

Acts 1:1-11

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 November 2013

Preacher: Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] Now, for a short while this evening, I'd like us to turn back to the passage that we read in Acts chapter 1. Acts chapter 1, and we can pick it up again at verse 9.

After Jesus said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

Men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.

Now, one of my favorite hobbies in life is a bit of woodwork. I love making stuff out of wood. I'm not particularly good at it, but I enjoy doing it.

Before I went to the Free Church College, I worked as an engineer, so I liked doing stuff with my hands. And I've always enjoyed doing woodwork. And I like, we have a garage where we're staying just now, and so we've got space to do a few wee projects, and bits and bobs like that, and I really enjoy doing it.

[1 : 3 1] And one of the things you have to do when you become a student at the Free Church College is you have to buy loads of books. You don't actually have to read them, just buy them. I have lots of books. It makes you look clever.

But I've bought lots and lots of books, so one of the things I thought I'd do, well, I'll buy, I'll make a bookcase. And I thought, well, I'll make a bookcase for these books. And I love the whole project of making, like, a bookcase.

You think, right, I'll plan it, and I'll go to B&Q;, I'll see what I need to buy, and I'll measure up the wood, I'll take it home, and I'll start measuring it, start cutting it, start assembling it all.

And it's great, I really enjoy it, and over a few nights or a few weeks, it all starts to take shape. Eventually, I've got a bookcase. Ever so slightly wobbly, but still I have a bookcase.

But by the time it's just about finished, I sometimes start to maybe lose a wee bit of interest. And when it comes to actually varnishing this bookcase that I've made, it still hasn't been varnished.

[2 : 3 3] I never actually did it. I just thought, ach, I'll do it sometime, and I took it inside and put my books into it. And I didn't bother with the varnishing. And in many ways, that was silly, because as I'm sure you all know, varnishing is really, really important.

It finishes it off nicely, makes it look nice, and it also protects it, stops the wood from getting stained, getting damaged, and it will make it last much, much longer.

But I have a bad habit of doing something 90% and then neglecting what comes at the very end. And that's something that I suppose can apply to lots of parts of life.

You very often will hear maybe people who've moved into a house. They do virtually all the jobs that need to be done, and then there's a few things that need to be done. The last wee bit can often be neglected.

And I think in many ways, that's also true when we think about the great events of Jesus' life. Because when Jesus came into the world, many amazing things happened.

[3 : 39] There was his birth with all the amazing events that took place, then there was his ministry with the miracles, the remarkable acts that he performed, then the great events of Jesus' death and resurrection.

All these things, they just, they command their attention, and we focus on them, and in many ways, rightly so. These are the great things that the Bible teaches us about. But it's easy to neglect what happens at the end.

What do I mean? Well, it's easy to neglect the ascension. Very, very easy for us to focus very much on the first 90% of Jesus' life, and to forget about his ascension.

So for a wee while tonight, I want us to think, in fairly general terms, about the ascension of Jesus. Jesus' ascension is something so important, so crucial, and it's well worth spending a wee bit of time thinking about.

And what I want to say is that the ascension confirms three things for us, three great things, and this is what I want us to look at tonight. It confirms what Jesus has done, it confirms what Jesus is doing, and it confirms what Jesus will do.

[5 : 07] These three things, what Jesus has done, what he is doing, and what he will do. So first of all, it confirms what Jesus has done.

Now we come to Acts chapter 1, and this is the final appearance that we have of Jesus in his earthly ministry. This is his last appearance on earth. His earthly ministry has come to an end.

So in many ways, the book of Acts begins with an end. The very first thing that happens is something comes to an end. Jesus' ministry has finished. And we see it says here, after he had said this in verse 9, or after he had said these things, it's like Jesus had finished everything he wanted to say.

It was complete. He was now ready to return to heaven. Now, we have to remember, though, that when we look at this, we know what happened.

We know that Jesus ascended back into heaven in Acts chapter 1, and we know that he didn't appear again. We know that this was his last appearance. But if we put ourselves into the disciples' shoes, then it might not have been as clear as that.

[6 : 19] How did the disciples know that this was Jesus' final resurrection appearance? Because over the 40 days between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension, he appeared at various times.

On the road to Emmaus, he appeared, but then he disappeared again. The disciples were in the upper room with the door closed. Jesus appeared, and then he disappeared again. So there were these appearances happening at various times.

And you can always think, well, if you think back to the transfiguration, Peter and James and John were up on that mountaintop, and a cloud came around Jesus.

