

He Ascended into Heaven

Acts 1:6-11

By [Dr. James M. Baird](#)

And as we are studying the ascension, this is the account found in the book of the Acts. I suggested to you previously that there are six historical events, and these events have all occurred in the past, and this is what Christ is and what He is like. It is upon these historical events that Christianity is based: 1) the prophetic teachings in the Old Testament of the coming Messiah, 2) the birth of that Messiah, 3) His sinless life, 4) His death on the cross, 5) His resurrection on Easter Sunday, and 6) the one we deal with tonight, 40 days after His resurrection, His ascension into heaven. May this be the Christ we see, not in any one of those events in the scriptural presentation of Christ, but in all of them, because it is a pattern that is lovely. It is a doctrinal study: it is a study of a God who fits everything perfectly together. It is a thing of beauty, intellectually, but it is a thing of power in terms of our salvation. In the book of the Acts, 40 days after Christ's resurrection, He meets with His disciples on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem. Beginning to read in verse 6, chapter 1.

Acts 1:6-11:

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. 9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

God give us insight.

I. The definition of “the ascension of Jesus Christ.”

It was a bodily ascension.

First of all, we want to deal with the definition. What are we talking about when we're talking about the ascension of Jesus Christ? These things: 1) It was a bodily ascension, 2) a bodily ascension into heaven, and 3) a bodily ascension into heaven where He was received in glory.

Number 1, it was a bodily ascension into heaven. It was with the resurrected body that Christ ascended into Heaven. This body was the same body in the sense that it was identified with the body that came out of the grave, and yet it was a spiritual body. It's helpful to remember those two words: the *same body* but with the scars, yet a *spiritual body* in that it had capabilities that our bodies do not have. For instance, He passed right through walls. He could leave like *that*, appear just like *that*, yet it was a real body. On that first Easter day, when they thought it was a ghost because He came into the Upper Room not through the door but through the wall, and He said, "That you may know that I am not a ghost, here handle Me. Give me something to eat." It is the kind of a body, beloved, that you and I will receive at the great day of resurrection, because His body is the first fruit. You also shall have that kind of a body, a real body. Now these are things that we don't totally understand and yet we know that the composition our body is being changed constantly. We were told formerly that the change took seven years, but now some say within one year. So the fact is that the earthly body is changed.

But Paul speaks of something else, as he says in Corinthians, "a real body and yet a spiritual body with capabilities that we do not have." You see, I think there is a clue to the ascension of Christ, [and] one reason why Christ was not fully recognized on that day of resurrection even when He was with His disciples to the road to Emmaus. Yes, it was a physical body. And it is a physical body, the angels say, that will be seen upon His return to this Earth. When He comes this second time, He will come in like manner as you have seen Him go. The return of Christ is going to be a visible return. There are some who have suggested that the return of Christ takes place when He comes into your heart and things such as that. The last event in the life of Jesus Christ, the return of Jesus Christ, will be a physical, visible return. That's what the text says. This first time He came in a very private way and then He ascended up into heaven. The next time He comes, the Bible says, in glory, in power, and the world will know. We don't fully understand, but the world will know, of that there is no question.

It was a bodily ascension into heaven.

Then, He bodily ascended into heaven. He bodily ascended up into heaven. Let me speak about the heavens. When we use that term, we think about the stars, the moon, and that is one way the Bible uses it and yet it uses it beyond that. There is a place: *the heaven* as it is used here is where God is. Now some folk will say, "Is it this side of the moon, that side of the moon?" There are people who

I have dealt with who are critical, almost obnoxious. We have come to understand in our day that the cosmos out there is immense. Heaven is where Christ is: that's what the Bible teaches. Where Christ is, right now, is where heaven is. Everyone who is there in heaven is there in spirit, except Christ in His spiritual body. And it says He ascended up into heaven.

Now, there are those who will say, "Well, how about those poor folks in China? Heaven is from Israel up. How about those folks? They have no heaven or is there a second heaven?" Well again, that is a very obnoxious way of dealing with Scripture. It is a way the Scripture always uses this kind of terminology in terms of looking at it from the viewer's point of view. We still use it that way when we're talking about the sun that is going to rise at six tomorrow. We know the sun does not rise; it's not going to set. It is simply as it is viewed.

