

NOTES FROM TONY BENNETT's SERMON 28th May pm

New Series "Kingship" Pt 4

Jesus: the ascended King"

Text: Acts 1 verses 1-11

Scripture references from the ESV

Acts 1:1-11 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.⁴ And while staying^[a] 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; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ 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." ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ 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."

The world around us may celebrate Christmas and Easter, albeit with Father Christmas and Easter eggs, but the ascension of Christ is completely ignored. Even the Christian Church makes little of what is actually the glorious and crowning climax of the Gospel. Without the ascension there can be no Pentecost. We have seen in the previous sermon that Jesus was the promised King who was, from the time of his transfiguration, on the way to Jerusalem, but we often fail to realise that the real climax of the journey is when Jesus leaves Jerusalem through his ascension.

We are looking here at **vv6-11**, which can be split into three parts – Assignment, Ascension and Assurance

1. **The disciples' assignment (vv6-8).** Jesus gave the disciples their assignment, but first they asked him a question which showed they still had a lot to learn, as do we! There are two errors of understanding in this question which we also need to avoid.

a) **They clearly still did not understand the purposes of Christ for them or for the world.** They still thought that Jesus had come to do something only for ethnic-geographic Israel. They had forgotten that God had promised to Abraham that 'in you **all the families of the earth shall be blessed**'. We exhibit the same blinkered vision when we think that certain people or types of people are beyond the reach of the Gospel.

b) **They thought it was possible to predict the future simply by present events.** The disciples did not appreciate that the purpose of the interval between Jesus' ascension and his return was not the restoration of an independent kingdom of Israel, but the church's worldwide evangelisation and witness to Christ. Jesus answered their question in v7. We need to take on board the lesson that there are things that it is not for us to know. We are told in **Deuteronomy 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.** It is acceptable to own to not knowing things about what God is doing, because there are things that are not ours to know. One commentator has said 'Our knowledge is not complete, but it is sufficient to enable us to live an obedient life'. So often we want to know the things that God has NOT told us!

From hereon, the disciples devote themselves to the proclamation and service of God's spiritual kingdom – a kingdom to be entered by repentance and faith, and in which the chief honour belongs to the risen ascended king. In v8, Jesus speaks of their being equipped for that assignment. It is still the church's assignment today, both as individuals and as the church, to be witnesses to the gospel of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, winning souls for his kingdom.

2. **The Lord's Ascension (v9).** When you think of Jesus today, what picture comes into your mind? Do you think of:

- The incarnation – Jesus as a baby lying in a manger. It’s important but **that is not where Jesus is today**
- The crucifixion – Jesus on the cross. The crucifixion explains the incarnation, but **that is not where Jesus is today**
- The resurrection – the risen Saviour speaking peace to his disciples. **Jesus is not walking among us today**

Scripture leaves us not with a baby born, or a man crucified, or even a Saviour risen, but with a King ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father.

Jesus had told his disciples: **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 go, I will send him to you.** (John 16:7).

His last two recorded conversations with the disciples are about the coming of the Holy Spirit (**vv5,8** above). Then Luke records the ascension (**v9**), from which we need to take three things.

- a) It clearly marked the end of his earthly ministry.** When Jesus rose from the tomb, he had a physical body, but it was also a marvellous, mysterious body that transcended the ordinary limitations of time and space. He could just appear and then disappear. The disciples needed to understand that, this time, he would not reappear. He had gone away.
- b) The Ascension clearly points to the glory of God, thereby confirming his deity.** The cloud was none other than the Shekinah cloud – the biblical symbol of God’s very presence.
 - It had appeared as both guide and safety to God’s people in the wilderness and on Mount Sinai at the giving of the law to Moses
 - It had filled the Temple at its consecration at the time of King Solomon
 - It featured in the vision of God’s glory given to Ezekiel at his commissioning as a prophet of God
 - It was in Daniel’s vision of one like a son of man who came to the Ancient of Days.

Most significantly at the transfiguration, **a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud (God’s voice) said, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.** All this clearly points to the deity of Christ.

c) **The ascension was a visible demonstration of Jesus' promotion.** Jesus had always been divine, but his human body had never before occupied the place of honour at the right hand of the Father. It is an extraordinary thing that God returned to heaven in human flesh. One commentator said; 'The dust of the earth now sits on the throne of heaven.

What is the Ascended Christ doing there?

- The Ascended Christ bestows gifts on the true church **to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,** ¹³ **until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,** ^[e] **to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ** (Eph 4:12-13) The greatest gift he give is the Holy Spirit to indwell us and sanctify us.
- He acts as intercessor and intermediary between the true believer and the Father. **He (Christ) always lives to make intercession for them.** (Hebrews 7:25). **He appears in the presence of God on our behalf.** (Hebrews 9:24)
- The Ascended Christ succours us in temptation. **For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.** (Hebrews 2:28). He prays for us at the throne of his Father in heaven.
- The Ascended Christ acts as a forerunner. **We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,** ²⁰ **where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf,** (Hebrews 6:19-20). He has entered heaven ahead of us, securing us in heaven and making us safe from the storms of life whilst we wait to enter heaven ourselves.
- The Ascended Christ has gone **to prepare a place** for us (John 14:2). Jesus went on to say: 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 what the Ascended Christ is doing in heaven today.

3) Our Assurance (vv10-11) The Ascension is vitally important because it reminds us so clearly of the truth that Jesus is both human and divine, and that this is how we should think of him today. Jesus' humanity was not a temporary phase of God's self-revelation that would be superseded by some 'higher' form. The manner of

his ascension tells us that he remained the same Jesus when he returned to God's space and time as was when he told his disciples to touch him and see that it was really him.

v11 tells us that this Jesus will come in the same way as they saw him go into heaven. That is a wonderful assurance if you are a believer. Jesus, the eternal Son of God will still have his glorified nature and body. The disciples had seen him go in cloud and glory, and in cloud and glory he will return.

However, his return will have differences.

- His ascension was private, but his return, although personal, will be public. **Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, (Rev 1:7).**
- He will not return alone, but will be accompanied by millions of his holy ones – both human and angelic.

Are you a true believer, who will rejoice on that day, or will it be a day of terror for you? Think carefully.

In these verses (6-11 above), Luke shows us that the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ is an important truth, and should not be neglected. We too easily think of Jesus

- **In the past tense**, having died and been raised from the dead
- **In the future** as coming again in glory

We fail to think of Jesus **in the present tense**, as one who is alive and reigning on high and who is right now bestowing gifts upon us, interceding for us, succouring us in temptation, acting as our forerunner and preparing a place for us.

The truth of the ascension gives all believers great comfort.

Jesus is in heaven on our behalf.

**Christian hope, Christian life, Christian faith and Christian theology
are all bound up in and point towards
our exalted Christ, our Ascended King.**

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

(Colossians 3:1-2)