***Ascension Matters***

**Ready for Pentecost #5, Luke 24:50-53 May 15, 2022**

***When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany,   
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.*Luke 24:50-53**

**First observation: When in doubt, worship together!**

**Image #1: Jesus really is the victorious Lord**

*32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. 33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. 34 For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,*

*“ ‘The Lord said to my Lord:*

*“Sit at my right hand*

*35 until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” ’*

*36 “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”*

Acts 2:32-36, Peter’s Pentecost sermon where he quotes from Psalm 110

*7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says:*

*“When he ascended on high,*

*he led captives in his train*

*and gave gifts to men.”*

Ephesians 4, Paul is quoting Psalm 68

1. Both Hebrew and Roman culture knew how to celebrate \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2. Peter and Paul (and everyone else, too!) were looking for a victorious Messiah

3. Jesus, “exalted to the right hand of God” is the final evidence of his Lordship

**Image #2: the priest who intercedes**

*23 Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; 24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

*26 Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.*

Hebrews 10

1. Jesus, to be our priestly intercessor, has to be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2. Jesus’ intercession is an essential element of our redemption – Jesus is not finished!

And no humiliation, therefore, can characterize his intercessory activity. But the fact that from the seat of exalted and undimmed glory and in the exercise of high priestly prerogative he interposes petition to the Father on behalf of every one of his own, to the end that they also may be glorified with him, should cause us to be filled with holy and adoring amazement at the condescensions of trinitarian love and grace. And the effect will then be that we shall be humbled to the point of being speechless, in a true sense exasperated, at the thought of the intercession which is interjected to save us from the doom which our continuing sinfulness and unfaithfulness deserve and saved to a glory which consists in glorification with Christ.

John Murray, “The Heavenly Priestly Activity of Christ”

**What we learn about Jesus’ return**

1) Jesus is coming back in this same way

*9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

*10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*

Acts 1

2) Jesus is preparing a place

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. 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.”*

John 14 (see Spurgeon’s great sermon, “The Ascension and Second Coming”)

**What Jesus’ ascension means**

1) Jesus ascends bodily to remind us that bodies still matter!

*23 Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; 24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

*26 Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.*

Acts 2

2) Jesus ascends to provide gifts for his church

*7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says:*

*“When he ascended on high,*

*he led captives in his train*

*and gave gifts to men.”*

*9 (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

3) Jesus ascends to guarantee our access to the Father

*11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. 13 Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, 14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy . . . .*

*19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith . . . .*

Hebrews 10

**Resources for studying Luke**

*Bible.org* has some wonderful resources at [*https://bible.org/book/Luke*](https://bible.org/book/Luke)

I. Howard Marshall’s Greek commentary is my go to help (Eerdmans, 1978)

Spurgeon has a sermon that connects the ascension and Second Coming at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/1817.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/1817.htm)

J. C. Ryle has an interesting commentary at [*https://gracegems.org/Ryle/l24.htm*](https://gracegems.org/Ryle/l24.htm) I have also included his classic article, “Repentance”, at [*https://www.monergism.com/repentance*](https://www.monergism.com/repentance)

Bob Deffinbaugh has a very interesting sermon series on Luke at [*https://bible.org/series/luke-gospel-gentiles*](https://bible.org/series/luke-gospel-gentiles)*.* His message on the end of Luke is at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/invisibility-invincibility-luke-2436-53*](https://bible.org/seriespage/invisibility-invincibility-luke-2436-53) Deffinbaugh has another sermon on the ascention, but I don’t agree that the ascension “does not serve as a fitting conclusion” to Jesus life, at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/ascension-luke-2431-acts-11-11*](https://bible.org/seriespage/ascension-luke-2431-acts-11-11)

Kevin DeYoung has a good Ascension summary at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-the-ascension/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-the-ascension/)

John Calvin’s summary of the benefits of Jesus’ ascension at [*https://www.monergism.com/3-benefits-imparted-our-faith-christs-ascension*](https://www.monergism.com/3-benefits-imparted-our-faith-christs-ascension)

John Murray, Rev. Muhr’s favorite professor, has a wonderful but hard to read lecture on Jesus’ intercessory work at [*https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\_christ\_murray.html*](https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_christ_murray.html)

