

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

The time of Jesus earthly ministry was done. In these verses, He stands with His disciples on the Mount of Olives, just outside the city of Jerusalem. This mountain held a special place in the hearts of the Jews and for the disciples of our Lord. It was over the slopes of this mountain that King David had fled Jerusalem with a broken heart during the rebellion of his own son Absalom. It was from this mountain that Jesus had descended, on the back of a donkey, into the city of Jerusalem for His triumphal entry into that city. It was at the foot of this mountain that Jesus gathered with His men in a place called Gethsemane to pray the night He was arrested. It was from that garden that He had been taken away, under arrest, to be tried and crucified by the Jews and the Romans. It was a special place filled with many memories for the Disciples.

This occasion would also be a memorable time. This was time of “**departure**”. Jesus was preparing to ascend back to Heaven from which He had come. He is leaving His men behind. For them, this must have been a difficult moment. They were about to watch the One they had loved, served and worshiped go away. These men had been with Jesus through the good times and the bad times. They had watched Him exercise the power to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cause the lame to walk, the deaf to hear and the blind to see. They had seen Him raise the dead, walk on the water and they had even watched as devils answered His beck and call. Now, they are about to watch Him depart. I am sure as they listen to His final words and wait for the moment His departure, there was sadness, and even a sense of loss.

There are several events in the life of the Lord Jesus that are inseparable. What He is doing this day is completing what He began when He laid aside His robes of glory to be born in the humble village of Bethlehem. His birth, His life, His crucifixion, His resurrection and His ascension are all part of the same process. None could have happened without the rest and everything fails if any is missing. These verses record for us the amazing ascension of the crucified and risen Lord back into the glory He knew before He became a man. This morning we will be talking about the ascension of Jesus back to Heaven to occupy the throne He vacated to come down to earth.

Remember He never stopped being King, He merely laid aside some of His divine prerogatives for a time, **Phil. 2:5-8**.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, :6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, :7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. :8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:5–8 NKJV)

Because of all He did, through the ***Incarnation***, in the ***Crucifixion***, and by His ***Resurrection*** - must now be completed through His Ascension back into His glory in Heaven. So, this morning join with me as we look at, **“THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.”**

I. V. 6-7 THE MYSTERY OF HIS ASCENSION

(III. The question asked by the Apostles seems to indicate that they knew nothing of His going away. They were under the assumption that He would establish His kingdom immediately. They weren't alone in their belief. No one, it seems, anticipated the ascension of Jesus back to Heaven.)

A. **It Was A Mystery To His Prophets** - The ascension is alluded to three times in the Old Testament.

Psalms 24:7 “Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in.

Psalms 68:18 You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, Even from the rebellious, That the Lord God might dwell there.

Psalms 110:1 The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”” (Psalms 24:7; 68:18; 110:1 NKJV)

The prophets seemed to know nothing of this great event. Perhaps this is why the Jews could not conceive of a Messiah Who would die on a cross.

They were expecting a King Who would reign in power and liberate the people of Israel. It is as if the Old Testament prophets could see His first coming and His second coming, but could not see His ascension back to Heaven and the church age in which we are now living.

B. It Was A Mystery To His People - While Jesus was ministering in the midst of His people, He spoke of His ascension on several occasions.

John 6:62 “What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?”

John 7:33 Then Jesus said to them, “I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me.

John 14:28 You have heard Me say to you, “I am going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.

John 16:5 “But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’

John 20:17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’ ”” (John 6:62; 7:33; 14:28; 16:5; 20:17 NKJV)

Yet, it seems, that at the time, none of the disciples understood just what He was saying. They could not grasp the thought that Jesus would be going away.

(Note: Though there may be parts of the Bible I don’t understand, there is enough understanding in order for me to live effectively for Christ. What I don’t want to lose sight of is that I am responsible for the amount of light that God gives me from His word.

