

Week 12

Ascension

Key Verses

Acts 1:9-11 "And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were watching, and a cloud took Him up, out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, then behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them, and they said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

+ Other Descriptions of the Ascension in Scripture:

MARK 16:19 *So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.*

LUKE 24:50-53 *And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.*

+ Introduction

A phrase is often used in our culture, "expect the unexpected." There are times in our lives that we experience something we did not expect. Though those experiences may not happen every day, they happen often enough for that phrase to ring true for most of us.

The reality is that things happen in our lives that we did not see coming, but when it happens, we can look back and see how the dots were connected to make it a reality. We refer to it as 20/20 hindsight. It is not something new for our generation; it has always been this way, even in the days of Jesus. Though the phrase is not used in the New Testament, the disciples realized that they would need to learn to expect the unexpected as Christ Followers:

- On the boat out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee with Jesus on the shore, they would expect to see Jesus when they arrived on the shore. However, Jesus walked on water; expect the unexpected.
- Seeing a man who was lame from birth with no hope of walking, until Jesus says rise and walk; expect the unexpected.
- Coming into Jerusalem with people lining the streets with palm branches and saying, *'Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, indeed, the King of Israel!'*; a few days later watching Jesus be arrested in the darkness of the night, tried and crucified; expect the unexpected.
- Jesus, having died on the cross and buried in the tomb with the stone rolled in place; it was over. However, expect the unexpected – three days later, He rose from the grave.
- And then Jesus ate with people, talked with people, signifying life after death since He was risen! He was back, what an incredible ministry they would have now with the resurrected Jesus walking with them.
- Then, 40 days after the resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven; expect the unexpected.

At the end of that time on earth, Jesus was *"lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."* (Acts 1:9) Though Jesus was no longer physically present on earth, He was very much walking with and guiding His disciples to do His work.

The purpose of this lesson is to understand the Ascended Christ better, to see the benefits Christians receive by His presence in heaven, to see the work He is doing today, and to look forward to what He is preparing for our future!

✦ Jesus' Earthly Mission is Complete

For a specific purpose, Jesus came to this earth, to seek and save the lost. (Luke 19:10). From Bethlehem to Galilee to Gethsemane to Calvary, Jesus was on a mission from heaven. Every step taken, every word spoken, every life touched, every miracle performed had meaning and purpose. Nothing Jesus did was by accident or happenstance.

As we have seen in previous lessons, Jesus was fully human and fully divine. It was His human mission that was limited by time and space. It was His divine mission that has no limitations by time or space. As the human mission of Jesus was complete with His death, burial, and resurrection, it was the Ascension that transitioned to the divinity of the eternal.

A. Jesus' Ascension Followed His Completed Mission on Earth

EPHESIANS 1:20-23 *He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things*

in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

HEBREWS 1:3 ...*When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

B. Glimpses of Jesus after His Ascension

Jesus was no longer physically accessible to His disciples daily as He had been for 3+ years. They were accustomed to seeing and touching Him, laughing and talking with Him, traveling and fishing together face to face and side by side.

Although Jesus was not physically around, this did not mean He was absent. His presence was felt not only by the Holy Spirit (which we looked at in a previous lesson), but He would reveal Himself on some unique occasions that proved to be significant to those in the 1st Century as the church was birthed. Two examples are:

- **Standing at the Stoning of Stephen** – Acts 7:56
- **Appearing to Paul on the Road to Damascus** – Acts 9:3-6

✚ Jesus' Heavenly Mission Continues

Though Jesus was no longer physically on this earth, His Ascension was not the end of His work; it was merely a transference of location.

Jesus prepared the disciples for this time, though it was still an unexpected reality. While Jesus was in their presence, they had doubt, fear, and even denial. Jesus was with the disciples in the boat during a massive storm in the middle of the night, and they were still afraid. Jesus had been arrested and in the same courtyard area as Peter, and Peter denied knowing Him. Jesus was physically in front of Thomas, and He still doubted that it was the resurrected Jesus.

Jesus had told His disciples that it would be to their advantage that He go away (John 16:7). Jesus had told them they would not be alone, but there would be a Helper who would come to assist. Jesus knew that the Holy Spirit would come in such a way to give them power, comfort, and confidence once He ascended.

After the Ascension, Peter, who had denied knowing Jesus, gave the first sermon at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. Further, disciples who had run away when Jesus was arrested put their lives on the line with the message of the Gospel after the Ascension, many being arrested themselves.

