



Luke 24:50-53
"The Ascension of Jesus Christ"
By Mike Clark

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⁵⁰ And 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.

INTRODUCTION –

Just to review briefly, you'll remember that last week we looked at the great commission in verses 44-49.

And we talked about how Jesus showed his apostles and followers that everything that was written about Him in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms had to be fulfilled.

And so we talked about how the gospel is in both the OT and the NT. The gospel was not an interruption or something new. It was in the plan of God from the beginning of Scripture.

And we also said that repentance and faith in Jesus alone is the only way to receive forgiveness of sins. That was verse 47. This was Luke's summary of the great commission.

This is the message that Christians must proclaim to a lost world. People need to repent and believe on Jesus in order to be saved.

In addition, we talked about how Christians are witnesses to who Jesus is and what he has done. We are witnesses and we proclaim Jesus to the world.

And finally we learned that Christians are clothed with God's power to witness of Jesus. That is we rely on God's power to proclaim the message boldly and we rely on God's power to change hearts of people to receive the message of the gospel.

And so now we come to the last verses in Luke's gospel. After 2 ½ years, we close out this great book.

In Luke's gospel, the story of Jesus began in heaven when he left and came to earth, and it ends when he leaves earth to return to heaven.

The story began with condescension and ends with ascension, it began with incarnation and ends with exaltation, it began with expectation and ends with consummation.



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It began with the Son of God descending to earth and being born of a virgin, and it ends with the Son of God being born from the dead ascending to heaven.

The story began with hope unrealized and ends with hope fully realized. It began with a promise and ends with a fulfillment and a new promise.

The story began with praise and worship, with the praise of Mary and Zacharias and angels in anticipation of the coming of Messiah and it ends the same way.

The story even began in the temple when the baby Jesus was taken to the temple, and there being offered for dedication in the Jewish custom he was taken up into the arms of Simeon who offered praise to God.

And then there was Anna who was always in the temple praising God. And so it began with praise and ends with praise. It began in the temple and ends in the temple.

We have come from the beginning to the end, and in between is the incomparable life of Jesus, his teaching, his miracles, his rejection, his death and his resurrection.

Luke began with his arrival, and Luke ends with his departure.

Only Luke is given the sole privilege of recording the culminating event of the ascension. And Luke tells us about the ascension twice.

It's how he ends his Gospel, and it's how he begins his next volume of history called the book of Acts.

Luke tells the story of Christ on earth; Acts tells the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the fulfillment of the Great Commission in the establishment of the church.

So Luke again in his two overlapping histories ends with the ascension and begins with the ascension. It is the culminating end of one history and it is the inaugural beginning of another history.

Now as he begins his history in Acts he fills in more detail about the 40 days that Jesus spent on the earth after his resurrection.

Acts 1:1 - In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.



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So as Luke begins to write he makes reference to his own Gospel. "Theophilus," is the one to whom he writes this history.

Acts 1:2 – Until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

So here he also refers to his ascension. Then he goes on to say some things that happened prior to his ascension, after he had by the Holy Spirit given commands to the apostles whom he had chosen.

What were those commands? To go into all the world to preach the Gospel, as Matthew puts it, or in Luke's case to proclaim forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations. That's the commands that he had given them.

Acts 1:3 - He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

And so during the 40 days he presented himself alive after his suffering by many convincing proofs such as, "See my hands, see my side." Such as, "Give me a piece of fish and I'll eat," such as having breakfast with them in Galilee.

And he filled out their Old Testament Messianic theology. He filled out their understanding of the kingdom of God. He gave them this Great Commission.

He affirmed that he was truly alive physically from the dead with many convincing proofs, all of this over a period of 40 days.

Acts 1:4 - And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So gathering them together he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem but wait for what the Father had promised, which he said you heard of from me.

What was the promise? The coming of the Holy Spirit to empower them for this great mission. And the promise came ten days later.

Acts 1:6 - So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

So they asked him, "Lord, is this going to be the time when you restore the kingdom to Israel?" Is now the time?



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Acts 1:7-8 - ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Now, that was a hint that the Lord wasn't coming in ten days, because the apostles weren't about to cover the remotest part of the earth in the next week-and-a-half.

So again, Luke begins with giving us more information about the period between his resurrection and his ascension so that Acts 1:8 ends at the same place Luke 24:49 ends, "Stay in Jerusalem until you're clothed with power from on high, mainly the coming of the Holy Spirit."

And so with that, let's look at these last verses of Luke.

Point 1 – Jesus blesses his people.

Luke 24:50 - *And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.*

So Jesus leads His companions which would include the 3 women named in v 10, along with the other women, the 11 apostles, and all the rest.

In Acts 1:12-15, this group is said to include some 120 persons, including Mary the mother of Jesus and Jesus' brothers.

