**Jesus - His Ascension**

Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53; Psalm 47 6.2.18

Summary: The ascension of Jesus is just a continuation of His resurrection, and one is lacking without the other.

Very few of us ever enjoy the luxury of coming to the end of even our most productive day and saying, "It is finished. I’m through. I’ve accomplished everything I set out to do today."

Instead, most of us have a long list of things we hope to get done someday. Maybe it is a garage you intended to clean out last fall. But spring has come and now you need to mow the lawn and work in the garden.

Very seldom can we just sit back, fold our arms, and say, "I’ve finished everything that I wanted to do."

But Jesus could do that. Jesus could say, "It is finished. I have done everything that God wanted me to do."

In the wilderness He conquered sin. On the cross He conquered death. In the grave He conquered hell. And now in space, as He ascends to the Father, He has conquered Satan himself.

Behind Him is the persecution of men. Before Him is the applause of angels. Behind Him is a cross. Before Him there is a crown. Behind Him is Calvary. Before Him is all of heaven’s glory.

The ascension of Jesus is just a continuation of His resurrection, and one is lacking without the other. But the ascension of Jesus is not the only ascension recorded in the Bible. Both Enoch of old and the prophet Elijah ascended directly to heaven as well. But Enoch and Elijah never died.

Ill. I like the story about a Sunday School child who was telling the story of Enoch. She said, "Well, one day God and Enoch were just walking along together, and it came close to the end of the day. And God turned to Enoch and said, `We’re closer to my house than to yours. So why don’t you just go home with me?’" It may have happened just like that.

But the ascension of Jesus is unique. Jesus really did die on the cross, and He was buried in the tomb. He was physically raised from the dead, and He really ascended to be with God.

As we think about the ascension this morning, I would like for us to consider 3 things. The first would be why Jesus remained for 40 days on earth between His resurrection and His ascension.

The second would be the difference between the flesh and the spirit.

The third would be the question, "Is this fact or is it fiction?"

**I. Why Did Jesus Remain For 40 Days On The Earth?**

First of all, "Why? Why did Jesus remain those 40 days on the earth following His resurrection? Hadn’t men hurt Him enough? Why would He stick around? And why 40 days?"

The number 40 seems to be special in scripture. It rained for 40 days in Noah’s flood. The 12 spies were in Canaan for 40 days. For 40 years the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. And now He spends 40 more days on earth following His resurrection. Is there some connection there? I don’t know.

But I am sure that one goal Jesus had in spending those 40 days after His resurrection was to finish teaching the apostles.

He had tried to teach them again and again what was going to happen. He had told them, "I’m going to die in Jerusalem. I’m going to be buried, and on the third day be raised from the dead."

And the apostles did the same thing that you and I do every time we hear talk of death, they tried to ignore it. They pretended it wasn’t there.

When Jesus said, "I’m going to Jerusalem," Peter said, "No, Lord, don’t go there." Then Jesus said to him, "*Get thee behind me, Satan. And He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem*."

He needed to complete the journey God had sent Him on - to go to the cross and die for our sins. So He went, and all the way He is teaching them this lesson. On the last night of His life He takes them into the upper room. He breaks bread and speaks of His broken body. He shares with them the fruit of the vine, and speaks of His shed blood.

But when Jesus died on the cross and was buried in the tomb, His followers were completely devastated because they had forgotten what Jesus said. They forgot even though He had told them repeatedly.

The tomb was empty. And even then they did not believe. It was not until they saw Him, Mary, the women, Peter, John, the apostles, 500 at once. Again and again He appeared unto them. He said to them, "Look at me. Touch me. Know that I am alive and I have done everything I promised I would do."

Finally, it all started to sink in. Back in the 14th chapter of John, Jesus had said, "*Let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in me. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again that where I am you may be also."* "You know the way," He had said. Thomas asked, "Lord, how can we know the way?" Jesus said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. And no man comes unto the Father but by me."*

During those 40 days Jesus appeared to them again and again, re-emphasizing the things He had already taught them. Suddenly, all of the teachings that Jesus had shared with them for 3 years began to make sense.

And a change came over them. They became excited because now they realized the truth of what Jesus had been teaching them, "*So go into all the world and preach the good news to every creature*. Don’t place too much importance on this world. You’re only going to live in it for a few years. But you have all eternity to spend with me."

Some of us still haven’t learned that lesson, have we? We’re all wrapped up in the "here and now," and we don’t really want to think about eternity. But Jesus spent 40 more days with them, re-emphasizing that death is not the end, but just the beginning. Now that is good news, no it is great news!

**II. The Difference Between The Flesh And The Spirit.**

The second thing I would like you to see is the difference between flesh and spirit. I wish I understood everything I know about this.

It is hard for us to understand because we see everything with physical eyes. And we comprehend things with a physical mind. And we touch things with a physical body. So it is hard for us to shift gears and go over into the realm of the spiritual. We wonder, "What will I be like once life on this earth is over for me? What kind of form will I have?"