Tim Keller has some very interesting comments on the mission of the church at [*https://redeemercitytocity.com/articles-stories/the-missional-church*](https://redeemercitytocity.com/articles-stories/the-missional-church) and a contemporary look at repentance at [*http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/All\_of\_Life\_Is\_Repentance-Keller.pdf*](http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/All_of_Life_Is_Repentance-Keller.pdf)

If you want to equip yourself to explain why we believe in resurrection, Michael Horton has a wonderful, if a bit heavy, article at [*https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/*](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/)



**Luke’s chronology**

Graphical user interface, application, table

Description automatically generated

**Ryle on Luke 24 at** [*https://gracegems.org/Ryle/l24.htm*](https://gracegems.org/Ryle/l24.htm)

**Section 144. The Ascension, Luke 24:50-53**

*And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.*

These verses are the winding up of Luke's history of our Lord's ministry. Theyform a suitable *conclusion* to a Gospel, which in touching tenderness and full exhibition of Christ's grace, stands first among the four records of the things which Jesus did and taught.

**Let us notice, firstly, in this passage — the remarkable manner in which our Lord left His disciples**. We read that "He lifted up His hands and *blessed* them. While He was *blessing* them — He left them and was taken up into Heaven." In one word, He left them when in the very act of *blessing*.

We cannot for a moment doubt that there was a meaning in this circumstance. It was intended to remind the disciples of all that Jesus had brought with Him when He came into the world. It was intended to assure them of what He would yet do, after He left the world. He came on earth to bless, and not to curse — and blessing, He departed. He came in love, and not in anger — and in love He went away. He came not as a condemning judge, but as a compassionate Friend — and as a Friend He returned to His Father.

He had been a Savior full of blessings to His little flock while He had been with them. He would have them know that He would be a Savior full of blessings to them — even after He was taken away.

If we know anything of true religion — forever let our souls lean on the gracious heart of Christ. We shall never find a heart more tender, more loving, more patient, more compassionate, and more kind. To talk of the *Virgin Mary* as being more compassionate than Christ — is a proof of miserable ignorance. To flee to the *saints* for comfort, when we may flee to Christ — is an act of mingled stupidity and blasphemy, and a robbery of Christ's crown.

Our Lord Jesus was gracious while He lived among His weak disciples. He was gracious in the very season of His agony on the cross. He was gracious when He rose again and gathered His scattered sheep around Him. He was gracious in the manner of His departure from this world. It was a departure, in the very act of blessing! We may be assured that He is gracious now, at the right hand of God. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is a Savior ever ready to bless — abounding in blessings.

**Let us notice, secondly, in this passage — the place to which our Lord went when He left the world**. We read that "He was carried up into Heaven." The full meaning of these words, we cannot of course comprehend. It would be easy to ask questions about the exact residence of Christ's glorified body, which the wisest theologian could never answer. We must not waste our time in unedifying speculations, or "intrude into unseen things." (Colossians 2:18.)

Let it suffice us to know that our Lord Jesus Christ is gone into the presence of God on behalf of all who believe on Him, as a Forerunner and a High Priest. (Hebrews 6:20. John 14:2.)

As a *Forerunner*, Jesus has gone into Heaven to prepare a place for all His members. Our great Head has taken possession of a glorious inheritance in behalf of His mystical body, the church, and holds it as an elder brother and trustee — until the day comes when His body shall be perfected.

As a *High Priest*, Jesus has gone into Heaven to intercede for all who believe on Him. There in the holy of holies, He presents on their behalf the merit of His own sacrifice, and obtains daily supplies of mercy and grace for them. The grand secret of the perseverance of saints, is Christ's appearance for them in Heaven. They have an everlasting Advocate with the Father — and therefore they are never cast away. (Hebrews 9:24. 1 John 2:1.)

A day is coming when Jesus shall return from Heaven, in like manner as He went. He will not always abide within the holy of holies. He will come forth, like the Jewish high priest, to bless the people, to gather His saints together, and to restore all things. For that day — let us wait, and long, and pray. Christ *dying* on the cross for sinners — Christ *living* in Heaven to intercede — Christ *coming again* in glory — are three great objects which ought to stand out prominently before the eyes of every true Christian.

**Let us notice, lastly, in this passage — the feelings of our Lord's disciples when He finally left them and was carried up into Heaven**. We read that "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God."

How shall we account for these joyful feelings? How shall we explain the singular fact, that this little company of weak disciples, left, for the first time, like orphans, in the midst of an angry world — was not cast down, but was full of joy? The answer to these questions is short and simple.