And he leads them out to Bethany. Bethany was located on the Mount of Olives, about a mile and a half, and was the site from which Jesus' triumphal entry had originated.

It's fitting then that it would also serve as the location of Jesus' final exaltation.

Bethany is a suburb I guess you could say of Jerusalem. If you go out the eastern gate of Jerusalem you'll see the Mount of Olives and just a little to the south and over the edge of the Mount of Olives, you will arrive in Bethany.

So it's a little village on the back slope of the Mount of Olives. Literally, the original text can be translated, "He led them in the vicinity of Bethany."



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Acts 1:12 says it was at the Mount of Olives. That is consistent. Just to the east of Jerusalem is the Mount of Olives, and just on the back slope of that hill is the little village of Bethany.

So he led them out as far as Bethany, and then he lifted up his hands, which would be a common gesture for people to make when offering a blessing.

By lifting up your hands, you're pointing in the direction of the source of all blessing. "Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights."

And he lifted up his hands pointing toward heaven to symbolize the place from where all blessing descends.

Jesus blessing his disciples is important enough to be mentioned twice in rapid succession. The pronouncement of blessing is modeled on the leave-taking like Moses in Deuteronomy 33 and Jacob in Genesis 49.

Lifting up of hands was an ancient ceremony that was formerly used by the priests. From the beginning God chose the priests to bless in his name as mediators.

Lev 9:22-23 - ²² Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. ²³ And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people.

Think about the day of atonement for just a minute. The high priest came out after the day of atonement was over and all the sacrifices had been offered, and took off the white robes which He had worn in the early part of the day as a common priest.

Those robes must have been all stained with blood, because think about it - for the whole day he was occupied with the shedding and the sprinkling of the blood.

And then the high priest put on his robe of glory and beauty, the garment of blue, and scarlet, and fine linen, with its bells, and its pomegranates, and a glittering breastplate on his breast.

And then he came out, and gave to the people the blessing which could only be given when the atonement was completed.

And so today, Jesus Christ blesses His people, not as the priest who is offering sacrifice, but as the one who has offered it.



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It's all finished and now with authority, not as a pleader, but as one who has power to give, He blesses His people.

He proves His right to reign by beginning now the reign of benediction among the sons of men.

Numbers 6:23-26 - ²³ *"Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,"* ²⁴ *The LORD bless you and keep you;* ²⁵ *the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;* ²⁶ *the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*

There is also the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek. Do you remember that story?

Gen 14:18-20 - ¹⁸ *And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)* ¹⁹ *And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;* ²⁰ *and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

Now what does it mean when it says that he blessed them? I think sometimes we might think of that as some kind of a symbolic gesture. But it isn't that at all.

When he blessed them, it simply means that he pledged to them blessing. Now, according to Ephesians 1:3, "We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus," right?

According to Ephesians 2:6 and 7, the promise through grace is that God will demonstrate in Christ through all the ages to come his mercy and his kindness toward us.

He will lavish us with the riches of his grace forever. And so I think what happened here, I think the last thing Jesus said was blessing.

He had given them the commission; that's responsibility, that's duty. But the final word is the word of blessing.

What would he have said? Perhaps something along these lines - I pledge to you my care, my love. I promise you all the things again that I have promised you all along. I am going to heaven to fulfill all my promises to you."

"I promise you heaven. I promise you the Holy Spirit. I promise you love. I promise you mercy. I promise you grace. I promise you power.



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I promise you all your prayers will be answered according to my name, and whatever you ask I will do that the Father may be glorified."

Jesus lifted up his hands in blessing as he took his departure from this world.

And think about this – Think about the blessings that thousands had received from his hands. His hands had multiplied the loaves and fish and fed the hungry thousands.

His hands had touched blind eyes and opened them. His hands had been laid on the leper and he was made whole. His hands had touched the dead man's coffin and he had been made to live again.

Jesus continually went about doing good and his hands were always blessing. So he blessed his disciples as he was leaving.

He was only continuing to do what he had done ever since they had known him. He lifted his hands to bless his disciples again because he had always been blessing them.

Point 2 – Jesus will return the same way he left.

Luke 24:51 - ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

Jesus' appearance among the disciples in v 36 is paired with his departure in v 51. Luke has been preparing his audience for Jesus' departure from as far back in the gospel as the transfiguration. Luke 9:51 – when the days drew near for him to be taken up.

Jesus' departure has a two part aspect to it – He is parted from them and then carried up. Into heaven indicates both the finality of Jesus' departure and Jesus' glorified status. Heaven was the abode of God and the abode of God was up and so one went up to meet God.

Movement upward signifies in a visible way the elevated status of Jesus. The glory and regal power anticipated of Jesus (9:26, 32, 51; 19:12) is now made visible to his followers.

Look at Acts 1 again as Luke gives further details on the ascension.



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Acts 1:9 - 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.

