

INTRODUCTION

In these 40 days, Jesus has appeared to more than 500 at one time, 1 Corinthians 15:6-7 “After that, He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles.” His bodily appearance was well documented and proven to the disciples and many others.

Jesus never condemned them for not fully understanding what they saw, cf. vs. Luke 24:41. Jesus did say to the two on the road to Emmaus, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25). Oh, how we can be slow of heart. What Jesus taught those gathered in Luke 24:36-49 is comforting and exciting, even being slow to believe. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus “That everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled”, cf. vs. 44. Therefore, you are to be witnesses now of what you have seen and what has been fulfilled, cf. vs. 48. Go and wait for the promise.

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS (VS. 50-53)

The Ascension is more than the last event in Luke's narrative sequence or a postscript to the Resurrection. He had already mentioned it as Jesus' ultimate goal in his great journey toward Jerusalem, Luke 9:51 “When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem.” The brevity of the account here at the close of Luke's gospel is not the measure of Luke's estimate of its importance. His words here, though few, are weighty with theological significance and very much in character with the entire book. Of the gospel authors, only Luke records the Ascension.¹

The blessing of Jesus, cf. vs. 50. This was a priestly action. Jesus is our prophet, priest, and king. Hebrews 4:14 “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.” Luke closes out his gospel with these important truths:

- He was carried up into heaven, and heaven is not a fictitious space
- They returned as He had said they should
- They worshiped Him with great joy
- They continually praised God in the temple

Note: Something has definitely changed, from a knowledge of facts to a real application in their lives.

THE DOCTRINAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS ASCENSION (ACTS 1:1-11) AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR US TODAY

Just as the doctrinal significance of His resurrection ensures us of our regeneration, 1 Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” It also ensures our justification, Romans 4:25 “He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.” It also ensures our resurrected bodies, 1 Corinthians 6:14 “Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.”

¹ Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): New Testament

What doctrinal significance is there for us about His ascension? These verses in Luke 24 and Acts are clearly designed to show the disciples that **Jesus went to a place**. He didn't just suddenly disappear. Acts 1:9-11 describe several important things. **First**, as they were looking on, He was lifted up and the cloud of what is God's glory took Him away. **Second**, the promise from the angels that He would return. **Third**, He was taken to heaven, **a place, a real place**, not some disappearing act.

Just because you cannot see the place nor fathom where it is, doesn't mean it's not there. Jesus ascended with a resurrected body, not a ghost or spirit form. Jesus didn't just go "somewhere", He went to heaven. Our eyes can't see the glories of heaven nor can they see the spiritual world around us. Elisha could not see the angels protecting him until the Lord opened his eyes to see, 1 Kings 6:17 **"And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."** When Stephen was dying, the first martyr, God gave him a special ability to see a world hidden from our eyes, Acts 7:56-57 **"He gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."**

How does the ascension affect us today? **First**, because His going up to heaven **foreshadows our future ascension**. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 **"Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord."** This affirms Acts 1:11 **"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."** Our Lord Jesus Himself affirms He will get us and we will be with Him, John 14:3 **"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."**

Second, His ascension assures us that our **final home will be in heaven**. John 14:2 **"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you."** Jesus says He is going to prepare a place, **not an imaginary sphere somewhere**, but a **place**, where there are **rooms, mansions, dwelling places**. And it's for us specifically. Consider this, that we are going to follow Him to a place He ascended to and forever be with the Lord.

Heaven, however, if you ask all too often even Christians, will come up with some sort of **earthly-minded** place. Too often we want **heaven to be like us or how we like it**. But what does the Bible say? And when Jesus went to prepare a place, as He said, what does this mean?