The disciples rejoiced, because now for the first time they saw all things clearly about their Master. 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 mysterious agony, and passion, and cross — the meaning of His being Messiah, and yet a sufferer — the meaning of His being crucified, and yet being Son of God — all, all was at length unraveled and made plain!

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.

Let it be a settled principle with us, that the little degree of joy which many believers feel, often arises from lack of knowledge. *Weak faith* and *inconsistent practice* — are doubtless two great reasons why many of God's children enjoy so little peace. But it may well be suspected that dim and indistinct views of the Gospel, are the true cause of many a believer's discomfort. When the Lord Jesus is not clearly known and understood — it must needs follow that there is little "joy in the Lord."

Let us leave the Gospel of Luke with a settled purpose of heart to seek more spiritual knowledge every year we live. Let us search the Scriptures more deeply and pray over them more heartily.

Too many believers only scratch the surface of Scripture, and know nothing of digging down into its hidden treasures. Let the word dwell in us more richly. Let us read our Bibles more diligently. So doing, we shall taste more of joy and peace in believing, and shall know what it is to be "continually praising and blessing God."

# From Invisibility to Invincibility (Luke 24:36-53) Bob Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/invisibility-invincibility-luke-2436-53*](https://bible.org/seriespage/invisibility-invincibility-luke-2436-53)

36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” 40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

44 He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things . 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. 52 Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

### Introduction

The distressing thing about our text is that the disciples, at the beginning of our passage, more closely characterize the church today than the disciples, at the end. The disciples’ initial response to the death of Christ was total devastation. Their response to the reports and evidence pointing to His resurrection was disbelief—hard core, persistent unbelief (cf. [Mark 16:14-15](javascript:%7b%7d)). The disciples are almost invisible in the text. They are hiding behind closed doors, or silently grieving in the safety of their own quarters (cf. [Luke 24:12](javascript:%7b%7d)). At the end of our text, the disciples’ fear has turned to boldness; their confusion to conviction; their troubled spirits to joy; their wallowing in self-pity and disappointment to worship.

It was Frank Tillipaugh, in his excellent book, The Church Unleashed, who referred to the “fortress mentality” of the church. I fear that he is right, that the church is more concerned about nurturing itself than it is with reaching a lost world with the gospel. We are more concerned with our own self-image than we are with the salvation of the lost. We seem to be more caught up in safety and security than in faith and obedience. We persist in constructing programs which protect us from the pagan world in which we live, rather than to penetrate it with the good news of the gospel. In the name of edification, the home and the family, we have preoccupied ourselves with ourselves. We are, I suspect, very much like the disciples, at the time of their unbelief.

If this is so, it is not a hopeless or incurable malady. The troubled and doubting disciples were transformed in our text, to men and women of joy, of boldness, and of worship. Soon, they will be characterized by their witness as well. Whatever it was that hindered these disciples is curable. And whatever the cure, it is just as available and as applicable today as it was 2,000 years ago. Let us consider our text, first to learn what transformed these almost invisible (the eleven disciples hardly appear in the gospels after the death of Christ) disciples to an invincible force that turned the world of that day upside-down. Let us then learn the same lesson for ourselves.

### The Structure of the Passage

The structure of the text is quite simple. Verses 36-43 depict the unbelief of the disciples and emphasize the “physical evidence” for the physical, literal, resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Verses 44-49 deal with the “biblical evidence” for what has taken place, and for what is yet to happen. Verses 50-53 describe the ascension of our Lord, and the dramatic difference which all these things had on the disciples. Summarized, the structure of the passage is as follows:

(1) Verses 36-43 — Exhibit 1: The Physical Evidence

(2) Verses 44-49 — Exhibit 2: The Biblical Evidence

(3) Verses 50-53 — Exhibit 3: The Difference in the Disciples

### Background

Before we consider these three sections, their meaning, and their relevance, let us make a few observations about the passage in general.

**First, the time which is spanned in these verses is 40 days.** We know this from Luke’s words in Acts chapter 1, where he wrote,

To these [apostles] He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God ([Acts 1:3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

We might gain the impression that these three paragraphs describe incidents all occurring on the same day, if it were not for these words in [Acts 1](javascript:%7b%7d), along with the parallel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and John. Luke’s purpose is not to tell us all that happened in those 40 days, nor even to indicate a change in location, as much as to sum up the way in which Jesus convinced His disciples that He was raised from the dead, according to the Scriptures. We may, therefore, suspect that a change in time and place might be found, for example, in verses 44 and 50. We do know at least that the ascension of our Lord took place 40 days after His resurrection, and thus more than a month after His first appearance to the disciples, as described in verses 36-43.

