

## NOTES FROM PASTOR TIM'S SERMON 23rd April 2023 am Series from Luke – “God’s love for the lowest” Pt 17

**Text: Luke 24 verses 36-53 Title: “Jesus absent but still active”.**

**Luke 24:36-53** As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” <sup>37</sup> But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup> See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” <sup>40</sup> And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marvelling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>[b]</sup> <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate before them. <sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance for <sup>[c]</sup> the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” <sup>50</sup> And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup> and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Have you ever heard a sermon on the ascension of Jesus? It is likely that your answer is not as far as you can remember!

- Do you understand what this doctrine teaches and why it is important?
- Does the truth that Jesus ascended to heaven fill your heart with hope and joy?

**The ascension of Jesus has huge implications for our faith.**

Much of what we take for granted in our Christian lives hangs on what we read in the final verses of Luke’s Gospel and at the start of the book of Acts. As we have worked through Luke’s Gospel, we have seen that

- Jesus was born to a virgin, fully God and fully man in one being
- He lived a life of perfect obedience to God’s law
- Despite this, Jesus died the death of a sinner on a Roman cross

However, three days later he was raised to life in a resurrection body. That body was a real flesh and bones body. Jesus was not a spirit, and his body is as fit today as it was when he walked out of the tomb. All of that happened 2000 years ago, and was witnessed by his followers.

- Where is Jesus now? If his body is able to live forever, where did he go?

Luke tells us in vv50-53 (above) and again at the start of Acts: **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. (1:6).** Eyewitness accounts tell us that while his disciples were watching, Jesus was lifted up as he was blessing them, and was carried up from the earth. He ascended from the earth into heaven.

Today, Jesus is **physically** absent from us, but we know that he is **spiritually** present. Scripture gives us that assurance. Jesus has said that he will never leave us or forsake us. By his Spirit, he dwells in our hearts by faith. We are able to experience true fellowship with Christ now and can enjoy his presence wherever we are.

**We cannot see him physically, but that does not mean he is inactive in our lives now.** As Jesus was taken away from the disciples, he was doing something hugely significant for them (vv50-51).

### **Jesus was blessing them**

To bless someone is to ask God to act with kindness toward them so that they will experience God's help, grace and mercy. In blessing them as he was being taken up into heaven, Jesus was showing them, and us, what he will be doing while he is in heaven. While he was on earth, he lived his life blessing others and he continues that work now.

**Jesus may be physically absent from us but he is active in heaven now on our behalf to bless us.**

There are at least four aspects of the blessing of Christ on his disciples that are valid for us too.

1. **Our Saviour is ruling for us.** During his trial, Jesus had said to his accusers: **But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God. (Luke 22:69).** That is what happened when he went back to heaven. We will

soon see the coronation of King Charles, and it promises to be a spectacular ceremony, but 2000 years ago a far more significant coronation happened when

### **Jesus sat down on the throne of God.**

The angels sang with thunderous praise at the birth of Jesus, so we can be sure that thunderous praise rang out after he defeated sin, death and Satan. Jesus took his seat on the highest throne in the universe and surely the foundations of heaven shook with the sound of angels shouting and singing praise to God, as they welcomed the triumphant Christ!

Jesus' words to his accusers referred to a prophecy from Daniel, given centuries earlier: **"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.<sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14)**

Charles will be crowned king over Britain and 14 other Commonwealth realms, and is head of state for some 150 million people, while he lives. Jesus' reign is quite different.

- Jesus rules over **every** nation on earth, and has authority over some 8 billion people.
- Jesus rules **forever**. His kingdom will never be destroyed.
- Jesus rules over the whole of the **spiritual realm**. Angels, demons and even Satan are subject to him.
- Jesus rules over the whole of the **natural world**. Tsunamis, earthquakes, the flight of a bird and the course fish take all come under his sovereign rule.

Right now, there is a real man in heaven, a man with a flesh and bones body – the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who is both God and man, reigning over the universe from the throne that is above every throne.

### **If you are a believer, then he is your Saviour.**

That means that the one who loves us and gave his life to secure our salvation rules over everything that we find fearful, governs every person who scares us, commands every spiritual being to do his will,

and has authority over all sickness and natural disasters.

