



THE STORY OF *Everything* LUKE 24:27

In the final hours before he died, Jesus told his followers, “It’s better for me to go” (Jn. 16:7). But have you ever wondered why the resurrected Jesus had to go? What if he had stayed? We could have all sorts of proofs that Jesus is real. The tomb is empty and he’s walking around, 2000 years old! You have questions about the Christian faith? Just go to our leader! He’ll answer any of your questions! You need proof? Our resurrected leaders still walks and talks and teaches and he hasn’t aged a day since his resurrection! All the proof you’d ever need!

If only Jesus had stayed, we think we wouldn’t have to have all these discussions with people. We think that the evidence would be enough proof to bring people to faith. We wish that Jesus was here because then we could go to him with our needs and our sicknesses and be healed.

And yet – he isn’t here. After spending 40 days with his disciples in various settings after the resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven. And Jesus told us that it was good that he was going to the Father. Why is it good that Jesus has gone to heaven? Why is it better that he has not stayed?

Wait for the Promise – He’s With Us

Luke tells us at the beginning of the book of Acts that Jesus was with his disciples for forty days, teaching them about the kingdom of God (v. 3). This had been Jesus’ message. So the disciples wanted to know if the kingdom was going to be restored to Israel at this time (v. 6). But Jesus tells them to wait for the promise of the Spirit so that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (v. 8). What does all of this kingdom language have to do with the ascension and with the mission of the Church?

One of the key passages that shaped how Jesus understood his life and ministry was Daniel 7. In that chapter, Daniel has a dream about four great beasts – these nations that will rise up from the earth and have great power. They will use their power in ways that tramples over others, a destructive power that will rule with harm.

But Daniel also sees the Ancient of Days on his throne, and the power of these nations are defeated. Then something profound happens. (READ Daniel 7:13-14). When the angel comes and interprets the dream, what is clear is that the kingdoms of this world will all bow to the power of the kingdom of God. This is how the dream ends in Dan. 7:26-27.

Why this is important is that the Son of Man goes on the clouds into the presence of the Ancient of Days, moving from earth to heaven. And what Luke describes is Jesus, the Son of Man (a title often used by Jesus himself), ascending in the clouds from earth to heaven. He is going to take his throne! Peter understood this in the next chapter of Acts when he said “David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand’” (2:34-35).

The Story of Everything: Ascension – Acts 1:1-11

CBC Ilderton

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The promise in the Old Testament to David was that there would be one who would sit on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:11ff). And now, Luke begins to pull all these pieces together for us. Jesus ascends to heaven, going to sit at the right hand of the Father so that he would begin his rule and reign as the Son of David, the Son of Man, ascended. And by ruling and reigning, he promises that he will send his power to be with us. And the promise of the presence of his ruling power is the presence of his Spirit. Jesus goes into heaven to rule and reign. He goes as the Son of Man to conquer the nations that Daniel saw. He goes as the Son of David to take the throne. And he goes so that his presence would be with us. This was the promise of the Father – I will walk among you and not abhor you (Lev. 26:11-12). He would receive the nations as an inheritance (Ps. 2:8). He would be the king enthroned forever.

It's good that Jesus has gone into heaven. By going into heaven, he has begun to rule and reign. He has begun to show us that his kingdom cannot fail. And he promises to send the Spirit as the display of his power that will rule over the nations.

What this means is that Jesus is King! We are not just inviting people into a personal relationship with Jesus. We are telling them that Jesus is King. Jesus is coming to establish his kingdom and subdue his enemies. We are calling people to stop their rebellion against the coming victorious King. And we go in the power of the Spirit, with the presence of the ascended Christ with us!

We are not going out into the world as weak, helpless Christians. We are going out with the very presence and power of Jesus himself. We are going and declaring to the ends of the world that his kingdom cannot fail! He rules over earth and heaven. The keys of death and hell are to our Jesus given! (see Charles Wesley's hymn "Rejoice, the Lord is King! Your Lord and King Adore").

So it is good that Jesus has gone into heaven. He has gone into the clouds, going to the presence of the Ancient of Days where he has begun to rule and reign. And the display of his rule and reign is the sending of his Spirit. This is why Jesus can say at the end of Matthew: "All authority has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples..." (Matt. 28:16ff). Jesus already rules and reigns. He has sent his Spirit. He is with you. So why this fear and unbelief? Why shrink back? Jesus is with us and will keep us as we go in his rule and reign!

Hold Fast to Our Confession – He's For Us

As Jesus ascends into the heavens, Luke tells us some very important details in v. 9: He was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. This moment is connecting some key pieces of the Bible story together for us, some critical components that we should not miss so that we can have confidence in holding to our confession, knowing that the ascended Jesus is for us.