**Second, Luke’s account of the last days of our Lord on the earth may be more thorough than the account given by Matthew, but his account in the first chapter of Acts is even more detailed.** Luke’s purpose, like that of the other gospel writers, was not to tell us everything, but to tell us a few important things, and thus they are selective in what they choose to relate. They have much more to tell us than what they have written (cf. [John 20:30-31](javascript:%7b%7d)).

**Third, Luke’s emphasis in his account of the post-resurrection appearances of Christ is on what took place in Jerusalem, not so much on what happened in Galilee** (as, for example, Matthew recorded (28:16-17). There are many appearances, some of which are described in one or more gospel, and others of which may be described by another. There were probably a number of appearances which were not even mentioned. We should not expect to be able to neatly harmonize all of the accounts, for there is simply too much that is not said. If all the facts were known, the details would perfectly harmonize.

**Fourth, while Jesus referred to the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures, Luke did not include any references for us in his account.** Furthermore, Jesus’ teaching is not really recorded, but only the most general thrust of it. We will discover some of the central passages when we come to our study in the book of Acts,[153](https://bible.org/seriespage/invisibility-invincibility-luke-2436-53#P8314_2832651) but the passages are not listed here. I think that the Spirit of God is challenging us to read and study the Old Testament and to find them for ourselves. We should look for prophecies pertaining to Christ in the Old Testament, indeed, in every part of it. Luke’s report of Jesus’ words tells us what to look for, and where, but the searching is still our task.[154](https://bible.org/seriespage/invisibility-invincibility-luke-2436-53#P8315_2833110)

### Exhibit One: Physical Evidence of Jesus’ Resurrection (24:36-42)

36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself[155](https://bible.org/seriespage/invisibility-invincibility-luke-2436-53#P8319_2833408) stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” 40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

The two disciples whom Jesus intercepted on the road to Emmaus could not wait to return to tell the good news to their brethren at Jerusalem. Immediately after they recognized Jesus and He disappeared, they rushed back to Jerusalem, and to the disciples. They were not even able to get their words out because Jesus had already appeared to Peter, who told them Jesus was indeed alive. Thus, the two disciples first heard of the certainty of Jesus’ resurrection from their peers. The best they could do was simply to add their own testimony to the same truth. Jesus was really risen from the dead, and they believed it.

Or so it seemed, but when Jesus actually appeared, it was clear that their “belief” in His resurrection was insufficient. Jesus’ first words to this group were, “Peace be with you” (verse 36). That was not their response, however. They were “startled” and “troubled,” Luke tells us (verse 37). Why? Why were they not overjoyed? Why were they frightened and upset? The word “startled” suggests that the disciples were “caught off guard,” as though they never expected to see Jesus. If He was really alive, as they professed, why would His appearance be such a shock? If Jesus had greeted with a pronouncement of “peace,” why were they troubled, the very opposite of peace?

The answer is that they thought Jesus to be only a ghost, a spirit, and they were frightened of ghosts.[156](https://bible.org/seriespage/invisibility-invincibility-luke-2436-53#P8323_2835616) The disciples believed in ghosts, and, at the moment, they believed Jesus was a ghost. This is, to some degree, understandable. John’s gospel informs us that the room in which the disciples were gathered had a “locked door” ([John 20:19](javascript:%7b%7d)). Jesus’ appearance was, therefore, not a normal one. How could Jesus have entered the room in a normal body? The ghost explanation made sense to them. It was their first (and seemingly unanimous) conclusion.

The fact was, it was easier for the disciples to believe in a “ghostly” Jesus, than in a Jesus who was literally and physically present. The issue really comes down to “belief” or “unbelief.” The disciples thought they really believed. They said that they believed ([Luke 24:34](javascript:%7b%7d)). But they did not really believe it. In Mark’s account, he tells us that Jesus Later appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen ([Mark 16:14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Belief, we know, is not just a matter of our professions, but of our practice (cf. [James 1:19–2:26](javascript:%7b%7d)). In the book of Acts we are told of the vision which Peter received, convincing him that he was no longer to avoid contact with Gentiles ([Acts 10:9-16](javascript:%7b%7d)). This was to pave the way for Peter to go to the house of Cornelius, and to preach the gospel. Peter did so, and these Gentiles came to faith. But the Jewish leaders of the church in Jerusalem called Peter on the carpet for his actions. After he gave a very thorough explanation, they had to acknowledge,

“Well, then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life” ([Acts 11:18](javascript:%7b%7d)b).

