

Acts 1:1-11 The Ascension of Jesus Falls Ch. AM 5/5/2024

What comes after Easter? Christians remember the death of Jesus on Good Friday, and His resurrection on that Sunday. What happened next?

Answer: the ascension of Jesus from earth back up to heaven!

Dr. Robert Godfrey, a Reformed and Presbyterian seminary professor, wrote, “The ascension of Christ marks the pinnacle (or high point) of His earthly ministry, yet [the ascension of Christ] is one of the most underappreciated aspects of Christ’s work.”

In the reports of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we get some statements about what happened during those intervening 40 days between the resurrection of Jesus and the Ascension of Jesus. Those days were when the resurrected Jesus appeared to His disciples, taught them about His ascension, and gave them instructions about the coming gift of the Spirit.

Let’s track three surprises for the disciples of Jesus, starting with Good Friday. The disciples had not expected Jesus to be crucified and they had not expected Jesus to die. Previously, Jesus had told the disciples that He would die, but they never did comprehend. As a result, the disciples were so shocked after Jesus was arrested, then crucified, and then died, that the disciples fled for their lives. They seemed to be still in shock about Jesus’ death and burial, and they were severely grieving the loss of their teacher. So, we could say that the death of Jesus on the cross on Good Friday was surprise #1.

What else did the disciples not expect? The resurrection! Again, they had been repeatedly told that Jesus would rise again on the third day, but they never did comprehend. So, surprise #2 was when the dead and buried Jesus rose from the grave and appeared to them.

In Luke 24, we read about the disciples walking on the road, when Jesus Our Risen Lord appeared to them. In Luke 24:45, Jesus “...*opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...*”

Surprise #3 was when Jesus ascended. Luke 24:51, Jesus “...*parted from them and was carried up into heaven.*” The disciples were surprised a third time! Surprise #3 was when Jesus ascended into heaven. This is what happened after Easter Sunday – 40 days later, Jesus went up through the sky and clouds, back to heaven.

Why is this important? Because it leads to joy and worship.

Consider what the reaction was of the disciples.

Surprise #1 – the death of Christ – they were shocked and grieving.

Surprise #2 – the resurrection of Christ – their minds were opened to understand the Scriptures and their hearts burned within them.

Surprise #3 - the resurrection of Christ, we read in the last two verses of the Gospel of Luke, “...they worshipped [Christ Jesus] and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.”

Why is the ascension important? Because of the victory of Jesus, and the resulting impact on us as Christians as we move from grief to joy, and from confusion to worshipping God.

In the ascension of Jesus, we learn about our King. (And knowing Jesus leads us to be filled with joy and worship Him!)

1. His timing. (v.1-7)

Verse 1, with the starting 4 words “*in the first book*” the author Luke referred back to the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of Luke was volume 1, and now the Book of Acts is volume 2 of what the apostle Luke has to show us about Jesus.

Verse 2, referred to the ascension of Christ already.

Verse 3, backed up to those previous resurrection appearances of Jesus, during the 40 intervening days between Easter Day and Ascension Day.

Verse 4, was a summary of what Jesus taught and instructed during that intervening time – stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promised gift from God the Father.

Verse 5 explained what that promised gift was – the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 6 told of when the disciples asked Jesus a question, and as a result of their mindset shown in their question, Jesus needed to correct them about a number of things. One of the things wrong with their mindset was their preference for knowing the timing of the Kingdom, over knowing Jesus Himself. In verse 7, Jesus made it clear that it was the Father who would set the timing. Jesus had fully submitted Himself to the authority of His Father regarding the timing of the events of the kingdom. Jesus is the One who would send The Spirit, and the Spirit would arrive on the exact right day, but that was set by the sole authority of God the Father.

God the Father sent Christ down at Christmas (the incarnation), the birth of Jesus.

God the Father sent the Spirit down upon Christ at the baptism of Jesus.

Jesus preached, did miracles, was crucified, and rose again.