- Heaven is the **dwelling place of God**, Matthew 6:9 **"Our Father who is in heaven"**, Psalm 103:19 **"The Lord has established His throne in the heavens."**
- The intermediate state of believers when they **die** is to be **immediately with Christ**, 2 Corinthians 5:8 **"I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."** Philippians 1:23 **"But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better."**
- The final state, a new heaven and new earth. There's a scene in Revelation 7:9-10 which has several different interpretations as for timing, but one of the most logical ones is the scene of the **redeemed gathered** before the new heavens and earth, **"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."** This is often described as **"The multitude is**

currently being gathered through the preaching of the Gospel. As believers die and enter the presence of God, they join this heavenly session.”

- Revelation 21, 22 speak of a new heaven and new earth
- Romans 8:19-23 speak of creation itself being redeemed and its longing for such
- We are looking for a place where righteousness dwells, 2 Peter 3:13 “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”

Consider this hope we have because He has ascended to heaven, Revelation 22:4 “They will see His face.” Matthew 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The highest joy in heaven isn’t going to be gifts or rewards or us, it’s God Himself. This is why the resurrection and ascension of Christ is vital to our heavenly thinking. It’s home. It’s a place where we will see God. We will sing. We will rejoice. No sin. No doubts. No off-key notes. No sadness. It will be eternal worship, cf. Revelation 5:11-14. Psalm 16:11 defines this joy “You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.”

Third, He will come in the same way. The phrase will come is a compound verb. It has both a tense and aspect, which means “It describes an action that has not yet happened but is expected to occur later. It expresses a fact or a completed action in the future rather than a continuous or perfected state.” In Greek, it is a future indicative tense, and in English, it requires two words, “will come.” It’s not up for debate or uncertain or may happen; it will. And because He ascended to heaven, a real place where we will be with Him, He will come again.

Throughout the centuries, debate has been about the timing of His return. But the clear fact is that He will return. He will make a sudden and visible return, Matthew 24:44 “For this reason, you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.” We are told He will come as you have seen Him leave, and the Lord Himself will descend from heaven, cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Here is the great hope of us who are waiting, Hebrews 9:28 “So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.”

BECAUSE OF HIS ASCENSION, WE LONG FOR HIS RETURN

At the close of Revelation, John affirms His message of His return, Revelation 22:20 “He who testifies to these things says, yes, I am coming quickly. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” The hope of His return should be rooted in how we live now. Titus 2:13-14 “Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.”

Wayne Grudem asks this question, “Do Christians in fact eagerly await His return? The more Christians are caught up enjoying the good things of this life, and the more they neglect Christian fellowship and their personal relationship with Christ, the less they will long for His return.” Does this apply to you? Have you considered that He could return at any time? This doesn’t mean you don’t make plans, even long-term plans, but has your comfort and ease made you numb to the fact He is returning?

On the other hand, there are Christians. For example, in the DRC, Muslims for the past two decades have attempted to expel Christians from the area by burning their churches and killing local church leaders. Yet, many churches in the DRC have outreaches in the Muslim areas. The less one has a hold of the things of this world, the more one longs for

the return of Christ. The more physical suffering one endures, the more one looks for His return. The reason the Lord does not remove the thorns in our flesh is so our eyes don't wander. Some in here today need some thorns.

Application: to some degree, the extent we long for His return is a barometer of our spiritual condition. It also gives us a measure of degree as to how we see the world. Jesus said this world wasn't His home. And it's not ours either. Christians cannot get comfortable here. We aren't to be passive and do nothing either. 1 Corinthians 10:31 "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Ecclesiastes 9:10 "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." Ecclesiastes 11 tells us not to sit on our hands and wander, but to do and sew and plant. Yet, all of these verses are the joy God gives us to do and plan and work here, but it's not our home. The fact is Jesus has told us to "be ready".

No doubt on that day, there will be missionaries ready to depart the airport, yet never reach their destination. Seminarians working on the doctorate that will never finish. Men about to preach their first sermon that will never be able to do so. Men and women working on years of research and never able to apply it. However, all are looking and ready, but busy and fruitful and will hear the words of our Lord in Matthew 25:21 "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."²

Go ahead finish that basement project, go to work, plan to retire from a job, plan that mission trip and VBS, but look and be ready.

² ESV