Now that's the way that Christ is. At that point, He went up to a place that is heaven. He went in a spiritual body. Men have asked me, "Well, when we bring our spaceships down we have all these protective plaques around the spaceship because there is tremendous heat; or it is cold up there—what happened to Christ's body?" And then, "How long did it take Him to get there?" Those are ridiculous questions. He was there immediately. When He ascended up into heaven and left their sight, I think in the next moment He was in heaven because He's not bound physically. And He passed right through all of the barriers, all of the celestial bodies, and everything else, just like that, because He was in a spiritual body. We don't understand all these things and yet it is not as though we are stupid or that the Bible is presenting stupid ideas to us.

It was a bodily ascension into heaven where He was received in glory.

He bodily ascended into heaven, 2) in heaven is where He is, and 3) He was received. The 24th Psalm speaks of the receiving of Christ into glory. "Lift up your heads, you everlasting gates, let the King of Glory come in." The scene is, as we would understand it, a great conquering victor coming home from battle, and the city gates are opened up (this is the city of heaven) and He is received. "Who is this King of Glory, the one mighty in battle?" He has won the battle on this Earth and He is received into heaven, and the angels and all of the heavenly beings honor Him, glorify Him. That's the picture in the book of the Revelation. He is vindicated. He leaves this Earth as One who was crucified by mankind and with only a handful of believers; He is received in the next moment into truth in heaven with glory and honor and majesty.

And in John 17 He prayed to the Father, on that night before He was taken, that He would be received back into heaven that He might receive the glory He had before He came to this Earth. He is glorified and received again, not only with the glory of God that only shone forth once through His physical being on this Earth, on the Mount of Transfiguration; but He receives the glory of the conquering hero, the conquering God, who conquered, what? Death. And gave His life for

our sins. And He is received in all glory, the book of Hebrews says, that “He sits down,” at the beginning of the book of Hebrews, “with the majesty on High.” And He is received to sit with God. That means, He rules. Every local Presbyterian Church has as its ruling body, a session. The word *session* means “a sitting,” “a sitting body that rules.” That’s why they are called *ruling elders*. That’s what it means when a session *sits*, “it comes to make decisions and rule.” And that’s what it means when Jesus Christ is received up into heaven: He is seated on the right hand of God the Father almighty—on the right hand, the place of honor. And so Christ is in glory, honored, received, and ruling, ruling.

II. Application Jesus Christ ministers to us on Earth through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now that leads us to the second place and that is application. I want to go through three things, I believe, that Christ does. You see, the ministry of Jesus Christ on this Earth, in a sense, was finished in that He gave His life, as an atonement for sin. His ministry continues; His work continues. We are not serving a God who did something 2,000 years ago. We are serving a God, the Lord Christ, who is alive and who is at work, now, today, in this year.

Do you see the difference? There are religions and there are some of us as Christians, I believe, who look at Jesus Christ as simply something in the pages of the history of the Bible. But we have failed to see that from pages of the Bible, Christ is presented as One who is alive now and at work. He is at work on this Earth. How is He at work on this Earth? He leaves and ascends, and when He enters into heaven, He sends the Holy Spirit. He said in the 16th chapter of the gospel of John, “it is expedient that I go,” and they were concerned about His leaving this Earth and leaving them alone. He said, “I will not leave you alone. I will give you the Comforter, One who will come along side of you. He will lead you into all truth. He will convict you. He will speak of Me.” And so He goes, and ten days after the ascension of Jesus Christ, when He has just told His disciples, “Go back to Jerusalem and wait,” ten days later Pentecost comes and the Spirit of God descends in power and force as never before on the day of Pentecost.”