Romans 2:12 “For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” (Romans 2:12; James 3:1 NKJV)

II. V. 9 THE MAJESTY OF HIS ASCENSION

(III. For the men who witnessed Jesus and His ascension back to Heaven, it was an event like no other. It was a time of Mystery, yes, but it was also a time of Majesty, as the King of Kings returned to His rightful place in Heaven at the Father's right hand.)

A. **It Was A Heavenly Event** - This was a supernatural event because ***Gravity Released Him!*** Jesus had no problem overcoming the so-called "***Laws of Nature***" while He ministered here on earth. After all, He walked on water, healed the sick, raised the dead, fed great multitudes with impossibly small amounts of food, He even overcame great distances like they were nothing. His ascension is merely one more instance of His power as God. He had already claimed to be deity and He had proven Himself to be deity time after time during the course of His ministry. Here, He proves that He is, without question, the God of the universe.

(**Note:** When the disciples see Him rise up into the air, the Bible says they "***looked steadfastly***". This literally means "***their eyes were on stems***". Their eyes were popping out of their heads as they tried to take in all they were seeing!) (**Note:** I don't know about you, but I am glad this same Jesus is my Lord and my God today! Why? Because He can, will and has exercised the very same power in overcoming the needs and problems in my life! I am glad today that I serve a God Who can!)

B. **It Was A Holy Event** - The Bible tells us that a "***cloud received Him out of their sight***". At the very same instant ***Gravity*** was commanded to ***Release Him***, His ***Glory*** was waiting to ***Reclaim Him!*** This glory had been allowed to surface only once during His lifetime, on the Mount of Transfiguration, **Matt. 17:1-9**. Now, He is received up into His glory once again!

***"Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves;
:2 and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.
:3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.
:4 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."***

:5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”

:6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.

:7 But Jesus came and touched them and said, “Arise, and do not be afraid.”

:8 When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

:9 Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.”” (Matthew 17:1–9 NKJV)

This might be speculative on my part, but I like to think that this;

- Was this the same cloud that had guided the children of Israel as they wandered through the wilderness.
- Was this the same cloud that had stood over the holy of holies in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple.
- Was this the same cloud that protected the holiness of God from the prying eyes of sinful men!

I think that if those men had been able to see beyond that cloud that day, they would have seen the heavens opened to receive their King. They would have seen the angelic hosts watching in wonder as their glorious Lord returned to His home in Heaven. They would have seen the Father rise to greet His returning Son of Whom He was so proud! You see, there was more going on there that met the eyes! God was doing a work into which mere mortals were not allowed to look. He was doing a work culminated the plan of salvation for you and for me!

III. V. 10-11 THE MINISTRY OF HIS ASCENSION

As the disciples watch their Lord depart into Heaven, they are approached by angelic messengers with a message for the Disciples. It is a message of hope and of promise. It is a message that tells them, ***“Jesus may be gone for a short time, but He will return in like manner. So, stop standing here looking up, get out there and get busy!”*** That is still the message the church needs to hear today! Some people want to go to Heaven, but they forget that they are to serve here on the earth while they wait for the trip!

The disciples came off that mountain and got busy doing what the Lord has called them to do! We have a job to do, let's get about it!

There are some important things to bear in mind about Christ return to heaven that have a direct bearing on us.

A. **He Ascended As The Crucified One** -

1. When Jesus returned to Heaven, He returned bearing in His body the marks of the cross. He returned having accomplished redemption on the cross for all who will believe in Him by faith.

John 20:27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

Revelation 5:6 And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth."

2. He returned with His Own blood to present in Heaven as the perfect, eternal, once for all atonement for sin.

***"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool."* (Hebrews 10:12–13 NKJV)**

3. (Illustration: After his defeat at Waterloo, Napoleon was exiled to the island of Sicily. History says that as time and age took their toll on the little Emperor, he would stand looking at a great map of Europe. On that map, there was a red circle around that place where he suffered his ultimate defeat. Napoleon would tap his finger on that red dot and say, "***If it were not for that one red spot, I would be the Emperor of all Europe!***" I can imagine the devil with a map of time before him as he taps on a red spot called Calvary and says, "***If it were not for that red spot called Calvary, I would be the king of the world!***" Friends, Jesus won the victory!)