And it all seemed very dramatic. But then all of a sudden, the cloud was gone, and Jesus was just there again. And it all seemed quite normal. And here we have a cloud again.

And you can almost think, you know, maybe they were thinking to themselves, ah, this is a bit like the transfiguration. Okay, in a minute, the cloud will go, and Jesus will be back. He's going to appear again, just like he did before.

[7 : 25] Maybe that's what they were thinking. But as we know, that's not what happened. And we see that this occasion is different to all the other appearances that Jesus made.

When Jesus, as we said, was on the road to Emmaus, he just vanished from their sight, and he was gone. But here it is much, much slower. And there's a very, very vivid description.

The disciples were looking on. This cloud, he was taken up, and this cloud hid them from their sight. It's almost like it's all done in slow motion. Jesus has just been taken up very, very slowly and taken away from their sight by this cloud.

And then these two figures in white, who we assume were clearly angels, these two men dressed in white stood before them and confirmed what had happened, that Jesus had ascended.

And if we remember, all the great events that took place in Jesus' life were confirmed by angels. The announcement of Jesus' coming in the first place was done by angels.

[8 : 32] The announcement that Jesus had arrived was done by angels when they announced it to the shepherds. Jesus' resurrection, again, announced by angels. And then finally, here, Jesus' ascension was confirmed by the angels.

So this is a definite, deliberate, final appearance. Jesus' earthly ministry was at an end. And the book of Acts is emphasizing that the disciples saw this taking place.

If you look at it, there's lots and lots of references to the disciples seeing, lots of references to visual activity. He was taken up before their eyes in verse 9.

Verse 10, they were looking intently. Then verse 11, it says, why do you stand here looking into the sky, gazing into the sky? All these references to the fact that the disciples saw what happened.

The ascension wasn't secret. It wasn't private. It was visible. It was witnessed. And it was the final appearance that Jesus made.

[9 : 39] Now, what's the significance of all this? Well, the ascension is the great, great confirmation that Jesus has completed his work.

Jesus' mission has succeeded. Jesus has finished what he came to do. When we think of Jesus coming into the world, there's two ways that we, two words that we use to describe it.

We talk of Jesus' humiliation and exaltation. That, in many ways, encompasses Jesus coming into the world. First of all, he was humiliated.

Now, by humiliated, we don't mean embarrassed. When we think of the word humiliated, we often think of the word in a kind of being embarrassed kind of way. But in this sense, we're talking about being humbled.

Jesus was humbled in that he came down from a position of glory, from a position of majesty in heaven. He was humiliated and descended onto earth.

[10 : 39] And this had various stages. First, there was the incarnation where God the Son became a man. That was one stage of the humiliation. That progressed further to where he was to suffer, where he went on trial, where he was beaten.

And ultimately, he was placed on a cross and died. That was the climax of Jesus' humiliation. But from that point, Jesus' exaltation begins.

Jesus is raised again from the dead. And he is ascended up and placed in an exalted position in heaven. He is given a position of power, of honor, and glory.

His exaltation begins. And when we think about Jesus' exaltation, we have to, again, remember how all these things took place from the disciples' point of view.

Because if we ask this question, how do we know that Jesus rose from the dead? Well, the answer is obvious. The resurrection appearances. He was seen. But when you think about it, Jesus didn't really need to appear.

[11 : 44] In terms of the great eternal plan of salvation, Jesus rose again in God's sight. And it's really, at the end of the day, only God's sight that matters.

He didn't really need to appear to people. But he appeared to people for our benefit so that we would know that he was risen from the dead. That's why he appeared as a risen Savior.

How then do we know that Jesus is exalted? Again, because of this visible ascension. It's the confirmation to us that Jesus did indeed conquer sin.

He was raised and he ascended. And Paul talks a little bit about this in Romans chapter 6. He says, We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again.

That's how we know, because we've seen him. We know he's raised from the dead. Death no longer has dominion over him. And so when we think about Jesus' resurrection and his ascension, it's best in a way to try and think of them as both being part of the one thing.

[12 : 54] Certainly when I was younger, I used to tend to think that Jesus sort of rose again and then he was like in that kind of in-between stage for 40 days and then he finally went back into heaven.

But that's not really the best way to think about it. It's better to think of Jesus' exaltation. That exaltation began when Jesus rose from the dead. And when he rose from the dead, he was raised and exalted and ascended.

And then for 40 days he made appearances to prove that that had taken place, which culminated in this final appearance. All these things are part of the one process of exaltation.

Resurrection and ascension are just, they're inseparable, they're just united together as one great act of exaltation. And so it reminds us that Jesus' work would have been incomplete if it wasn't for the ascension.

