

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

- 1) **AN ACTUAL ASCENSION** - Luke records the history in **Acts 1:9-11** - "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 emphasis of Scripture is that this was not a *spiritual event* or *vision*. Notice the way Luke links the literalness of the *ascension* with that of the *Second Coming*. **You can't marginalise one without doing the same to the other**. As the years rolled by, the Ascension continued to be a vital part of the confession of the early church - **1 Timothy 3:16** - "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."

- 2) **THE FORM OF THE ASCENSION** - Several truths stand out as to the nature of the Ascension:
- a) **A VISIBLE Ascension** - Luke describes the event in very *physical terms*. He says Jesus "departed from them" (Luke 24:57). All of the terminology is *spacial*. In Acts 1:9 he states that Jesus left them *before their very eyes* - "as they were looking on...." Again, we see the testimony of *eyewitnesses*, not just the hopes of some religious mystics.
- b) **A TEMPORARY departure** - Notice the clear words of the angels in **Acts 1:11** - "...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." Jesus would come back in the same way they had seen Him leave. This again points to the literal *Ascension* and *Second Coming*.
- c) **His destination was HEAVEN** - If Jesus really *left*, where did He *go*? The doctrine of the Ascension links Jesus to a *destination*. And He told us what that destination was - **John 14:2-3** - "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? [3] 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." There is *meaning* and *hope* for us in the Ascension of Jesus. Here is a *physical* link to heaven. Here is the ultimate significance of Jesus rising from the grave and conquering death on our behalf.
- 3) **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ASCENSION** - What is the importance of the Ascension. What does it mean to us?
- a) **It declares His victory over all** - It is one thing to be *alive*. It is another to be *victorious*. Paul spells out that the Ascension is Christ's victory march before the watching universe - **Philippians 2:9-11** - "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Why, then, is the world still in such a mess? Why does sin seem to so frequently have the upper hand? Scriptures teach a complete victory in Christ's work, but one which awaits its complete revelation in this world. Let's look at two important passages:

Revelation 5:5-7 - "And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." [6] And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. [7] And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne."

Christ alone has the authority to open the seals of the book of God's plan for human history. He opens it as the *risen, exalted lamb* (6). But notice that the scroll is opened *one seal at a time!* There is an *unfolding* of God's plan and will.

Hebrews 10:12-13 - "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, [13] waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet." Christ didn't "sit down" at the Father's right hand while He was on the cross. This speaks of the finality of His Ascension. Again, we see a *time delay* between the seating of Christ in glory and the subjugation of all His enemies. Paul outlines the same truth in **1 Corinthians 15:25-26** - "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. [26] The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

- b) **Our citizenship is now in heaven** - See **Philippians 3:20** - "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...." A big part of understanding our *identity* in this present world comes from pondering the Ascension of our Lord. We can't think of ourselves *rightly* in this present age apart from identifying ourselves with Christ in heaven. The Ascension of Christ is to *bring a new vantage point to my perspective on all earthly events*. Paul says I am to "seek those things which are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God"(Colossians 3:2).
- c) **The Church has become Christ's Body on earth** - **Ephesians 1:22-23** - "And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." To speak of the Ascension is to recognize the *absence* of Christ's physical presence in this world. We are the *only* body Jesus has in this present age. We are presently in an *era of hiddenness*. Christ is no longer physically present on earth. The Church is the means through which Christ will accomplish His will on earth.

Think of your own body. There is very little you can do without it. In the same way, Jesus works by His Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit has no physical body at all. The Spirit *indwells* believers with the presence of Jesus. The Spirit is Jesus working through the physical body He has on earth - the *Church*, to accomplish His purposes.

- d) **The Ascended Christ reaches the world through the Church** - **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."

Notice Jesus *didn't* say, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, watch all the wonderful stuff I can do!" He said *He* was given all authority, and therefore *we* should get going. Why? Because *we* are the body Jesus uses to *exercise* His authority and get His work done on earth. Until Jesus comes again, we are under His authority to extend His Kingdom through being willing instruments of His saving love.

- e) **The Ascended Christ is committed to intercession for us** - There is a *twofold prayer thrust* by our Ascended Lord: *First*, He continually prays for the lost - **Hebrews 7:25** - "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." Whether or not *we* pray for the lost, *Jesus* does, and constantly. Remember now, we are *Christ's body* on earth. If His Spirit lives in us, how will this shape our prayers? *Second*, He is able to fully sympathize with us in all of our weaknesses **Hebrews 4:15-16** - "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. [16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

We need never fear Jesus can't relate, or has a cold heart to our weaknesses and needs. The Ascension of the *permanently Incarnate Christ* ensures we have one in heaven who, though sinless, always feels *with* us, never *against* us.