

# The Ascension

God calls people upward. It's easy to get down. It's easy to stay down. It's safe down low...but the if you want to grow spiritually, it has to be up. God is calling you up. He tells us things like lift your eyes and fix your mind on the things above. He wants you to come up higher, draw near to Him, where He is....

Do you hear that call? Many Christians don't....here's why...complacency. If you are satisfied with where you are, you won't hear the call to come up higher. Today we will focus on hearing that call and rising up.

This past Thursday was Ascension Day, the 40th day after Jesus' resurrection, a day where we remember Jesus' ascension to heaven.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples. He spent 40 days with them teaching them about the kingdom of God. Yes, that is what He had been doing for the last 3+ years or so, but this was different. This was deeper. Look at what He told them before His ascension....

## **Luke 24:44-45 (NKJV)**

44 Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

See Jesus had already told them all of this. He had taught them the law and prophecies that were written about Him. They had a head knowledge of them but lacked the understanding....even after all this time. But Jesus opened their understanding. He called them up to a higher level giving them a supernatural ability to receive the truths that He unfolded.

I know sometimes we read the bible and it can be hard to understand. You may understand it intellectually but not spiritually. You may have the head knowledge but not the heart knowledge. Don't feel bad about it....but don't stay there either....

These people spent 3+ years with Jesus. Not just hanging out casting lots, but evangelizing, witnessing, spreading the gospel. Yet they lacked that higher understanding. Jesus supernaturally gifted it to them, and can do the same for you today. Don't get comfortable where you are. Seek, knock, and ask for greater understanding. That means keep reading, keep praying....

With their understanding opened to receive, He continues....

**Luke 24:46-49 (NKJV)**

46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.48 And you are witnesses of these things. 49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

This life that Jesus lived, the life they were a part of, it was necessary. It was a pivotal part of God's plan. The cross was not Plan B. God was not surprised by man's sin. Jesus went to the cross exactly as God had intended before the world was created.

**Acts 2:23 (NLT)**

23 But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him.

Jesus reminds His disciples that it was all necessary, now that they can understand it. And it's necessary that repentance and the remission of sins be preached in the name of Jesus to all people groups. Because if they don't get that then the death and resurrection have no power in their lives. There is no life apart from Jesus....

He says you are witnesses of these things. They were first hand eyewitnesses. They were the ones who were left with the responsibility to share their account of who Jesus is. That responsibility has been passed on to us! How dare we keep it to ourselves?

You know when you get one of those good family recipes? Let's say Grandma made the best pie. Sure you could just eat that pie, keep it in house and never share it, but it's sooooo good that you kinda just want to show it off.

So you have a dinner and invite a family over (say your pastor's family) and you make this pie. While you are making it you are thinking about how good it is and how impressed your guests will be. So they come over, eat a fantastic meal, and you pull out the pie. You warm it up, throw some ice cream on the top....and everyone loves it. You did Grandma proud. Your guests loved the pie so much they want you to make one for someone else who HAS TO try it. They are telling everyone about this pie....it's soo good....unlike anything I've ever had....

Shouldn't it be the same with the gospel? Shouldn't people experience something when they are around you that they can't get anywhere else. Something that has been passed down to you that you've just gotta share because it's just way too good to keep to yourself?

Because if they taste it, they will see that the Lord is GOOD! They will want to share it with their friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers.

Now they might also ask for the recipe....and they just might have to wait on that one.....

**Luke 24:49 (NKJV)**

49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”

Jesus told His disciples what to do.....be witnesses of His death and resurrection, preach repentance and the remission of sin in the name of Jesus. They knew WHAT to do, but they had to wait for the HOW.

It's like trying to bake that pie without the recipe. If you don't have that main secret ingredient, it may look similar but it isn't going to taste the same.

Jesus says go and wait for the Holy Spirit who will empower you to be the witness you need to be.

**Luke 24:50-51 (NKJV)**

50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.  
51 Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.

Notice Jesus lifted up His hands and blessed them. This was no common blessing, this was engaging with the Father in heaven, asking for His favor upon His people. This was a prayer of the blessings promised to Abraham being invoked upon these people.