**We do not need to fear anything because everything is under the authority of King Jesus who uses all these things for our ultimate good.**

**Our Saviour is ruling for us**

**2. Our Saviour is interceding for us.** In the Christian context, to intercede means to speak to God in prayer on behalf of someone. When Jesus was physically present on earth, his disciples saw and heard him interceding on their behalf to his Father in heaven. Jesus prayed that God would make them holy, keep them saved and united and one day bring them to heaven to see Christ in his glory on the throne.

- Take time this week to read his prayer **John 17** for yourself.

The apostles assure us that Christ continues to intercede for his people – that is for us.

- **For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into**

**heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. (Hebrews 9:24)**

- **Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right**

**hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (Romans 8:34)**

Right now, Jesus is praying for us and pleading our right to stand in the presence of God and come to God with our own prayers. We do not need to be afraid that God will turn us away. At his right hand is the one who atoned for our sins and clothes us with his own righteousness.

- We are accepted, and our prayers are accepted, because of Jesus.

No matter what you are facing right now, you can be assured that Jesus is praying that you will be kept and given all you need to face the trial in a way that will lead to your growth in holiness.

**Our Saviour is before the throne of God interceding for us,  
giving us the right to come to God as our Father,  
taking our prayers and offering them as if they were his own.**

**3. Our Saviour is preparing a place for us.** Before Jesus was arrested, his disciples were deeply troubled by what he told them would happen. In order to reassure

them, Jesus spoke these words of comfort: **Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.** <sup>2</sup> **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?** <sup>3</sup> **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.** <sup>4</sup> **And you know the way to where I am going.** (John 14:1-4)

There is much about heaven that the Bible doesn't tell us, and we must not speculate, but we can be sure that heaven is a real place, where Jesus in his flesh and bones body has gone. Jesus went into Heaven in a resurrected body and sits on a real throne. He tells us that it is a place that is big enough for all his people and that he is preparing a place for us. Through his death and resurrection, he has secured for us a right to live in his Father's home.

**We cannot conceive what heaven will be like**

**but we shall see Jesus and be with him, in a real place with resurrected bodies.**

**Our Saviour is preparing a place for us**

**4. Our Saviour is coming back for us.** Jesus said **I will come again and will take you to myself (John 14:3).**

After Jesus had ascended, the angels were sent to the disciples to say to them: **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 1:11)

Paul wrote: **But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,** <sup>21</sup> **who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.** (Phil 3:20-21)

The Bible assures us that this world will not continue as it is. Jesus is coming back and when he does, he will make all things new. We can be sure of this because the resurrection, ascension and return of Jesus assure us that

- Death may take our bodies but we get them back in a far better way
- Death may take our family but we get back the true family, God's family
- Death may take us from this world but we get it back without the curse to ruin it.

**Everything that death takes from us, we will get back.**

**Best of all, we get to share it with Jesus forever.**

If Jesus had **NOT** ascended to heaven, then:

- We would have no one ruling over everything that scares us
- We would have no representative interceding for us in heaven
- We would have no place being prepared for us in God's home
- We would have no one to come back from heaven to take us to be with him

**Jesus may be physically absent but he is active on our behalf to bless us.**

- How should we respond to the fact of the ascension? How did the disciples respond?

Their best friend was being taken away from them, after a chain of events that had caused them to be deeply sorrowful. Yet, amazingly, what we read (above) is that **they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,<sup>53</sup> and were continually in the temple blessing God. (vv52-3).**

How did that happen? Jesus opened their minds to understand all that the scriptures said about him (**v45** above).

- Now, they understood why he had to die, be raised to life and return.

Having their minds opened to the scriptures resulted in great joy for them. This surely is a great driver for us to spend more time in the Bible, so that we too find that joy, which results in two activities:

**a) Worship:** When we begin to understand the blessing Jesus achieved for us through his ascension, then our lives will be marked with real joy and we won't be able to stop ourselves worshipping God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It changes everything.

**b) Witness:** The disciples told people what they had seen and heard. They could not and did not keep their joy to themselves but wanted others to come to Jesus and find the same joy. When we have the blessing of being united to Christ, how can we keep quiet about it? Jesus' last command to his disciples was to witness to what they had seen and heard. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit to empower us to do this.

As we await the return of Jesus, we have the assurance that:

- Jesus rules over everything for us
- Jesus is interceding for us

- Jesus is preparing a place in God's home for us
- Jesus is coming back for us.

Our joyful response is to worship out of our growing knowledge of Christ  
and to witness in the power of the Holy Spirit.