The resurrected Jesus instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem.

Jesus ascended to heaven, and Jesus sent the Spirit upon His disciples at Pentecost, per the timing set by God the Father.

Then, the disciples went to Rome and distributed the message about Jesus from there.

Listen to the apostle Peter explain in 1 Peter 3:23 that Jesus Christ “...has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him.”

The physical presence of Jesus departed from this world, in order to be replaced the Spiritual presence of Jesus with us, by His Spirit. The Spirit of Jesus remains on us as His church. One day, Jesus' physical presence will once again be our enjoyment, when Jesus returns bodily. One of the things we learn in the ascension of Jesus was the perfect timing of God the Father. We have joy knowing that Jesus went up at the perfect time, and Jesus will come down someday at the perfect time.

2. His witnesses. (v.8)

The author of the book of Acts, this doctor named Luke, was more concerned in these verses about what was said, than about what physically happened. What was said? We saw that in verse 6 the question was posed by the disciples, now that Jesus had been raised from the dead, was God going to complete His purpose by finally establishing His rule? The answer Jesus gave in verse 7 had two aspects 1) the timing of the event remained a secret known only to God the Father 2) the disciples must not focus on knowing the timing of the next actions of God. In verse 8, Jesus taught the supreme importance of the witness of the church. Rather than the task of knowing when God will establish His rule, Jesus said that what was more important was that the disciples and the church must focus on the task of sending missionaries to witness about Jesus to the ends of the earth.

WITNESSES. In verse 8, there are two senses of the role of being witnesses for Jesus. 1) an observing witness, like an eye witness to a car accident 2) a reporting witness, like going to court and taking the witness stand to testify about that car accident. 1) An observing witness was one who was there at the right time and right place, so that he saw it with his own eyes. 2) A reporting witness was one who spoke to other people about what he had seen. A reporting witness was willing to tell others what he saw or what he knew. Consider, for example, after Judas had died. So instead of 12 disciples, they were down to 11. They needed to replace Judas so that they had 12 again. Matthias, in order to become one of the twelve, must have been an observing witness of Jesus, what we call an eye-witness. That was a prerequisite. If he became one of the 12 disciples, Matthias must in addition become a reporting witness, or a vocal witness, or what we would call a witness who testifies. He would become a witness in the sense that he would be vocally proclaiming the message of Jesus' resurrection.

In Acts 1:21-22, Peter spoke about who would be qualified to become a disciple in place of Judas, was a person who was an eye witness to the previous actions of Jesus. Listen to what Peter said, "...*So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us— one of these men must become with us a witness to His resurrection.*"

LOCATION: we notice something whenever we read the other book by Luke, the Gospel of Luke, that our attention was directed to Jerusalem. The geographical focus of the Gospel of Luke was the city of Jerusalem. It was in Jerusalem that Jesus suffered, died, rose again, and ascended. In contrast, in the Book of Acts, our attention was directed to a different location, a different city...to Rome. The geographical focus of the book of Acts was Rome, first as the destination for Christ's gospel, and second as the distribution point for Christ's gospel. From Rome, the good news would later reach the entire world.

It is common knowledge that in the Muslim religion, each person is supposed to travel to a holy city during their lifetime. That is not a requirement in Christianity. We do not have a religion that demands that we each make a trek to a certain geographic spot. In fact, Christianity's basic instruction is just the opposite. Our instruction from Christ is rather than to visit one spot, we spread out, and everyone find a new and different place to go, and everywhere that the church goes, we are instructed to tell the good news. This was the basis of the church's missionary task. It all started here when Acts 1:8 instructed us to go to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8 is very clear, listen, "...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." Christian churches are to spread out and preach and teach about Jesus all over the globe. Ever since the risen Lord taught this just prior to His ascension, the Christian church has had a global mission.

3. His plans. (v.9-11)

In verse 9, Jesus ascended. Verse 9 is the verse that contains the actual event of The Ascension of Jesus, "...He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight."