The apostle John writes in 1 John 3:2, *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."*

Now consider what we see in the 20th chapter of John. It is early on Resurrection morning and Mary Magdalene is weeping at the empty tomb. Mary, a woman who had 7 demons cast out of her. Jesus had made all the difference in her life. But now He is gone and there was a large vacuum in her life. So Jesus made a special appearance and spoke directly to her.

Then in vs. 17 He tells Mary, *"Do not hold on to me."*

Later, in vs. 27, He speaks to Thomas, the doubting disciple, and tells him, "*Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach our your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe*." And Thomas said, *"My Lord and my God!"*

These two passages teach us that Jesus was in a form that could be touched and held on to. Later on He would pick up fish and eat them with the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Yet, at the same time, when He wanted to enter into a room, He didn’t have to bother opening doors. He could just walk through walls, if He wanted to.

And we are told that someday we will be like Jesus. I wish I understood all that I know about that. How cool to walk through walls!?!

But here is what I do understand. The Bible says that in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, I will be changed. One day I will have a new body that will never grow old. I will have a body that will not be limited by time or space or any of the other restrictions that we have here.

One day I will ascend as Jesus ascended, and I will be with the Father for all eternity, just like Jesus.

**III. Is This Fact Or Is It Fiction?**

Now lastly, "Is this fact or is it fiction?" Well, it depends upon a couple of things, doesn’t it? It depends upon, #1, what do you think about the Bible? Do you think that it is the Word of God, or just a collection of man﷓made stories passed on down through the ages?

For some, it is not in vogue to believe in the Bible. We are branded as narrow and naive if we do. So you may be of the persuasion that, "Well, maybe not all of it is true." And you decide that there are some Bible teachings or commands that you can ignore or just disobey completely. And a lot of people are doing exactly that.

It is an important question, isn’t it? "What do you think about the Bible?"

And what do you think of Jesus? Do you really believe that He is the only begotten Son of God? Or do you feel that He was just a good man, a good teacher, but that is about all?

There are many people who believe that you don’t have to believe the Bible, and that you don’t have to believe everything that is written about Jesus. You can just believe some of it.

But if I understand Christianity, there is no middle ground. You either believe that this is the infallible Word of God, or you don’t believe that it is the Word of God at all. You either believe that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God or you don’t believe that He is a Son of God at all.

So "What do you believe?" If you believe that the Bible is the revealed Word of God, and if you believe that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, then you believe that the resurrection and the ascension are facts, not fiction.

Ill. In Acts 7 we read of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Vs’s 55 and 56 tell us, *"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. `Look,’ he said, `I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’"*

Ill. In the 9th chapter of Acts we read about Saul of Tarsus as he travels along the road to Damascus. Beginning with vs. 3 it says, *"As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, `Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ `Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. `I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’"*

Ill. Seventy years later, the apostle John is on the island of Patmos, exiled from the church, and exiled from his friends. He sees the resurrected, ascended Lord. And in vs. 10 of chapter 1, he writes these words*, "On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet."*

Vs. 12 says, *"I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me."* And vs. 17 says, *"When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. Then He placed His right hand on me and said: `Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.’"* The resurrected, ascended Lord!

Ill. Henry Rimmer wrote a letter to Charles Fuller when he heard that Fuller was going to preach on the subject of heaven on Sunday night at church. Rimmer was an old man about to die. He wrote to Fuller and he said, "I would like so much to be in church Sunday night to hear your sermon on the subject of heaven. But my physical impairment will not allow me to be there. The reason I would like to be there is because I have great interest in that place.

"I own a piece of land with clear deed and title in that wonderful place that you are going to be talking about. I didn’t buy it," he said. "It was given to me without price and without money, although the One who gave it to me purchased it at great cost. I don’t have it as an idle investment," he continued. "I have been busy sending materials to the master architect for more than 50 years, and He is building for me a house of my dreams. It will never have to be painted or remodeled because it is being made just for me. Termites will never eat away at its foundation because it is built on the Rock of Ages. Fire will never destroy it. Winds will never blow it away. There will be no locks on its doors because no evil people will ever live in that blessed land. Between me and my home there is a valley, a dark valley. And I must cross it. I am not afraid," he said, "because One has gone before. And He will lead the way. I am ready to take His hand. My house is almost finished. I would like to hear your sermon on heaven because I have a great interest in that land."

Close: Is that your interest? Do you share it? The invitation of Jesus is not just an invitation to get rid of problems here on earth. It is not an invitation just to get a few things fixed up. It is an invitation that will last for all eternity.

The Bible is right. Jesus really is the only begotten Son of God. He really did die on that cross. He really was buried in that tomb. He really did rise from the dead. He really did ascend to be on the right hand of God. He really is making intercession for us. He really is preparing a place for us. And one day He really will come back.

Where will you be? Where will you spend eternity? God’s invitation is offered. What will you do with it?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, some of these things are hard for us to believe, help us and remove our doubts, replace doubt with solid faith that Jesus is the true God and the only way to everlasting life. In His strong name. Amen.