

Christ's Commission And Ascension

(Luke 24:44-53 and Acts 1:1-11)

Intro: The Easter story does not conclude with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Easter concludes forty days after Christ's resurrection with His ascension back to His Father in heaven. The ascension of our Savior Jesus Christ is a very important event, an event which served to return and to restore Jesus to His eternal glory and majesty as God's exalted Son. ***The ascension of Jesus to heaven is recorded only by Luke***, and that with an unusual brevity (Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:9). Luke makes it clear that Jesus' ascension marks the final departure of the resurrected Lord from the earth, thus bringing an end to His forty day period of post-resurrection appearances

Equally important is the Commission that Christ issued to His disciples to go forth as His witnesses beginning in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:18-20).

Look with me this morning at Luke's account of Christ's commission to His disciples, and ascension back to His Father in Luke 24:44-53 & Acts 1:1-11.

The setting for this material appears to be the final day of what is referred to as Christ's 40 day post-resurrection ministry. The material in the preceding verses, 36-43, clearly takes place on Easter Sunday evening. We looked at this last Sunday. The "**Now He said to them**" in **verse 44** introduces Jesus' parting words to His disciples on the day He ascended to heaven. Again, this would be the conclusion of Christ's 40 day post-resurrection ministry to His disciples. Luke tells us in Acts 1:3 that *Christ presented Himself alive to His disciples by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking to them many things concerning the coming kingdom of God.*

I. Christ's Appearances to His Disciples Luke 24:44-49

A. Christ provides understanding: "*He opened their minds to understand the meaning of the Scriptures*" (vv. 44-45; cf. v. 27)

1. The Old Testament Scriptures predicted Christ's *suffering and death, resurrection, and ascension:*

44 Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures

The first thing Christ does in His final appearance to His disciples is open their minds to understand the meaning of the Scriptures in relation to His incarnation, suffering, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension back to His Father. As we have seen through our studies in the Gospels, the disciples failed to understand the numerous Old Testament predictions foretelling Messiah’s suffering and death. The disciples, like most Jews in that day, were looking forward to the coming of their Messianic King who would deliver them from the Roman oppression and occupation. The equally valid predictions of a *Suffering Savior* in passages such as Isaiah 52–53 were ignored. **We read in verse 45 of Luke 24**

v. 45—Christ opened His disciples’ minds so they could understand the meaning of the Scriptures in relation to His mission from the Father. He had done the same thing for the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus (v. 27). Now He explains to the entire company of His disciples “*that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled*” (v. 44).

This is the common threefold division of the Old Testament: the Law of Moses or the first five books, the Prophets, which included most of the historical books, and the Psalms, which included the writings. The Old Testament contains over 600 prophecies about the Messiah. I have selected 1 well known predictions from each of the three divisions mentioned: the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms:

a. The Law—Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19

15 “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. 18 ‘I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 ‘ And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.

The Lord Jesus Christ, is the prophet like Moses that God raised up to speak His words of forgiveness and life to all men. According to **Luke 24:19** Jesus the Nazarene, was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people. And **Peter says in Acts 3:22-26**, that Moses, as well as all the prophets from Samuel and his successors onward, all announced the days of the Lord Jesus Christ, who God sent as a Servant to bless us by turning every one of us from our wicked ways.

b. The Prophets—Isaiah 52:13–53:12

This passage in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 describing the Suffering Servant, who would be crushed and put to death by God the Father for the sin of the world, is perhaps one of the most famous prophecies of all. The Jews of Jesus' day applied it to the nation of Israel or ignored it altogether.

c. The Psalms—Psalm 16:8-11

This prophecy traces the full course of Christ's earthly ministry from His humiliating death on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, and His ascension back to glory at God's right hand (cf. Acts 2:24-36).

2. The Lord Jesus predicted His *suffering, death, and resurrection* (Luke 9:22, 44; 17:25; 18:32-33)

Jesus' repeated predictions of His approaching suffering, death, burial, and resurrection were not understood by the disciples. From the very beginning of His ministry, the Lord was not only aware that He had come into this world to die for our sin, but anticipated His resurrection and ascension. Christ knew that His death, resurrection, and ascension were essential for fulfilling God's purposes and solving man's dilemma. There must be both the **DESCENT** of the Holy One from heaven, and the **ASCENT** of the glorified God-man back into heaven.

Application: The Lord Jesus desires to do the same thing for you and me today. He wants to open our minds to understand the meaning of the Scriptures. He wants to equip every one of us to live for His glory. *Lord Jesus do this for us this morning: open our minds to understand Your Word and plan for our lives! Help us to spend time in Your Word, and to live for You each and every day.*

B. Christ commissions His disciples to be His witnesses (vv. 46-48)

The second thing Christ did was to commission His disciples to be His witnesses (vv. 46-48)

Jesus' disciples had witnessed His death and resurrection on the third day, therefore, they were to go forth and proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning with Jerusalem (see Acts 1:8). The Book of Acts provides the record of the church's birth on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and expansion to the entire Gentile world, initially through the efforts of the Apostle Peter, and later through the Apostle Paul (Acts 10–28).

