtain, behind the cloud, into heaven. And I want us to think about Jesus. Now, we can't see him. It's really difficult to, you know, if you think about the life of Jesus and the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and all the events that took place and the miracles and everything. It's quite easy for us to picture these, isn't it? Conversations that he had, the feeding of the 5,000 and so on and so forth.

[18 : 48] It's quite easy to picture these in our mind's eye. It's not so easy to think about Jesus after he was ascended, after he ascended to heaven. Because we don't really know what heaven looks like.

We can't picture the glory of God in all his majesty. It's beyond our wildest imagination. And I wouldn't even try, to be honest. One day you will see it. But right now, all we have is God's word and the information that we have in God's word. So, we have to confine ourselves to that.

But I want you to remember this, please. That even though we can't imagine the place where Jesus is, let's remind ourselves it is a real place. Heaven is as real as earth and any place in the universe.

And the same God who created the universe created heaven, wherever that is. We just don't know exactly the geographic location. We can only think in terms of geographic locations. But God's beyond all that. He's not confined to our length and breadth and height and time and the dimensions. God works in other dimensions, in parallel dimensions. And I don't think that heaven is as far away from us as we think it is. You have to be careful that you don't allow your imagination to run riot and to take you beyond what God's word tells us. Remember when, remember when, and I know I'm going off on a bit of a tangent, but remember when Stephen was put to death for his faith in Jesus? Remember how they were stoning him and he was just about to die and the last thing he saw before he died was heaven opened and Jesus was standing ready to welcome him in. Now, if heaven is that far away, how come, how come he saw it so clearly? So don't let's think about, about heaven as way beyond the blue. You ever sang that chorus, way beyond the blue? Well, I'm not sure if that's very theologically accurate. I think there's a lot, I think there's a lot nearer if I can say that. I don't even know what nearer means. But what I want us to understand is that it is, that, that, that it is a real place. Jesus says, I go to prepare a place for you. A real place, an actual place.

Besides, and here's where it applies to this life. When Paul in, in Colossians chapter 3, he wants to describe how the Christians should live. He's giving instructions. He's saying it, first of all, begins with this, to set your minds on the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand. In other words, the very first priority as we begin to live our Christian lives is to set our minds on the place where Jesus is. Not because, not to try and sort of picture it, but to, to understand the reality of what Jesus, of where Jesus is right now. Acts tells us, or rather Hebrews tells us that he was commanded by the Father to sit at his right hand as a consequence of the work that he had completed in this world. And that was a hugely significant action, an event. We never saw it, nobody saw it, but it took place nonetheless. And the glory, the majesty that Jesus possesses right now is one in which he sits at the Father's right hand and he reigns with God the Father over this world.

[22 : 58] Where he is right now is a throne, the throne of the universe. Revelation chapter 7, or chapter 4 and 5, they make that very clear. The throne of the universe. Now, the whole idea of a throne is kingship and sovereignty and power and authority. And that is what Jesus possesses right now. You might say, well, I don't see much evidence of that in the world. I mean, if you, it's all very well to talk about Jesus' authority and his power and his kingship. But if that's the case, then, you know, why do we not see more evidence of it in the world? And that's a good question. It's a question that deserves a lot of discussion. And that is because, and I would say a lot of things, several things in response to that, first of all, because we still live in a fallen world. And as long as this world is a fallen world, there will be always the suffering and the misery and the sickness and the war and the hatred and the inhumanity to man that there always has been since the fall. But I would never say that there's no evidence of Jesus' kingship in the world. There certainly is. You go around the world today and you visit churches. And you talk to people in churches and they will tell you what God has done in their lives in transforming them, bringing them out of lives of hopelessness and guilt and condemnation and darkness into his kingdom. That's why it's so important for us to be mission-minded.

Because when we're mission-minded, you get to hear the stories of people who have been changed by God himself. And you take that and you replicate that all over the world and you find that there are a lot more Christians than you think there are. It's just that they're scattered all over the place. You have to go to sometimes little villages and townships and hamlets and streets and some churches are meeting in homes. And lots of Christians are meeting in secret because they can't meet openly.

And there are all kinds of churches. Sometimes there is only half a dozen in them and they're meeting like we are. They don't have the privileges. They don't have the building that we have. But nonetheless, they love Jesus and their lives have been transformed by him. I hear it regularly where I am.

So, it's wrong to say that there's no evidence of the kingship of Jesus. Jesus is hard at work, if I can put it that way.