The ministry of Jesus Christ continues through the work of the Holy Spirit, whom He sends. When the Holy Spirit comes, He gives us power. We are weak (are we not?) and feel helpless. And He said to His disciples, ‘Wait. You shall receive power.’ When they were in the presence of Jesus Christ on this Earth, the disciples, physically, ah they were so confident as long as He was present. He is no longer present with them. But do you see the essential nature of His sending the Holy Spirit? If He were physically present on this Earth, He might not be in Jackson, Mississippi and He might not be in First Presbyterian Church tonight. He might be in another city, another country. But He is here with us because through His Holy Spirit He is with all His people individually and corporately around this world and He empowers them. You are not alone and you are not

operating simply under your own power. He not only sends the Holy Spirit to give us power; it is the Holy Spirit who continues and inspires the apostles to write this book. By the way, the relationship and communication of Christ through His disciples changed after the resurrection. Up until that time it was very physical. They put their arms around Him. In the last 40 days after His resurrection, I believe the whole purpose of His coming, leaving, showing that He had a real body, was to teach them, 'You now live with Me, communicate with Me, in a totally different plane, on a spiritual plain.' It's the plane that you and I deal with Him tonight, not on a physical plane, but on a spiritual plane. But He is with us always.

He not only empowers us from within; He gives us the Scripture. It is the Holy Spirit who comes and who takes the apostles and writes the New Testament, all the doctrines, all the truth. It is the New Testament that enlightens the Old Testament. This is the way that Christ rules, this and every church. When we speak about Christ ruling the Church, how does He rule the Church? Now, through two means: through the sending and work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and through the rule book, the Bible. He sends the Holy Spirit to write His truths and He rules the Church through the Bible. That's why when there are groups that have authorities other than the Scriptures. There are always those authorities, you see, that are man-made authorities. A direct rule of Christ is through the work of the Holy Spirit and through the Scriptures. This is how He rules His Church.

The Holy Spirit is also the One who brings salvation, the work of Jesus Christ that was accomplished on the cross. That's what John means when it says, "You are born from above." That's what the Bible means in John 3 when it says that, "Life comes by the Spirit." You must be born again. It is the Holy Spirit who enters into your heart, opens your eyes that you may see what was accomplished by Christ on the cross, through His sinless life, and His virgin birth. And so it is the Holy Spirit who not only gives us power for living the Christian life, Christ governs His people by sending the Spirit personally and bringing you alive and ruling you through the Scripture. How is Christ actively alive and at work today? Through the work of the Holy Spirit whom He sends.

Now there is a sense in which in the Old Testament, the emphasis is upon God the Father. In the gospels, when Christ was on this Earth, this emphasis is upon the Son. It doesn't mean that Christ was not mentioned in the Old Testament. If you come Sunday I am going to enter into a series of sermons on the life of Sampson, and I believe Christ physically dealt with Sampson's mother and father. The emphasis is upon the Father in the gospels; but it is upon Christ, physically, when you come into the New Testament. In terms of after the ascension, it is primarily a new emphasis on the life, ministry, and work of the Holy Spirit whom Christ has sent. The Father sends the Son; the Son sends the Spirit—all in total agreement, all sitting and ruling in heaven at this moment. How is Christ at work tonight? Through the Holy Spirit. We must teach and believe

and trust and know. You cannot but read the book of the Acts and the New Testament epistles without seeing the work of the Holy Spirit. That is how Christ is at work.

Jesus Christ ministers to us in heaven through intercession. He not only is at work...and this is the last thing that He is doing (I suggest to you among others, but these are the major things). How is Christ ministering to us tonight? He ministers through the direct work of the Holy Spirit: He ministers on this Earth through Holy Spirit. He ministers in heaven by interceding for us. He intercedes for us in this way. A number of years ago, perhaps some of you remember there was fire in a hotel in Atlanta. This would have been 40, 50 years ago. Many people died; many laws were changed. Two who died through smoke inhalation were two teenage girls who had been visiting Atlanta at a youth ministry. They were teenage high school girls. When they found them dead, they had the Bible open to John 14. They knew they would face death and John 14, "Let not your heart be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in Me, in My Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." The first ministry of Jesus Christ as the intercessor is He prepares a place for you that when you die...How many times have I had a funeral and I have not used those verses? Seldom. He is the One who prepares a place for you.