The Ascension of Jesus did not mean the absence of Jesus. He was still ever-present. In fact, Jesus was still working and fulfilling His ultimate mission while in heaven for those on this earth. Jesus is our advocate before the Father (1 John 2:2). Jesus intercedes for us as our High Priest as we see referenced in Hebrews:

HEBREWS 4:14 *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. (NIV)*

The power and purpose of Jesus were not limited to those few years on this earth; instead, they were part of the eternal purpose that is still lived out even today in heaven.

MARK 16:20 *Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed His word by the signs that accompanied it. (NIV)*

Jesus was never going to leave or forsake His disciples. The relationship with Him is eternal, not based on geography. As He is in heaven on the throne, He still reigns with purpose, providence, and promise. Wayne Grudem explains,

“Just as a human king sits on his royal throne at his accession to the kingship but then engages in many other activities throughout each day, so Christ sat at the right hand of God as a dramatic evidence of the completion of his redemptive work and his reception of authority over the universe, but he is certainly engaged in other activities in heaven as well.”¹

✦ Jesus' Ascension Provides Anticipation for the Believer's Future

The realization of the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus gives us hope that leads to an anticipation of the future. Paul knew to live is Christ, to die is gain (Philippians 1:21). Even at the end of his life, as he wrote to Timothy, Paul anticipated what would be waiting for Him because Jesus had ascended to heaven.

2 TIMOTHY 4:7-8 *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;⁸ in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

Grudem tells us, “Just as the resurrection has profound implications for our lives, so Christ's Ascension has significant implications for us.”²

Here is a small list of what the Ascension provides:

- The anticipation of the future Ascension of all Christians. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- The anticipation that heaven is a real place for real people. John 14:2-3
- The anticipation that Jesus was the “First Fruits” for other believers. 1 Corinthians 15:20
- The anticipation that we will share in Christ's authority. Ephesians 2:6; 6:12, 2 Corinthians 10:4

+ What Is Jesus Doing Today?

Jesus is active and working on our behalf and fulfilling His mission even today. Scriptures tell us of the activities of Jesus taking place because of His Ascension.

- **Jesus is Ruling over Angels, Authorities, and Powers in Heaven**

1 PETER 3:21-22 ...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11 For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- **Jesus is Preparing a Place for Us**

JOHN 14:2 In My Father's house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you.

- **Jesus is Preparing to Return for Us** 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, John 14:3

- **Jesus is Preparing to Judge the World**

MATTHEW 25:31 But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

- **Jesus' Ascension Provides Reason for Worship and Joy** Luke 24:52-53

- **Jesus' Ascension Provides Help When We Are Tempted**

HEBREWS 2:18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

- **Jesus' Ascension Motivates Us To Serve Him** Colossians 1:13-14;
Luke 12:34-48

- **Jesus' Ascension Motivates Us To Keep Our Eyes On Him As We Run "The Race" of Life** Hebrews 12:1-2

+ Conclusion

We would expect that Jesus not being in our physical midst would be disconcerting. We are accustomed to trusting in that which we can see and touch. But we are to expect the unexpected.

Jesus is ever-present in the lives of all Christians everywhere on earth.

Because Jesus has returned to heaven and has shed his human body, He is now free from any limits that men and women physically experience. He has returned home, and He is without limitations. There is no place He cannot be. When He walked the earth, He experienced the limits of a human body. If He was in Jerusalem, He was not at the same time in Bethany. He chose to limit His glory and limit His power; but now He is with us always, even to the very end of the age. He will never leave us nor forsake us. There is nothing that will separate us from the love of Christ. When we walk through hard times, He is there. When we fall, He is there. When we experience His power and provision, He is there. Jesus is always there; He will always be there because He has ascended into heaven. He is without limitation!

Remember what the two angels told the disciples at the Ascension: *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”* Acts 1:9-11

Since Jesus is coming again, we need to be about His business! Immediately before Jesus' Ascension, He gave some marching orders for our focus until our time on earth is over, or until He comes again in power. Let us be about the business of telling the world about the love of our Ascended Savior: Jesus Christ, The King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords!

ACTS 1:8 *...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*

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¹ Wayne Grudem, Bible Doctrine, Zondervan Academic, 2019, p. 267.

² Ibid.