This is what finalizes it. It places him back in heaven beside the Father. And so it reminds us what Jesus has done.

[14 : 02] It has an emphasis on his past events. And so today I want you to remember the ascension, to remember what Jesus has done, to remember that Jesus' work of salvation was a total success.

His mission was perfectly completed. Now again, we know that, and we're sitting on the other side of it looking back. But if you go through the processes of it and think about it, there were so many things that Jesus had to get past.

When Jesus came into the world, straight away the devil tried to kill the infant Jesus, and they had to escape to Egypt. As soon as Jesus began his earthly ministry, the devil tried to stop him with a temptation.

Again, the devil tried to stop him. And he would use any way, he even tried to use the disciples to stop him. We know that in Matthew chapter 16, verse 21, Jesus started speaking about his death and resurrection, and Peter said, this will never happen to you.

But Jesus turned and said to him, get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance. The devil was even using the disciples to try and stop Jesus. And as we know, as Jesus went to the cross, he was overwhelmed with anxiety, overwhelmed with dread as he was in the garden of Gethsemane.

[15 : 29] And so we have to remember that when Jesus' humiliation began, when he came into the world, a huge, huge task lay ahead of him.

A task that is of a magnitude that we can't even really begin to describe. Many hurdles lay ahead of him. Many challenges, and a massive amount of opposition was going to do everything it could to stop him.

A huge task lay ahead. And the ascension tells us that all of that task has been totally and perfectly completed.

Jesus had a mission. He had a job. And he accomplished it completely. The ascension tells us what Jesus has done.

But secondly, the ascension also confirms to us what Jesus is now doing. And as we said, act in many ways begins with an end. It begins with the end of Jesus' earthly ministry.

[16 : 34] But at the same time, the start of acts is also a beginning. It's the beginning of the New Testament church. It's the beginning of this period where the gospel is to go out to all nations.

And notice, it's very interesting the language that Luke uses. In chapter 1, he says, notice what he says. He says, in my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach.

He's saying that he had just started. What he wrote in the book of Luke was what Jesus began to do. He is still doing more. Jesus' work continues.

And if you read through to the very end of Acts and come to chapter 28, you see that the book doesn't really have an ending. It doesn't really have a conclusion. And of course, that's deliberate because the story hasn't stopped.

The church is ongoing and continues to this day. So the ascension confirms what Jesus has done. It concludes his earthly ministry, but it also marks the beginning of his heavenly ministry.

[17 : 40] Jesus' earthly ministry was told in the book of Luke and now in the book of Acts we read all about Jesus' heavenly ministry. Jesus is in heaven acting on behalf of his people.

What is Jesus doing now? What is Jesus now doing? Well, there's lots of things that we can say, but the passage here emphasizes one thing in particular and that's what I want us to focus on.

If we notice what it says in verse 3, it says, Jesus appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God. What does a kingdom have? It has a king. What is Jesus doing now? He is king.

Jesus has ascended into heaven to take his rightful place as king. And we have to remember that the ascension puts Jesus back where he belongs.

[18 : 50] When Jesus ascends here in Acts chapter 1, he isn't going to heaven, he's returning to heaven. He's going back where he came from.

He's going back where he belongs. Jesus descended down from heaven as Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 4. He said, in saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth.

He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things. Jesus descended down his humiliation as far as the horror of the cross but then he ascended again.

He is reascended back to the glory of heaven. And so this great plan that God had, the great plan of salvation that he worked out through the whole of the Old Testament pointing towards Jesus' coming, that he worked out through Jesus' life, his birth, his ministry, all that is complete.

God became a man and now he is exalted in heaven as king. And if you look at chapter 2 of Acts, we see that this is the kind of thing that Peter is emphasizing.

[20 : 07] Peter is talking to the people about Jesus and he is emphasizing that Jesus is king. From verse 30, Peter says, he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.

Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of this fact, exalted to the right hand of God.

He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven and yet he said, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this, God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Peter is to be crucified is now risen as king. Now, we have to again remember the context of the time, of this first century.

[21 : 21] To be crucified in this time was the ultimate disgrace. The ultimate disgrace. It was the worst form of death that anybody could have. And so, if somebody was crucified, then they were, you know, they were just, it was the worst event, it was the most shame, the most disgrace that anyone could suffer.

Anyone who was crucified was absolutely, utterly cursed. And so, this is why the cross was such a stumbling block to the Jews, because they thought, well, how can Jesus be a king if he was crucified?

