

What Jesus Did Next

PHBF 04.11.10

TEXT: selections from Acts

SCR. READING: Acts 1:1-11

**Words for kids: ascension, Jesus,

SERIES: From the Manger To the Cross For the World

Quiz question: What key event of Jesus' life is anticipated in the OT, narrated in the gospels, alluded to over 3 dozen times in the epistles, mentioned in numerous historical creeds and confessions (Apostles Creed, Nicene Creed, Westminster Confession, Heidelberg Catechism), and celebrated by major portions of the Christian church, but generally neglected in evangelical Protestantism?

The Ascension. PHBF Statement of Faith, Article IV "Jesus Christ": "We believe in Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son, who fully possesses the same nature and attributes as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. He is not only true God but true Man, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. We believe in His sinless life, His substitutionary atonement, His bodily resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven, His priestly intercession on behalf of His people, and His personal, visible return from heaven."

It's what Jesus did next. But it's more than just another happening in Jesus' life. It's the culmination, the crowning moment, and one of the enduring achievements of His life. Two points: 1) What the ascension means; 2) Why the ascension matters.

WHAT THE ASCENSION MEANS

Four aspects of meaning: two practical, two theological

1. The end of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances

The event itself was intended to show the disciples that Jesus was decisively leaving. The alternative would have been another disappearance... which would have left them waiting for another reappearance. He didn't suddenly disappear, never to reappear again; He departed in a manner that left no uncertainty about where He was—a final declaration that He was gone for good. His words, the physical phenomena, the angels' words—it all was calculated to serve notice to the disciples that He was finally gone.

2. Jesus' transition to another realm

The way the ascension played out made it clear that Jesus didn't just change places from one location to another. It wasn't just a transition from here to there. The clouds (Acts 1:9) are significant—not your everyday variety white fluff made of water vapor. This cloud is the manifestation of God's presence, the same cloud that had surrounded them on the Mount of Transfiguration and which in the OT was the aura of glory surrounding God Himself. Jesus isn't a human rocket launching through space to a really distant planet or galaxy called "heaven." He was changing realms altogether.

3. The climax of Luke and the preface to Acts

i.e., the ascension is the culmination of Jesus' earthly ministry and the beginning of His new heavenly ministries

Luke mentions the ascension twice—Luke 24:50-53 & Acts 1:9-11. Why does Luke tell this story twice, especially since the other gospel writers don't tell it at all? Because it suits his theological purposes.

In the gospel narrative, the ascension was His end game all along:

Luke 9:51 *When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*

It is a fitting conclusion to His life—an end to the humility of His incarnation and the culmination of His earthly ministry. The ascension reiterates the gospel principle of suffering then glory—"whoever humbles himself will be exalted." In this sense we could have summed up Luke's theme: "From the Manger To the Throne For the World."

This was the point from the very beginning:

Luke 1:30-33 ³⁰ *And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

When does this prophecy come true? When does Jesus receive the throne of David? In just a moment, we'll see that it was at His ascension.

This is the backdrop against which Luke begins to narrate the story of the early church and the spread of the gospel. In Acts, the ascension sets the stage for all that follows. Jesus commissions the apostles for their mission, promises the Holy Spirit, and ascends to His throne to reign as Lord of the church until His return in similar glory.

4. Jesus' exaltation to the right hand of the Father

The resurrection made specific points about Jesus: He was the conqueror of sin and the victor over death. Likewise, the ascension made a specific point: He was the universal Lord.

Acts 2:29-36 ²⁹ "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, ³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool." ³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

1. v 30 David received a promise that one of his descendants would sit on his throne (2 Sam 7:8-17, Ps 89:3-4).
2. This promise of God was partially fulfilled in the resurrection (vv 31-32, cf. vv 24-28) of Jesus.
3. This promise was completely fulfilled at the ascension (vv 33-35, esp. v 34), which Peter takes as the fulfillment of Psalm 110:1.

The ascension is Stage Two of a 3-stage process whereby Jesus was exalted. The resurrection is 1, the ascension 2, and His enthronement (or session) is 3. ILLUS: appointment of a new President: election (Nov), presidential interregnum, inauguration (Jan 20)

At this time, He received a new level of glory and honor: Acts 2:23 (cf Phil 2:9). Before the incarnation, He was God. Then during His earthly life, He was the God-MAN. After His ascension, He was the GOD-man.

Notice that the pre-ascension appearance of His body did not startle the disciples, although He did have some physical properties that defy what we can do with our present bodies. But when He appears personally after the ascension – Paul (Acts 9:17, 26:16, 1 Cor 15:8) and John (Rev 1) – His glory cannot be concealed (cf. also Rev 19:11-16).

At this time, He sat down at God's right hand as predicted in the OT (cf. Ps 110:1 and Hb 1:3). Taking His seat in this location shows both His exalted authority (Eph 1:20-21, 1 Pet 3:22) and His completed redemptive ministry. At this point, He was ready to pour out the Holy Spirit on His people (Acts 2:33).

The ascension is a redemptive event of profound importance. It marks the moment of Christ's highest point of exaltation prior to His return. It is in the ascension that Christ entered into His glory. ...Jesus' ascension refers to His going to a special place for a special purpose. He goes to the Father, to the Father's right hand. He rises to the seat of cosmic authority. Jesus goes to heaven for his coronation, His confirmation as King of Kings. (R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, pp 95-96)

WHY THE ASCENSION MATTERS

1. Frees us from fear in the cause of the gospel

The ascension emboldens us to make radical sacrifices for the cause of His kingdom. The ascension assures us that Jesus is sitting at the Father's right hand in the seat of all authority. And Jesus' authority is the reason we can go to all the nations:

Matthew 28:18-20 *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (cf. Eph 1:20-21)

The angels reminded the apostles that their business wasn't up in heaven. Star-gazing wasn't their calling. They were called to a mission here on the earth. APP: A pietistic dream of heavenly bliss misses the point of earthly mission. NOTE: Shake the Nations Missions Conf.

2. Provides for the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives

Acts 1:1 Jesus has only begun. What we've read in Luke is only the beginning. Without the ascension, there is no Pentecost. There is no outpouring of the Spirit. There are no gifts.

Jesus told His disciples that if He did not leave, the Spirit would not come (Jn 16:7). Every time we see the work of the Holy Spirit—an unsaved person repents or a Christian person uses one of their spiritual gifts—realize that this moment is a living reminder of Jesus' ascension.

Ephesians 4:7-10 *But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." ⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)*

The ascension does not mean Jesus is no longer here; it means He's now here everywhere, in believers by the Spirit. So give up your low expectations, insurmountable problems, lifeless spirituality... those are unworthy of what we would expect of Jesus.

3. Ensures us that we have an intercessor before the Father

Acts 7:55-56 ⁵⁵ *But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (cf. Hb 8:1-2, Rom 8:34)*

Giving rise to the early church's devotedness to prayer.

4. Inspires joy and worship

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God. Lk 24:50-53

When Jesus first told the disciples He would be leaving, they were filled with sorrow (Jn 16:6). But when the moment came, they worshipped. Why the change? They understood the ascension.

In fact, they had begun to understand what it meant for them that Jesus had come "From the Manger" and gone "To the Cross" as a sacrifice "For the World."

Closing elements

Song: "Mighty to Save" chorus

Announcements (Lars)

Benediction:

Jude 1:24-25 ²⁴ *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

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