The Story of Everything: Ascension – Acts 1:1-11

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First, Luke tells us that he was taken up, and second, he was hidden in the cloud. And this moment actually connects us to the Exodus story in some profound ways that give us confidence to hold fast to our confession.

When Israel had come out of Egypt, they had offered a lamb as a sacrifice, placing the blood on their doors so that the angel of death would pass over them. God had brought them out of slavery, into the wilderness, and there he led them to Mount Sinai. At Sinai, God had told Moses that he would make the people his treasured possession, and he would be their God, and they would be his people (Exod. 19:5-6). He would make a covenant with them. But the people were not to go near or touch the mountain (Exod. 19:12, 21-22). They had seen Moses go up the mountain where there was smoke and lightning. It was a terrifying sight. So the people had said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die” (Exod. 20:19). So Moses ascended the mountain on behalf of the people to come before God where he acts as a mediator for the people, and he is hidden by the cloud.

What happens next is that Moses is told to build a tabernacle. He is given instructions about how God will dwell among the people. There are very specific instructions that God tells Moses is a pattern for him to replicate (Exod. 25:40; 26:30; 27:8).

At the tabernacle, God told Moses that the priest was to act as a mediator between God and the people, entering into the presence of God by a sacrifice – a burnt offering. The burnt offering is described in Leviticus 1 and is more than just a sacrifice that is burnt up. It could also be described as an ascension offering – an offering going up in smoke, an offering going up to God. This is the sacrifice that Moses and the 70 elders offer before they go up the mountain in Exod. 24 so that they can share a meal with God. Leviticus 1 describes how this moment of the covenant meal is to be repeated. Why? So that people can come into the presence of God.

And now, Jesus ascends to God. He doesn’t go up the mountain and get hidden by a cloud. He goes up into heaven and a cloud takes him out of sight. Jesus has been offered as the burnt offering and now ascends to God. And by his ascent to God, the sacrifice that forgives sin and invites us into a meal with God is complete. Luke tells us these details, connecting the story of the first Exodus so that we could have confidence to hold fast to our confession of faith.

So do you wonder how you could ever be bold for Jesus? Do you ever wonder how you could ask bold requests of God for the salvation of friends and family and why he would ever take you seriously? Do you ever wonder if God could hear your prayers? Do you ever wonder how you could have intimacy with God? The ascension is the answer. Jesus has ascended. Like the offering of Leviticus 1, he is the ascension offering. And the goal of the ascension offering is just like Exodus 24 – that we could have fellowship with God. That we could come into his presence.

That we could know that we are his people and he is our God. That we could have boldness and confidence to come before him in prayer. That we could not shrink back, but press forward.

It is good that Jesus has gone into the heavens. He has gone up into the presence of God, like Moses, as our mediator so that we can have fellowship with God. As the writer of Hebrews would say to Jewish Christians who were tempted to go back to the ways of the Old Testament, “Since then we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, but one who in every respect tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then in confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need” (Heb. 4:14-16). Jesus has gone into the heavens as our ascension offering, our high priest, so that we can come boldly before God and go boldly into the world so that we can...

Go with the Power of the Glorious Christ

The book of Acts begins with the disciples in Jerusalem, having fled for their lives after Good Friday, fearing what would happen next. Concerned about the power of Rome and the opposition from their fellow Jewish people, the first band of disciples could do nothing but hide away, wondering what would happen next. Even though Jesus had been raised from the dead, Acts begins with this small band of fearful disciples, tucked away in a room in Jerusalem, waiting, wondering.

But the book of Acts ends very differently. It ends in Rome, not Jerusalem. It ends with one of the key missionary leaders in house arrest. The key missionary in the movement is under arrest, waiting for his case to be heard, and if it would end badly, the result would be his execution. But if that sounds bleak, we need to read the last verse of the book of Acts. What was Paul doing while in house arrest? He was “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hinderance” (Acts 28:31).

From fear to faith. From cautious to confident. From few to many followers. From Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. What made all the difference? Jesus left. It was good that he would leave. Why? Because in leaving, he has given us his very presence to be with us. He has shown us that he is ruling and reigning at the right hand of the Father. He has given us the confidence that can speak boldly.

The ascension might only be mentioned in a few verses, but for us as Christians, it is vital to the life of the Church. Jesus has gone into heaven. He’s for you. He is with you. So now you can go and be his witnesses in your home, in your workplace, to the ends of the earth. He’s with us. He’s for us. So let’s go!