How can a king be crucified? But the ascension is confirming that this Jesus is not a criminal, he's not a disgrace, he is king, he has been placed back where he belongs.

And as Peter emphasizes in verse 23, this man was handed over you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge. The crucifixion was all part of God's plan, all part of God's work, and God has now exalted Jesus.

That's why Peter can say, this Jesus whom you crucified, God has made both Lord and Christ. God has put him back now into his rightful place.

[22 : 41] He is the king, he is the exalted king. But the amazing thing is, as exalted king, Jesus isn't just doing nothing, he isn't just sitting there on a throne inactive, he is acting on behalf of his people.

As king, Jesus acts for you and for me, he does stuff for you and for me. What does Jesus do? Well, the catechism explains this really well.

The catechism tells us that Jesus rules us, Jesus defends us, and he restrains and conquers all our enemies.

The catechism sums it up really, really well. And if you just really want to commend to you the catechism, read it, I'm sure you do, it's really good. You can get it on an app, on your phone, dead easy, download it, read it, it's really, really good.

But it sums it up brilliantly, Jesus rules us, he defends us, and he restrains and conquers all our enemies. And this is so encouraging for us today, because it's got such good practical implications for our lives.

[23 : 52] Jesus is our ruler, he rules us, and even this chapter again emphasizes that, he gave them instructions, or in many ways that could be better translated commands, in verse 2, he gave the disciples commandments, he told them what to do, they were to obey him, they were to listen to him, his word is authoritative, it's to be obeyed, and to be respected.

And so the whole world might be opposed to Jesus, the people we know at work or in school, they might blaspheme all the time, they might seem opposed to God, and that's fine, we can let them do that, but we will be loyal to God, we will be loyal to Jesus, he is our king, we will obey him, he rules us.

But then the catechism reminds us that Jesus defends us, now I really like that, I think that's so encouraging, Jesus is our defender, and that is so reassuring, because when you think about it, a defender is somebody who protects something precious, something important, even if you think about football, you think about the defenders on a football team, their whole job is to protect the goal behind them, it's important, they want to defend it, they want to protect it, Jesus is your defender, that means that you are important, you are precious to him, and he wants to protect you, and guard over you, so when you feel worried or scared about something, remember the ascension, remember that Jesus, your defender, is sitting at the right hand of God, he's watching over you, he is looking after you, the most powerful person in the whole universe, the most powerful king that there is in existence,

Jesus Christ, is your defender, he's defending you, it's a great, great comfort, and as well we're reminded that as king Jesus restrains and conquers all our enemies, and again that is such a comfort to us, because we have enemies, or should I say we have an enemy, the devil is our enemy, and he wants to do anything he can to attack us and to accuse us, scripture makes that clear, revelation chapter 12 at verse 10, we read these words, I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, now the salvation and power and kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come for the accuser of our brothers, that's the devil it's referring to, has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

God. So I want us to almost try and picture that in our mind. Imagine God and the devil is trying to sort of shout at him or speak to him and say all sorts of words of accusation, accusation against you, saying he hasn't done this, she hasn't done that, she's let you down, she made a mistake, she mucked up, she doesn't deserve to be saved, you should abandon her, you've got no reason to love her.

[27 : 12] The devil is accusing us before God all the time. But while the devil is accusing, Jesus is defending.

And Jesus is saying, no, no, don't listen to a word he says, that's my child, I died for him. he cannot say anything that will condemn him.

Jesus is our defender, he is speaking in our defense. Paul speaks about this in such a wonderful way in Romans chapter 8 in verse 31, what shall we say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all? How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? The devil can say what he likes, he cannot bring a charge against us. Jesus is interceding in our defense.

[28 : 22] And so it's such a comfort to us, and if we feel like we are oppressed by the devil, or if we feel like our sin is really hanging over us and making us seem so bad before God, or if it's bringing us down, remember the ascension.

Remember that Jesus is exalted as king and he restrains and conquers all our enemies. Nothing can threaten us. Nothing can cause us to be taken out of the Father's hand.

The ascension confirms what Jesus is doing. But last of all, the ascension confirms what Jesus will do. It confirms what Jesus will do.

Verse 9, it says he was taken up and a cloud hid from their sight. And then in verse 10, we see that these angels appeared and they spoke to them, and they have a vital message.

They say, men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky, this same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.

[29 : 35] And this reminds us that the resurrection and the ascension is not the end of the story. There's still something else to come. Jesus will return.

And it reminds us that right now we are in the last days. We are in the last days. we spoke about Christ's humiliation and his exaltation and all the things that took place, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the revelation of God's word.