He not only prepares a place for you in heaven, but He also intercedes for you as your great high priest. The whole book of the Hebrews is basically about the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is that you have direct access to the Father through your high priest, Jesus Christ. That's why, in the Reformation, one of the great marks of the Reformation was the priesthood of all believers. We do not have any man or any church that intercedes for us. That's why in a worship service I don't turn my back on you. I am not interceding for you as though you must go through me. And it is still a critical mark of the truth of our church.

Now, what are we saying about the intercession of Jesus Christ? It means that when He interceded into heaven, remember the priest who took the blood of the animal in the Old Testament, He takes Christ's blood into heaven. Not a bowl of blood but He brings His marks. You remember in His body, He shows the scars.

Have you ever tried on a pair of glasses? Let's say a rose-colored pair of glasses. They are tinted rose; everything is rose. When God looks at you, He looks at you through the rose-colored glasses of Jesus Christ. You are not here and Christ there. He always looks at you through Jesus Christ and with Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is always interceding for you, saying, 'That one I purchased on Calvary's cross, Father.' Your standing in heaven is dependent tonight upon that One who is interceding for you and who gives you ground for your salvation. That's what His work is in heaven for you.

He is your great high priest. He is also your great high priest in that all of your prayers go through Him. That's why we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. It's not a little thing we tack on in the end. We are acknowledging to God that "I cannot approach You in my sin. I cannot even approach You in prayers, except through my Great High Priest who has cleansed and given me a ground, a standing before You forever."

It also means, as Christ intercedes, that we on this Earth are not perfect. He is interceding for us in that He presents, as the book of Hebrews says, "our works and our worship." We like to believe that we have worship services that have some power, that God is honored and that God moves in the hearts of His people. Would there be a soul here who believes that you have worshiped perfectly tonight? That there's nothing wrong? That you've given your best and your whole? The worship that we offer to Him is not always fully in the Spirit, Spirit-filled, and fully in truth. Yet, Jesus Christ takes our worship and presents it to the Father. He said, 'Whatever you do...If you give a cup of cold water in My name, I'll remember it and honor you for it.' The same is true of our work. Our work is not perfect but Christ intercedes for us.

Conscience will kill you. Conscience will say, "You believe that you are going to heaven?" Conscience will be attacked by Satan who is the accuser of the brethren. And Satan will accuse and accuse, and he will use people, and he will use your conscience and you will be walking with such guilt trip that it is unbelievable. But the Lord Jesus said to Peter in that Upper Room, "Satan seeks to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you." When you are converted, when you trust Me, and when you have understood it's not you, it's Me—and then He restored Peter after His resurrection. That Christ, as 1 John says, 'He is our lawyer.' "He is our advocate when we sin before the Father," the One who loved us and died for us. He is taking your work and your worship and He is perfecting it in heaven, until one day we, our work, and our worship will be perfect. And then one day He will come, and when He does your soul will be resurrected, your body will be resurrected and joined with your soul; then you will have the glorious body. And that will be the last great event in the life of Jesus Christ. He will bring His kingdom, and we shall live on this Earth. I am going to close by reading these few verses.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn (firstborn not only spiritually but physically) among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate

us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:29-39)

Who was predicted, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died for our sins on Calvary, rose on the third day, and has ascended and intercedes and works now and will come again as we pray together.

The loving Father, we come to Thee and offer Thee praise and thanks for our great Savior and for the work of Thy Holy Spirit, and our prayer is also for one another. Forgive us if we have a low, a contemporary view of our great Savior. Father, if there be a single soul here on this night who hesitates about commitment of life to Christ as Savior and as God, even now may Your Spirit have made sense in that one's heart and soul, and may the risen Christ be His God and Lord and Savior now through faith. And if there be one here highly discouraged or troubled, may he lift his eyes and see the conqueror and see the end. And if there be any here who are afforded great opportunity to do great things for Jesus Christ, may they know of the risen Savior. Hear our prayers, we pray, in His holy name as He taught His people to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

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