C. Christ promises to send the Holy Spirit (v. 49; Acts 1:4)

1. The coming of the promised Holy Spirit (v. 49a; John 14:16, 26; 16:7; Acts 1:4-5)

Jesus had told His disciples on the night of His betrayal that His departure was necessary so that the Holy Spirit could come. **John 16:7** *“It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away the Comforter will not come to you, but if I go I will send Him to you.”* It is by means of the Holy Spirit that Jesus makes His life intimately and personally available to each of us. The Holy Spirit indwells every person who believes in Jesus Christ from the moment that one repents of their sin and invites Christ to come into their life (1 Cor. 12:13). The Holy Spirit cleanses us from sin and empowers us to live for the glory of God and Jesus Christ.

2. The command to stay in Jerusalem to await the Holy Spirit's coming (v. 49b; Acts 1:4)

The disciples were commanded to stay in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high, the Holy Spirit. As we all know, these first disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit ten days later, on the Day of Pentecost. Luke records this initial filling of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2. Paul informs us in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that every subsequent believer is filled with the Holy Spirit at the moment they believe on and invite Jesus Christ to come into their life as Savior.

II. Christ's Ascension Back to His Father (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-11)

A. Christ's final goodbye to His disciples (vv. 50-51; Acts 1:9-11)

Immediately after commissioning His disciples Christ led them out, presumably from Jerusalem, to the top of the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12). While lifting up His hands and blessing His disciples, Christ ascended bodily up into heaven (vv. 50-51).

What an amazing experience this was! As the disciples were standing on the Mount of Olives, they watched as Jesus with arms extended and pronouncing blessings upon them, ascend up into the sky and was received up in a cloud. They never saw Him again; He does not go beyond the cloud, but just disappears. The cloud received Him out of their sight.

It appears that once Christ was in the atmospheric heaven, He was engulfed by a cloud. Though we are not told so, this may have been the same *shekina* or glory cloud connected with the transfiguration, and which descended on the tabernacle in the wilderness, and filled Solomon's temple. Many Bible commentators believe this was the *shekinah* cloud, or glory cloud of God. It was a supernatural cloud, a symbol of Christ's glorification as the Son of God. He was resuming His preincarnate glory—the glory He had before the incarnation. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus had prayed that His Father would restore Him to His eternal glory that He had always shared with Him **John 17:1-5. His ascension restored Him to His eternal glory!**

B. The disciples' great joy and worship (vv. 52-53)

Notice the disciples' tremendous transformation: they went from fearful and depressed to confident and joyful. They returned to Jerusalem with great joy in their hearts. They had finally come to understand the meaning of Christ's mission of suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. He had come to offer Himself as the atonement for man's sin. Whereas His death paid for all sin, His resurrection and ascension validated His sacrifice as well pleasing to the Father.

v. 53—the cowering disciples returned to Jerusalem as bold witnesses for Jesus Christ. They were continually in the temple giving praise to God.

The disciples' initial sadness over Jesus' goodbye was turned to great joy once they came to understand the purposes of God. How about you, do the trials and hardships of life have you down this morning? It is my prayer for each of us that God might help us to understand what He intends for us to do in service to Christ and this body. May you be filled with great joy as you discover God's will for your life, and as you begin to serve Him!

Conclusion:

Salvation in, and service to the resurrected Christ brings us great joy and peace of heart. The indwelling Holy Spirit equips us with power to live a life that glorifies God, and benefits one another. The heart of the Easter message is Jesus' command for all of us to go tell others that He is alive! What GREAT NEWS. May God help us to start living it and sharing it!

Applications:

1. It is clear from Luke's account that the Easter story actually concludes with Christ's ascension back to heaven in glory.
2. We too can and should experience great joy because our Savior lives.
3. We can experience great joy because our ascended Lord Jesus has made His life and power available to believers through the Holy Spirit.
3. We can experience great joy because Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven.
4. Lastly, let me say, the pain of saying goodbye to a loved one or facing any trial in life can be eased considerably when we understand that we have a victorious Savior at the Father's right hand. One who loves us and lives forever to make intercession on our behalf!

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for this insight into the privileges that Christ has secured for each and every believer. Please turn our sadness and sorrow into great joy and praise for all that You have done for us through Your Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Please open our minds to understand your Word, and the purposes You desire for us to carry out. Equip us by Your indwelling Holy Spirit to love and to serve You and one another. We ask this loving Father for Jesus sake! Amen!

Closing song: *More Love, More Power* Lyrics are on the back of your handout