B. He Ascended As The Conquering One -

1. When He ascended back to Heaven, He ascended as a conquering general Who had invaded the territory of the enemy, ransacked his position, spoiled him and returned in victory to His Own city! This is exactly what the Bible says He did.

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,:14 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.:15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.” (Colossians 2:13–15 NKJV)

2. Then He gathered up those believers who had been imprisoned in the heart of the earth since Adam, and marched back into Heaven as a conquer.

“Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.”” (Ephesians 4:8 NKJV)

- 3.(**Illustration:** After World War I when many French soldiers were returning from fighting the Germans in the trenches, they would approach the city of Paris. There on the Arc de Triumph, built by Napoleon was a robed choir. As the dirty, bloody soldiers approached, some helping their crippled and blind comrades, others still covered with the blood of their fallen friends, that choir would sing out: ***“What right have you to enter the Arc of Triumph?”*** Those soldiers would stop before the choir, lift their voices together and cry, ***“We have been to Verdun! We have been to Verdun!”*** Then, the soldiers would be given a heroes welcome! Imagine the scene in Heaven that day as Jesus made His way into the city. I can hear the angelic hosts crying out as one: ***“What right do you have to enter Heaven!”*** Then, I can hear the answer rising from the throat of the One Who gave voice to the wind, ***“I have been to Calvary!”*** Then I can see the angels bow before Him! I can see the Father rise to meet Him and I hear the Father say for the third time: ***“This is my beloved Son in Who I am well pleased!”***

C. **He Ascended As The Comforting One** - When He returned to Heaven, He did not leave His people alone. He sent His Spirit into the world to indwell, fill, guide and comfort the people of the Lord. He sent the Holy Spirit, Who came bringing gifts for the people of God.

“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 depart, I will send Him to you.” (John 16:7 NKJV)

D. **He Ascended As The Confessing One** - One of the most vital ministries the Lord provides for us is His ministry of intercession.

1. He is our Jesus **Confessor**. ***“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32)***

2. He is our **Mediator**. ***For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,” (1 Timothy 2:5)***

3. He is our **Advocate**. ***“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” (1 John 2:2)***

4. He is our **Intercessor**. ***“Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. (Romans 8:34)***

Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25)

E. **He Ascended As The Confirming One** -

1. His presence in Heaven is the guarantee of our presence in Heaven some day!

“even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), Ephesians 2:6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” (Ephesians 2:5–6 NKJV)

2. He ascended into Heaven as our **“forerunner”!**

“that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

:19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,

:20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 6:18–20 NKJV)

The word **“Forerunner”** refers to **“a scout, a trailblazer, one who charts the course others are to follow.”**

F. **He Ascended As The Coming One** - These two angels promised the disciples that this same Jesus would return in the same manner. They are referring to His second coming! When He went up, He left the promise that He would come down again!

1. When He comes the next time, it will be to receive His people unto Himself and take them to Heaven.

:51 “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51–52)

:13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

:15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)

1. After that, He is returning to rule and reign on this earth for 1,000 years. Are you looking for His return? He's coming and it could be today!

“He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—as I also have received from My Father;” (Revelation 2:27)

CONCLUSION:

After 14 years of studying the Bible, William Miller (1782-1849)--a U.S. revivalist who predicted the second coming and earned a large but temporary following of 50,000-100,000--became convinced that Christ would return in 1843. When Miller announced April 3 as the day, some disciples went to mountaintops, hoping for a head start to heaven. Others were in graveyards, planning to ascend in reunion with their departed loved ones. Philadelphia society ladies clustered together outside town to avoid entering God's kingdom amid the common herd. When April 4 dawned as usual the Millerites were disillusioned, but they took heart. Their leader had predicted a range of dates for Christ's return. They still had until March 21, 1844. The devout continued to make ready, but again they were disappointed. A third date--October 22, 1844--was set, but it also passed.

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