In verse 10, immediately after the Ascension of Jesus, the disciples were still standing there where the Ascension had just happened. The disciples were still looking into the sky! Then suddenly two men appeared who were obviously angels. Luke did not know how else to report about them but to describe that they were "*two men... in white robes.*"

In verse 11, these angels said to the disciples not to stand there looking into the sky, because Jesus will come back.

These were angels sent by God. There was a similarity to the appearance of two angels at the empty tomb, the day when Jesus rose again. Luke 24:2-4, "...they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel."

What we learn about the plans of Jesus has an impact on our actions. Jesus plans to come back. The plan is for Jesus to come back. The plan is for Jesus to come back in the same way that Jesus went to heaven. This was not a change of plans. This was the plan all along. This was a repeated announcement and an affirming of the plan that Jesus Himself had taught during His earthly ministry. Consider Luke 21:27, when Jesus said that at the end of the age, men will “...*see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*” Yes, the plan was true and confirmed – that just as Jesus ascended, so also Jesus will come back again. Jesus ascended *in a cloud with power and great glory.* So, we know that Jesus will come back again *in a cloud with power and great glory.*

What does this mean? His return will be visible. His return will be with His physical body. That same glorified human body with which Jesus went into heaven, will be the same physical body with which Jesus will come down out of heaven to earth. In studying the ascension, we learn about the future plans of Jesus!

Conclude:

1) Know Jesus. We learned all this not just to know ABOUT Jesus. We know Him. Instead of searching to find out the timing of the return of Jesus, we need to rejoice in the fact that we know Jesus. Knowing Jesus is our priority. Knowing Jesus is our focus. By faith, we know Christ Jesus our Lord, and we walk with Him, and we get to know Him better through studying His Word. Know Jesus, grow in your knowledge of Jesus’ timing, witnesses, and plans.

2) Remember the current activity of Jesus our King. Jesus remains invisible to us, but He is real and He is active. What is Jesus doing now? Jesus is ruling the church and the world, and Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven. Jesus is praying for us. Jesus is using His Spirit and His Word to guide and protect us.

He is in heaven, and therefore He is entirely blocked from our view. By faith we must remember that Jesus has confirmed that His plans are to come down here in the same way that He went up to heaven, in order to take us to be with Him where He lives in heaven. Consider John 14:2-3, “*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.*” That is our future. The ascension of Jesus encourages us to keep watch for the return of Jesus! He will return in the same way that He went!

3) With Jesus as King, be encouraged about the condition of the worldwide church. The Book of Acts began by reporting about the Ascension of Jesus. At

that time there was a small band of 11 disciples, a few others, a few women, who were eye-witnesses of Jesus' ministry, His crucifixion, His resurrection, but these eye-witnesses were still characterized by grieving and fear.

But how does the story end? The Book of Acts ends very differently. The last verse of the Book of Acts, Acts chapter 28:31, tells us how the apostle Paul was over in the city of Rome for two years, "*proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.*"

The Book of Acts began in fear and loss in Jerusalem, but ended in boldness and expanding victory in the great world city of Rome!

How did that happen? How did the church grow from such small and fearful beginnings in Jerusalem, to, being so big and bold, as Acts 1:8, puts it, from "*Jerusalem... all Judea, ... Samaria, ...and to the end of the earth*"? Answer: The actions of Jesus. Christ's surprise action #1 – crucified. Christ's surprise action #2 – arose. Christ's surprise action #3 – ascended. Christ's surprise action #4 – sending His Spirit. The actions of Jesus give us hope regarding the condition of the worldwide Church. We see fulfilment of the words of Psalm 2, where God the Father said to Jesus, "*I will make the nations Your heritage, and the ends of the earth Your possession.*" Jesus is head over the nations of the world, so that He can use the whole world for the benefit of the church. Psalm 2 ends with these words, "*Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.*"