All of these things have happened and we are looking back at them. They will not happen again. But one thing will happen.

Jesus will return. What will Jesus do when he returns? Jesus will judge the world. We're reminded of that in Matthew chapter 25.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

[30 : 54] Jesus will judge and as we know there will be two results from this judgment. Those who don't believe will be cast out and those who do believe will be gathered to be with Jesus forever.

And they will enjoy all the wonderful promises of heaven forever and ever and ever. Jesus will come again and he will judge. But notice what the angels say in verse 11.

They say why are you gazing into heaven? As if to say to the disciples why are you just standing here gazing and almost doing nothing? And it reminds the disciples and it reminds us that now we are in a state of urgency.

We are in the last days. We are in a state of absolute urgency now. If you go back to the beginning of the Bible and go to Genesis at that point God had a plan for salvation and that plan involved many stages.

There was the flood, there was the covenant with Noah, there was the exodus, there was the law, there was the establishment of the Davidic kingdom, there was the kingdom period in Israel, there was the exile, there was the return from exile, there was all the prophecies that took place, coming into the New Testament, there was John the Baptist's birth, there was the incarnation, there was the ministry of Jesus, there was the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension, the second coming.

[32 : 31] These are all the stages of God's plan and they have all happened except one. There's only one thing left to happen.

Right now today, we are in the last stages of history. If you imagine that you're on a long train journey and there's lots and lots of stops to be made on that train journey.

Well, we have passed the second last station. All the stops have been made. All that's left is the final stop, Jesus' second coming.

And as we know from verse 7, we don't know when this will happen. Jesus said, it's not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. We don't know when it will happen, but it will happen.

We are in the last days. And so right now we have to remember the ascension. Jesus has ascended and is now waiting to return.

[33 : 43] And that's why what we are doing here today is so important. And why the proclamation of the gospel is so, so important. Because we are in a state of urgency.

And if you are not a Christian, I want you to remember the ascension. Remember that Jesus has ascended. He has done everything that has been required for your sins to be forgiven.

He's done it. He died on the cross and rose again. He's now sitting at the right hand of God and he's waiting for you to put your faith in him.

And he will come back. One day he will come back to gather all those who have put their faith in him to be with him. If you're not a Christian, your salvation is a matter of urgency.

see, it's not something to be put off or to be delayed. It's really, really important that we remember that. So I want you all to remember the ascension.

[34 : 50] Like I said, it's really easy to neglect and I've spent many times forgetting about it and neglecting it. But we should remember it. It's so important. It reminds us of all that Jesus has done.

It reminds us of all that Jesus is doing for you and for me every day. And it reminds us what he will do.

That he will come and gather all his people to be with him forever. Remember the ascension. Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for what your word teaches us and we pray that we would learn all the truths of your word.

That we would grow in our knowledge of you and that it would shape our mind and our perspective so that we would remember and understand the urgency and the need of all these things.

We pray, Lord, that we would have a clearer view of Jesus, that we would remember all that he has done and all that he is doing and all that he will do and that in response to that we would all look to him and trust in him for our salvation.

[36 : 10] Help us with all of these things, Lord, because we need your help. Please have mercy upon us so that we might all look to you and trust in you. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. We'll conclude by singing to God's praise from Psalm 96.

Psalm 96, the Sing Psalms version on page 127. It's the first version, Psalm 96a, the Common Media version on page 127.

We'll sing from verse 7, All nations to the Lord ascribe the glory that is due, glory and strength ascribe to God and praise his name anew.

We'll sing from verse 7 to the end of the psalm. We'll stand to sing these words to the tune Jackson to God's praise. Amen. When he comes to the glory that is due, glory and strength as strive to God and praise his name anew.

[37 : 43] Turn Enter this force with joy and ring, and offering with you.

Worship the Lord in all we fear, all and before him bow.

In every hand the Lord is clear, he establishes the earth.

And cannot rule, the Lord will judge the people's sin is so.

Let them rejoice and earth be glad, with joy let oceans ring.

[38 : 57] The fields and all in them will shine, and forest trees will sing.

The people will sing before the Lord, who comes to judge the earth.

He'll judge the world in righteousness, the people's sin is so.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord, we thank you for all that we've received from you. And we pray that as we part one from another, that your blessing will be upon each one of us. And we ask that by your grace, you'd enable us all to serve you and to glorify you in every part of our lives.

We thank you for all that you've done for us. And we just bow down before you and praise you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Go before us now and take away our sin.

[40 : 11] In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. And that's why we pray for it. Amen. Amen. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.