



**UP THE DOWN STAIRCASE**  
**Luke 24:50-53, Acts 1:1-11**

Today we come to one of the great events in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ – His glorious ascension. We share almost every week in the words of the Apostles’ Creed, “He **ascended** into heaven.”

We have been preaching and studying our way this year as a church family through the book of Acts written by Dr. Luke, the physician and historian. Today, in our reading from **Acts 1:1-11** we observe that the book of Acts opens with the event known as the Ascension.

Jesus takes the disciples all of 2 miles away from Jerusalem to the vicinity of Bethany where it says, “He lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them he left them, and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the Temple, praising God.” This is the first occasion I know of when Jesus is now worshiped.

He is no longer just their teacher and master; he is their Messiah and Lord. They not only worshiped him – but with great joy. Remember back almost 5 months ago, when we read of the birth of Christ? Luke said, “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” The Ascension brings that truth to completion.

St. Luke also writes another book, that you and I know as the **Gospel of St. Luke**. Luke closes that gospel with the account of the ascension. This is our first hint that this event has a surplus of meaning to us.

Last November when we worshipped at the Garden Spot chapel I preached a sermon entitled, **“Climbing Down the Ladder.”** I had Rachel and Ryan Figgins climbing down and up a ladder.

I shared how Jesus climbed down the ladder from his heavenly home and became a servant. He laid aside his divinity. Today that direction is reversed. He goes up the down staircase.

My first point for your consideration today is that **THE ASCENSION COMPLETES THE EARTHLY – PUBLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST.**

The ministry of atonement is fulfilled. When Jesus cried out “It is finished” – the debt was paid – sins were covered and the wrath of God was removed and Satan was mortally wounded. Satan is now a defeated enemy. The disciples were now absolutely convinced that Jesus had broken the powers of sin and death and was alive forevermore. As Charles Wesley would later write, “He breaks the power of cancelled sin - He sets the prisoner free.” While we know the disciples had been slow of heart to believe, they nevertheless believed. Now their hearts and souls were full of courage that would now allow them to be witnesses of this truth. This is our confidence also.

### **SECONDLY, THE ASCENSION OPENS THE PERIOD OF THE CHURCH MISSION – OR WHAT WE CALL THE CHURCH AGE.**

The disciples are no longer just students and learners – but they are now witnesses of all that Jesus Christ had done and completed in his earthly ministry. After his ascension in **Acts 1:9** – he tells them not to keep looking up in the skies – but to get to work. The story of how that work unfolded we have studied these past months. Those 11 disciples plus Paul - now empowered by the hope of the resurrection and the ascension of Christ – help grow a movement that now numbers 2.4 billion believers. You and I – this church – are a part of this ongoing witness and story. That is why this church historically has invested almost 35% of its budget to missionary work. We don’t ask ‘What did Jesus do?’ – but ‘What is Jesus doing?’ He is alive and reigning, at work in our lives. The question is, ‘What is your ministry and service in light of this victory?’

### **THIRDLY, THE ASCENSION BEGINS THE ROYAL RULE OF JESUS CHRIST OVER ALL THE WORLD.**

The Jewish Messiah has become the Cosmic Christ for all the earth. The book of Acts demonstrated how the risen – enthroned Christ is at work in his disciples – building the kingdom of God through his church which will be birthed in chapter 2. The work began in Jerusalem – but then spread to Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world. Yes, the good news would not be limited to one nation – one race – one age – or any other limitation. Yes, the Jewish Messiah is the Christ for all the world. God in Christ has torn down all the walls that man has built to separate each other. We have all been brought near through the blood of Christ.

### **FOURTHLY, THE ASCENSION DECLARES THAT JESUS THE CHRIST IS THE KING OF ALL KINGS.**

It is very important for us as believers and witnesses to never forget that because Jesus Christ is King – he will have the final word in our lives and the world. The Creed states: “He will judge the living and the dead.” Christ, not Caesar, rules the world. It was this truth that transformed the world. It still does. Every king or Emperor will fade away into the pages of history – a mere footnote – but Jesus the Lord of the church continues to grow. His name can never be erased. His name – as one writer said – “is simply plowed into the pages of history.” He is still reaping the harvest.

We know from history that earthly kings and queens may sit on the throne for awhile – even decades. Queen Elizabeth has been the Queen of England since 1952. However, the King we serve is seated high above - his kingdom is eternal. We know that the Bible teaches us that “His kingdom is not of this world.” However, this is where the paradox comes – because this King is always at work in this world. We know that this king died on a cross – but yet because of his ascension – this king is eternal and he shall reign forever and ever. From the Book of Revelation we discover he is “King of all kings and Lord of all lords.” The Psalmist cries out – “The Lord is a great God – and a great King above all gods.” The Apostle Paul declares – **“In Him all things hold together.”**

Since Christ has triumphed over Caesars, emperors, and Hitlers – don’t worry unduly about the book **ANGELS AND DEMONS** or the countless books written trumpeting the cause of atheism. As one poet wrote:

O, where are kings and empires now,  
Of old that went and came  
But Lord, Thy church is praying yet,  
A thousand years the same.<sup>1</sup>

**FIFTHLY, THE ASCENSION DECLARES, THE SON OF GOD WHO ENTERED TIME AND SPACE AT BETHLEHEM IS NOT CONFINED BY THESE LIMITATIONS OF TIME AND SPACE.**

It was the late Archbishop William Temple who helped me more than anyone else to understand the meaning of the ascension when he wrote, “The Ascension of Christ is his liberation from all restrictions of time and space. It did not represent his removal from earth – but his constant presence everywhere on earth.” He is now, **“Simply everywhere.”** Wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in his name, he promises to be present with them. The African-American spiritual teaches us and reminds us, “He’s got the whole world in his hands.”