The ascension of Jesus reminds me of Enoch in Genesis 5, who went to heaven without dying. God just took him. And then later Elijah was taken up into heaven by chariots of fire.

The last spot of earth that Jesus touched was a mountain. Mountains have often been the places where some of the greatest events of men with God have been performed.

Imagine Jesus gently as it were pushing the earth downwards and himself ascending into the glory where he now sits at the right hand of God.

Think about how astonished the disciples might have been. Maybe they shrunk back as the majesty flamed forth from Him.

He begins to rise and up He went, slowly, majestically rising, and the disciples looking on until He must have grown less and less to their astonished vision and when He was about to vanish from their sight, they saw a cloud float between himself and them and he was gone, gone to his throne.

Think about this – there were no angels' wings to bear him, no visible arm of omnipotence to lift him gently from the earth. He rises by his own power and majesty. He needs no help.

Perhaps behind that cloud there were scenes of glory which it isn't possible for human eyes to gaze upon and words which it was not lawful for human beings to hear.

But maybe it was something along the lines of Psalm 24.

Psalm 24:9-10 - Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ¹⁰ Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory!

Acts 1:10 - 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."



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So the disciples are watching as long as they could see. Two angels then ask them why they are gazing into heaven.

That seems like a pretty obvious answer, doesn't it? Where would you be looking if somebody was going up?

The original language has the sense of "Why are you looking longingly? Why are you looking as if you're losing someone?" He's going to come back.

He went up physically and bodily, and that's exactly the way he'll come back. He went up from the Mount of Olives; he'll come back to the Mount of Olives. And when he comes back, every eye will see him.

He took his glorified humanity out of the grave. He spent 40 days with those who loved him as a glorified God man.

He then took his glorified manhood straight into heaven, all the way back to where he'd come from in a completely different dimension than time and space.

And this is proof that heaven is a place which accommodates glorified humans, and it will accommodate us. "We will receive a body like his glorious body," Philippians 3 says.

And so he went; the work was done, the work was complete. If you were on the heavenly side, what would have happened when he arrived there?

Well, Scripture says he went to the right hand of God. That's a way to describe the place of association with God, the highest most exalted place that God could give.

He sat down at the right hand of God Hebrews says. He sat down because his work was over. Hebrews even compares him to Old Testament priests who never sit down because their work is never over.

But he having made purification for sins once for all sat down. So if you were on the heavenly side it would've been a coronation.

Point 3 – Worship is the proper response of the Christian for what Jesus has done.

Luke 24:52 - *And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.*

So, we come then to the response.



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They continued what they started back in Matthew 28:9 -

Matthew 28:9 - And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

We started off with, "And he, but now read "And they." How would you react? There could be no other way to react than the way they reacted. Why? Because they now understood everything.

They understood the Old Testament. They understood every Messianic reference in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the holy writings.

They understood who he was. They understood what he had done. They understood the necessity of his suffering in death as well as his triumph in exaltation.

They knew that the salvation that he had come to provide had been accomplished and that forgiveness of sins could be preached to the ends of the earth.

They knew that everything the Bible prophesied about the Messiah, about his impact, about the world's access to this salvation grace was now possible.

They also knew that he had risen from the dead, and that guaranteed them their own resurrection.

And they knew what a glorified body looked like and they'd experienced that, and so they had some kind of a knowledge of what their own experience would be in glory.

So they did what anybody who loves him does, they exploded in worship, fully-informed worship, fully-informed praise.

Perhaps they even began to worship him as he was going up. What can we understand about that? It was the purest kind of worship of which human beings are capable, fully informed, firsthand experience.

They knew the risen Christ, just as they had known the incarnate God in the years of his ministry with him.

They understood the Scripture and how it pointed to him and how everything was fulfilled in him, and they knew the future kingdom was to come and they knew he would be back.



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And they exploded in worship then and there. Isn't this wonderful, how all those years he had struggled to get them to understand anything?

Now they get it all. All the doubts are gone. All the fears are gone. All the questions have been answered, and they know he's the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior, the Redeemer, and they're ready now to preach the Gospel. If it costs them their lives, that's fine.

By the way, the word worship here, Luke holds that word back until he gets here. He's never used it in his whole Gospel.

It's almost as if you've got to hold this word out for this moment, because this is worship without parallel, to express the final crescendo of pure, confident adoration unmixed with any doubts.

This is remarkable, because these are Jews who lived under one dominating command their whole life: Worship only God, the first commandment. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Don't have any other gods."

This then is the affirmation that Jesus is God from Jews. Now that to this day is the one thing that offends the Jewish people, to tell them that Jesus is God. This violates their monotheism.

And so the company of Jesus' followers return to Jerusalem.

Why did they go back to Jerusalem? Because, in verse 49, when he had given them the commission sometime during the 40 days and maybe reiterated it that day again, he said at the end of verse 49 stay in the city until you're clothed with power from on high.