Changing people's lives and bringing them into his kingdom. And we need to continue to pray and rejoice in that tremendous truth. So, he is on the throne.

[26 : 05] Just before we leave this point, I want us to just remind ourselves that Jesus continues to be God and man. When Jesus was lifted up from the earth, he didn't leave his human nature on the ground. He didn't leave his body on the ground.

He took his body with him. His human body. Albeit it was a glorified body, but he took it with him. So, that means that as he sits in heaven, he doesn't just sit as God, but he sits as God and man.

And that's a tremendous truth to remember this morning. Because he continues to reign in our nature. He is as much man today as he was when he walked the streets of Galilee and Jerusalem.

And it is as God and man that he speaks to the Father. Hebrews chapter 7 tells us that right now he ever lives to make intercession for us.

I think I've said this before. Perhaps here. That it's a marvelous present fact that the second person of the Godhead and the first person of the Godhead are in a unique conversation on behalf of us.

[27 : 30] Us. Us. which means that and I believe this with all my heart by the way. I know that this defies our it goes beyond what we might imagine but which means this that right now the Father and the Son God in these two persons are talking about you.

talking about me talking about Bon Accord as well as every other church and every other Christian every other person in this kingdom but what I truly believe that.

I know what you're saying you're saying no way no way I am just that I'm not even that size in the universe I'm tiny I'm insignificant I am nothing no you're not you are God's child beloved chosen before the foundation of the world purchased in Jesus Christ and you are talked about in heaven that's what it says he ever lives to make intercession for us us us that's not just Paul or whoever wrote Hebrews it's us everyone who belongs to the kingdom does that not give you a sense of of incredible privilege incredible joy to know that your life is secure within the conversation of God himself

Jesus ascension is our guarantee thirdly with this I close he's our guarantee that our sins are forgiven because not only did the son of God pay the price make the sacrifice for our sin and rise again on the third day but that same son of God is now on the throne of the universe sitting beside the father and where he is the constant intercessor on our behalf when we come together like this and when we join together in worship we're not here just to remember the past we are but we're here to remember the past to think about the past but to worship the living active reigning

Lord Jesus Christ who is involved in our worship in that he receives our worship and he delights to be amongst us he is the present reigning and the ascension is the guarantee of that presence but lastly is the guarantee of his second coming men of Galilee remember as he was taken up and as he disappeared from before their eyes the angels appeared and they said men of Galilee why do you stand here looking into the sky this same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven I don't need to tell you that the birth of Jesus was supernatural it was mysterious something happened by the power of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary Jesus was conceived and he was he was brought forth by a virgin it was supernatural so it's no surprise to us is it that when he leaves for the last time that his departure is also supernatural but what a difference at first his birth was secret in the darkness of a manger when he leaves his departure is not secret but it's just it's just a supernatural but his departure is also a foreshadowing what's happening here is what we might call an acted out prophecy as much as anything else and that's the message of the angels because their message is look did you see the way that he was lifted up well pay close attention to what you've just seen and remember it because it's going to happen again in reverse the same Jesus who you saw departing from you is actually going to return in the same way do you believe that this morning

[32 : 38] I do I don't know how it's going to happen and I certainly don't know when it's going to happen nobody does but the Christian life is a life of anticipation in which we never lose sight of this one future event that everyone knows is going to happen that Jesus the same Jesus the same Jesus of Bethlehem the Jesus of Galilee the Jesus of the 5000 the Jesus of the walking on the water the Jesus of the raising of Lazarus and the Jesus who died on the cross and who rose again the same son of God is going to appear he is going to return to this world one day and that's the certainty and the hope and the expectation that all of us who love him and believe in him have because despite its impossibility and despite the skepticism of an unbelieving world faith and that's what we have to face faith lays hold on one thing alone and that is the promise of God

I don't know how he's going to do it and I don't know when he's going to do it but I believe he will do it one day so that's why we need to be ready we may never see it we may never be alive when it happens but nonetheless we will still be part of it that great parousia that event when the dead will be raised and when those who have died lived and died will go forever to be with the Lord body and soul what a hope what an expectation what a certainty that we have rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ our Father in heaven we thank you for the great promise that you have given to us that you will return in glory and we do pray for that day even so come Lord Jesus give us strengthen our faith Lord so that we don't get sucked into the unbelief of a skeptical world but rather we pray that by returning time and time to the Bible and by the power of the Holy Spirit that our faith will be strengthened and that we will be given the courage to share our faith with others so that by that same power they too may come to share in the hope that we have in Jesus name

Amen