C. S. Lewis coined the phrase that at Jesus’ birth “God entered time and space.” At Jesus’ ascension, He towers above these limitations again. There is much evidence from all his post-resurrection appearances that he could appear and disappear as he pleased. The road to Emmaus is such an experience (**Luke 24:13-35**). On one occasion, he instructed some of the women not to physically touch him because he had not yet **“ascended”** to His Father (**John 20:17**).

As Archbishop William Temple further shares, during his earthly ministry he could only be in one place at a time. If he was in Jerusalem – he was not in Capernaum; if he was in Capernaum, he was not in Jerusalem. Because He is now ascended – he can be present everywhere. Now the presence of Christ can be enjoyed at all times and in all places – by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “When I go – the Father will send the Holy Comforter.” That is why we do not need to go to the Holy Lands to experience Jesus Christ – because he is present everywhere.

## **SIXTHLY, THE ASCENSION CONTINUES THE GLORIFICATION OF JESUS CHRIST.**

We know from **Philippians 2:5-11**, the great journey that Christ made from heaven to earth. We call it the 'Kenosis Passage' – whereby Christ voluntarily lays aside or strips himself of his divinity in order to experience our human struggles and frailties. How that happens has challenged theologians for centuries to try to explain the unexplainable. However, Charles Wesley said it best, **“He emptied himself of all but love – and bled for Adam’s helpless race.”**<sup>2</sup>

In the ascension, Jesus took up again the fullness of his God-self, his deity. It was the end of the kenosis, the self-imposed self-limitation.<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine called the Ascension the most important Christian festival of the year.

The Ascension reminds us just how high Jesus was raised. His name – Jesus – because of his sacrifice and obedience to the will of the Father – has a saving power that no other name in history is allowed. When Paul tells us that we wrestle with powers and principalities in high places – we do not worry because Jesus is higher than them.

The head once crowned with thorns is crowned with many crowns. Yes, the Lamb wins – not the scepter of any earthly ruler. That is why we sing, **“All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name.”**

## **NEXT, THE ASCENSION BEGINS THE OFFICE OF THE ETERNAL INTERCESSORY WORK OF JESUS CHRIST AS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST.**

Jesus - now seated at the exalted and honored position at the right hand of God – uses that power and relationship with the Father to intercede and pray for us. Yes, **Hebrews 8:1-2** name Christ’s present work since the Ascension as that of a High Priest.<sup>4</sup> At this very moment Christ is praying for us and the church of which he is the head. What are you asking Jesus to bring before the Father right now? John Calvin – in his landmark work, **THE INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION** – describes the three-fold office of Jesus Christ as that of Prophet – Priest – and King.

## **FURTHER, THE ASCENSION DECLARES THAT JESUS REIGNS SUPREME OVER ALL HIS ENEMIES.**

Yes, the resurrection signaled the defeat of the last enemy – death. This truth is shared in **1 Peter 3:22**. Mr. Peterson translates this verse in **THE MESSAGE**: “Jesus has the last word on everything and everyone, from angels to armies. He’s standing right alongside God, and what he says goes.”<sup>5</sup>

Yes, Christ’s kingdom will never fail or fall because it has a king nobody elected and nobody can dethrone. This brought joy to the disciples knowing that nothing in all creation could separate them from King Jesus. It should for us as well.

It was from Dr. Tom Oden that we learned in seminary that because of the Ascension – flesh and blood are now acceptable in God’s holy presence because it has been assumed into the Godhead because of the Ascension of our Lord. As God became one with us in Jesus – so now you and I can become one with God in Jesus. Charles Wesley writes, “No condemnation now I dread, Jesus and all in him is mine! Alive in him – my Living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine. Bold I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.”<sup>6</sup>

Yes, the Ascension reminds us that our risen Lord now fills the entire universe with his presence and power as the exalted Christ. As the Head of the church, he continues to equip us and send us back into his world to do his work and to witness to him and to share the good news of the gospel that we are forgiven and that all of human life is claimed by him.

Finally, the ascension sets the stage for the second or final coming of Jesus Christ. I pray that you are prepared and ready for this great event. If you believe in the ascension of Christ – you will be ready.

Therefore, since it all belongs to him, let us continue our work in his vineyard with confidence until he comes again in his full and final glory.

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz  
May 24, 2009 Preached at both services  
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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Cleveland Coxe.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Wesley, **“And Can it Be That I Should Gain”**, verse 3.

<sup>3</sup> **THE UNNECESSARY PASTOR: Rediscovering the Call**, Marva J. Dawn and Eugene H. Peterson, William B. Eerdmann Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000, page 141.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Dawn, page.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **THE MESSAGE: The New Testament in Contemporary English**, NavPress, Colorado Springs, Co., 1993, page 492, I Peter 3:22.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Wesley, **“And Can It Be That I Should Gain”**, verse 5.