And they did exactly what he told them to do.

They returned to Jerusalem with great joy; there's no more sorrow like in the upper room. They worship and they obey.

Finally their earlier joy which produced astonishment and disbelief has given way to great joy.

Joy and praise were associated with the birth of Jesus and those known for their faithfulness to God lived in hope of divine redemption and blessed God at the news of the advent of the Savior.



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How do we explain that this little group of weak disciples were full of joy now?

The disciples rejoiced because now for the first time they saw all things clearly about Jesus. The veil was removed from their eyes. The darkness had at length passed away.

The meaning of Christ's humiliation and low estate, the meaning of his agony, the cross, the passion, the meaning of his being Messiah and yet a sufferer, the meaning of His being crucified and yet being the Son of God, all was at length unraveled and made plain now to them.

They saw it all. They understood it all. Their doubts were removed. Their stumbling blocks were taken away. Now at last they possessed clear knowledge, and possessing clear knowledge they felt unmingled joy.

Point 4 – We bless God because he blesses us.

Luke 24:53 – *And were continually in the temple blessing God.*

Now that doesn't mean that they remained in the temple day and night but went there during the ordinary hours to worship God and give thanks to Him.

Their joy is such a contrast with the fear that formerly kept them hidden at a house.

Later in the book of Acts, Luke tells us what this looked like.

Acts 2:42 - *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

Acts 2:46-47 - ⁴⁶ *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Acts 5:41-42 - ⁴¹ *Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. ⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.*

Their constant presence in the temple compares them favorable with Anna back in 2:37.



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They are eyewitnesses. They are ready to preach. They're ready to write. They are ready to come alongside others who associate with them as they write under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the books of the New Testament.

They are ready to go to the ends of the world. They are ready to die, and most of them will, for the sheer joy of what they now know to be true. And their praise cannot be contained and they are continually in the temple praising God.

At the close of the gospel, the faithful continue to wait, now for the Holy Spirit who will empower them for service as agents of this same salvation.

CONCLUSION –

Beloved, Jesus came to earth to bless and not curse. Jesus came in love and not in anger. He came not as a condemning judge but as a compassionate friend. Christ lived to bless. That was the sum of his whole life.

If you are a believer in Christ, even in the midst of all your trials and troubles and your weaknesses, you are blessed. Blessed of the Lord that made heaven and earth and blessed forever and ever.

Jesus was gracious. He was gracious in the season of His agony on the cross, gracious when He rose again and gathered his scattered sheep, gracious in the manner of his departure from the world.

Jesus has gone into the presence of God on behalf of all who believe on Him, as a Forerunner. As a forerunner Jesus has gone into heaven to prepare a place for all His people.

And Jesus has gone into heaven to intercede for all who believe on Him as their High Priest.

But beloved there was a great cost for this blessing.

Meditate and look at Him whom we have pierced and mourn over the sin that pierced him. It is a blessing to have a broken heart mourning because of sin and to look at Christ and to know that he has carried away all our sins.

There is Jesus going up to heaven from earth, out of which he has risen from the grave where He was buried after He had died as the Substitute for sinners. And as He goes up, he is blessing men with His pierced hands.



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But also know that the hands that blessed us are also the hands that rule the world. He is head over all things including the Church.

What blessed assurance will they be to us that, having loved us so much, He will never curse us, that having bought us with His blood, he cannot cast us away.

Do you see Christ lifting his pierced hands to you, offering the blessing of eternal life? – Then do just what the disciples did. They worshipped him. Render to Jesus the worship He is due and adore Him.

Be filled with joy church family. We have to live in the midst of an ungodly society, but as you live in its midst, serve Christ with great joy and share the good news of the gospel.

People may reject you, persecute you, or even kill you, but know this – Jesus reigns and since that is true all is well, Amen?

And so I ask you this morning - Has the blessing of eternal life come on you?

Have you had the blessing of justification, the blessing of forgiveness, the blessing of adoption?

If you have, you can expect to hear these words one day –

Matthew 25:34 - *Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

But if you haven't trusted in Christ, then believe on him now so that you don't ever hear him say to you -

Matthew 25:41 - ⁴¹ *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

A day will come when Jesus will return from heaven in like manner as a He went. And if you haven't repented and trusted in Jesus, His return will not be a blessing, but a curse. He will come not with uplifted arms but with flaming vengeance.

So flee from the wrath to come and embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior.

If you trust in Christ who has risen from the dead and gone into glory, you will be saved.



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Hebrews 7:25 - *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.*

And so as we leave this great gospel from Luke, may the Word dwell in us richly and in doing so we shall taste more joy and peace in believing and shall know what it is to be continually praising and blessing God as we wait, and long, and pray for his return.

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.*

Prayer