Then it came to pass that while He blessed them, He ascended to heaven. This blessing took a while. Jesus prayed pentecostal prayers before pentecost. Jesus took His time to pray over these disciples because He was calling them higher. He knew that what they were being tasked with would not be possible if they remained where they were at.

Right before their very eyes, He was lifted into heaven. Can you imagine? He dies, then He's back and things are better than ever, and all of the sudden, WHILE He is blessing you.....He starts going UP.....

**Acts 1:9-11 (NKJV)**

9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, 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 who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

I can imagine I would have had a similar reaction....I might have been thinking “what in the world is going on NOW?”

Jesus could have just vanished. He could have just walked off and not come back. But He didn't. He was lifted up, in a physical, resurrected body. And entered into glory. It says a cloud received Him out of their sight.

They just saw a MAN enter into glory. Jesus is in a physical body in heaven today. And He's coming back in the same manner.....

**Matthew 26:64 (NLT)**

64 Jesus replied, "You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven."

I think His ascension to heaven right before the disciples eyes was a sign to them and to us that He was transitioning authority to His people. It was like proof "I'm really leaving this time". I've got to go prepare that place for you....

**John 14:2-3 (NIV)**

2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

As they look to heaven, they are reminded of His eventual return for His church....

**Luke 24:52-53 (NKJV)**

52 And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.

The response to Jesus leaving was "they worshiped Him". They didn't fear what was next. They didn't worry about when He'd return. They didn't cry because He was gone. They worshiped Him.

As He ascended so did they, spiritually. They got it. Even though Jesus had departed, they worshiped Him as the living Lord.

Then they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. Isn't it interesting? I would expect it to say they returned with great faith or expectation but JOY?

Do you sometimes feel a lack of joy in your life? Do you read this account of the ascension of Jesus and ask yourself, "Why do I not have great joy in my life?"

The reason the disciples were so full of great joy is that they now clearly understood the person and work of Jesus. Whenever Christians struggle with a lack of joy, it is because we have taken our eyes off Jesus. We are overwhelmed by our circumstances, or we give in to temptation, or we believe Satan's lies. The remedy is to look to Jesus and remind

ourselves of who he is and what he has done to rescue us from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Instead of feeling down that Jesus left. They had joy that God has visited and redeemed His people! The joy of His presence was so powerful that it overflowed beyond His time with them.

Joy is the deep-down sense of well-being that abides in the heart of the person who knows all is well between himself and the Lord.

*“and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.”*

This is how Luke closes out his account of the gospel. They were constantly in the temple praising and blessing God. They went to their place of worship and teaching. They got together, all the time, to praise God.

This would have included singing praises to Him, celebrating Jesus' coming and going, invoking God's blessings. This was an overflow of the joy that they had for Jesus. Here church was birthed. Church is essential to our faith. Jesus didn't meet with people one on one, He met them in groups. He sent them out in groups. He blessed them in groups.

They were constantly in the temple praising and blessing God.

That was the beginning of the church, and it is also the key to why the church matters. What would have happened if Christ had ascended without commissioning the disciples; or if those first commissioned disciples had decided they were through with this Jesus-business and they were going to go back to home and get their lives back to normal? That would have been the end. Christ would have lived, taught, healed, died and been resurrected, and within a few generations he would have been forgotten; the healing would have stopped, the resurrection promise would have been lost, the hope would have faded away. Christ's love and salvation never would have been known beyond those people who encountered him during his years on earth.

If we in the church do not continue Christ's ministry, no one will. That is why the church matters! Christ made a difference in people's lives. He healed the sick. He helped the poor. He forgave sinners. He shared God's grace and love. And he died on the cross so that we might have eternal life with our loving God. We are talking about the difference between life and death, and it is the church's task to get that message out into the world! Christ can transform people's lives if only we will show people who Christ is and what he is about!

Jesus left us with the promise of His Spirit to help us, to give us power and boldness to be a witness. So let's do it!

What areas do you need God to work on this morning? As He is calling you higher, what has to low?

Do you need your understanding opened up?

Do you need to repent and be forgiven?

Do you need to learn to worship Him?

Do you need to know His joy?