

The Ascension

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The hearts of the disciples were filled with sorrow upon Jesus' announcement that He would depart from them. They had walked with their Lord since the beginning of His ministry and the thought of His absence only provoked grief. Yet the ascension of Jesus into heaven was necessary so that He could prepare a place for them and then they could be reunited. The Holy Spirit would dwell within them in the meantime and minister to their hearts as a down payment of their future inheritance. Appreciating these promises and filled with hope regarding the future, the disciples were filled with joy and moved to rejoicing as Jesus ascended to heaven. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul discusses the ascension.

SCRIPTURE READING

Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the grief and fear of Jesus' disciples at the Last Supper.
2. To detail Jesus' promises to His disciples at the Last Supper.
3. To describe the purpose of Jesus' ascension.

QUOTATIONS

The significance of the ascension is often overlooked in the modern church. We have special celebrations and holidays (holy days) to commemorate the birth (Christmas), the death (Good Friday), and the resurrection (Easter) of Christ. Most churches, however, make little or no mention of the ascension. However, the ascension is a redemptive event

of profound importance. It marks the moment of Christ's highest point of exaltation prior to His return. It is in the ascension that Christ entered into His glory.

—R.C. Sproul

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. John 14 is one of the most popular chapters in the Bible.
 - 1. “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 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? 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. And you know the way to where I am going” (John 14:1–3).
 - 2. Jesus originally spoke these words in a context of fear and confusion among the disciples.
- B. “When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’” (John 13:31–35).
 - 1. Jesus forecasted His departure into death in the upper room, but His disciples failed to understand.
 - 2. Jesus told them to not let their hearts be troubled because He knew they would be crushed with grief by the humiliation of His death.
 - 3. Jesus assures His disciples that if they were living with a false hope regarding the resurrection of the dead then He would have told them.
 - 4. If we truly believed Jesus left us to prepare a place for us, our longing for heaven would increase and our whole view of heaven would change.
- C. “I have said these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart” (John 16:1–6).

- The pain of Jesus' departure was the focus of the disciples on the night of the Last Supper.
- D. Luke provides two accounts of the ascension. One at the beginning of Acts and the other at the end of his gospel.
1. "And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:4-11).
 2. "Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God" (Luke 24:50-53).
- E. The significance of the ascension is often forgotten.
1. The disciples rejoiced greatly and praised God continually upon the ascension of Jesus to heaven.
 2. The disciples were able to rejoice because they came to an understanding of why Jesus left and what He would be doing for them.
- F. Jesus ascends to His heavenly throne for His coronation.
1. He is invested as the king who conquered death on our behalf.
 2. The ascension is a cause for rejoicing for all Christians because our king reigns from now on for us.
 3. The task of the church is to make the invisible reign of Jesus Christ visible by our fidelity, celebration, and joy.

4. Jesus will return to consummate the establishment of His heavenly kingdom on earth.

BIBLE STUDY

1. Many people believe the resurrection of Christ is the high point of redemptive history. After studying the event known as the ascension, you might rethink this. Focusing on Acts 1:1–11, who is present in this scene? When did it take place? Where were they? What does it say about the progression of the gospel? How does the book of Acts detail the fulfillment of these words?
2. What did the Father promise in Acts 1:4–5? What power was to be received with the promise? What was the purpose for this power? How was the promise related to Jesus' ascension (compare John 16:5–16)?
3. Examine Jesus' response to the apostle's question about the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6). Of which kingdom did the apostles speak? On what did Jesus refocus their attention? Did Jesus say or imply that the kingdom actually would be restored to Israel?
4. Where did Jesus go when He ascended? According to Luke's gospel account (24:50–52) of this event, the disciples rejoiced at His leaving. Why would they do that? Could it be connected to where Jesus was going and why (John 14)?
5. It has always been a point of Christian doctrine that Jesus retained His resurrected human body when He ascended, though many Christians today make the mistake of associating heaven with all things ethereal (and thus that Jesus did not continue on in His physical body). What do the "men in white robes" say happened to Jesus' body? Given the rumors about the whereabouts of Jesus' body, why was this information included?
6. The two men in white (probably angels) seem to reprove the apostles for staring into the sky after Jesus. Explain their statements. If Jesus is coming back in the same way He left, why shouldn't the apostles stare after Him? Why do you think the men emphasized to the apostles that Jesus was coming back?

DISCUSSION

1. How does the formation of the church begin the period of the restoration of the kingdom? Through what means does the kingdom's restoration continue today? What event will complete the kingdom's restoration? Is it possible for the church to usher in the kingdom's full restoration just prior to Christ's return? Why or why not?

2. The ascension is important because it marks the beginning of the spread of the gospel and the promised empowerment of God's people. Do you perceive yourself as a fully empowered Christian? What can you do to stop disbelieving who the Bible says you are in Christ?

3. Why do the disciples feel compelled to choose another disciple to replace Judas (Acts 1:22b)? What is the qualification they seek in the man to replace Judas?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Dawson, Gerrit Scott. *Jesus Ascended*

Johnson, Dennis E. *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*

Kistemaker, Simon. *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*