In spite of this profession, their practice lagged behind, for in the very next verse we are told,

So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone ([Acts 11:19](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB, emphasis mine).

If our belief and our behavior do not match, it is often our belief that is inadequate. So it was for the disciples. And so it is, I might add, for most of us as well.

It is noteworthy to observe that the “insufficient belief” of the disciples at the appearance of our Lord is very similar to the “insufficient belief” of many today, when it comes to the resurrection of our Lord. They would hastily admit that Jesus is, in some sense, alive today. He is alive in spirit, alive in our hearts, not unlike the way in which the memory of those who have died lives within us. But He is not viewed to be physically raised from the dead and present with His people today. Such unbelief is like that of the disciples. And this unbelief Jesus was determined to change to genuine faith.

The thrust of verses 36-43 is our Lord’s gracious provision of ample physical evidence for His physical resurrection. The first evidence was the Lord, standing before them. He was not, as they supposed, a ghost. He encouraged them to touch Him,[157](https://bible.org/seriespage/invisibility-invincibility-luke-2436-53#P8332_2838777) and to see that He had flesh and bones (verse 40). He also encouraged them to look at His hands and His feet (verse 40). The inference is clear that both His hands and His feet bore the nail prints which He had from the cross. In this sense, at least, His body was “like” the body He had before His death. The body of our Lord was not like the former body in that it was not corruptible, and it was somehow capable of appearing and disappearing, as was evident in His appearance in the room where they met, with the door locked. Finally, Jesus ate some of the fish which they were eating, the final proof that His body was, indeed, a real one—one which may not require food for life, but which did assimilate it. How else would Jesus be able to share a banquet with His disciples in heaven, and to drink the cup and eat the bread anew in the kingdom (cf. [Luke 22:15-18](javascript:%7b%7d))?

The evidence was compelling. The disciples were convinced. This is most apparent by the change in their disposition. There are three sets of descriptions given to us in verses 36-37. Pause for a moment to note them:

(1) Startled and Frightened (verse 37)

(2) Troubled and Doubting (verse 38)

(3) Joy and Amazement (verse 41)

The disciples’ first response to Jesus’ appearance was that they were “startled and frightened” (verse 37). Jesus pressed past these symptoms, to the deeper roots, which was that their spirits were troubled and doubting (verse 38). Once the evidence was grasped by the disciples, their “troubled spirits” turned to “joyfulness” (which I think includes the “peace” of which our Lord spoke in His greeting[158](https://bible.org/seriespage/invisibility-invincibility-luke-2436-53#P8338_2841184)), and their “doubt” turned to amazement. The former “doubt” was that of unbelief, the latter “amazement” was due to joy, equivalent to, “I can’t believe this is happening to me!,” or “It’s too good to be true!”

We should not leave these verses behind without suggesting that Lord’s use of the term “peace” is more than just the usual form of greeting, which it seems to be. The term “peace” should have been a pregnant one, first of all from its Old Testament roots. Very often (e.g. [Lev. 26:1-13](javascript:%7b%7d); [Num. 6:22-26](javascript:%7b%7d); [Judg. 6:11-24](javascript:%7b%7d); [Isa. 9:1-7; 48:17-18; 59:1-8; 60:17-20](javascript:%7b%7d); [Ezek. 37:24-28](javascript:%7b%7d); [Micah 5:5](javascript:%7b%7d); [Hag. 2:3-9](javascript:%7b%7d)) the peace of God is closely associated with His presence. Conversely, the absence of peace is associated with His absence or withdrawal. Second, Jesus’ words to His disciples, recorded by John in the upper room discourse ([John 14-17](javascript:%7b%7d)) contained the word “peace” several times. The “peace” of which our Lord spoke there had to do with the future, when His presence with His disciples was manifested through His Spirit, who was yet to come. The peace of God and the presence of God are virtually inseparable. It is not surprising, then, that Jesus would show His disciples that He was physically present, and also speak to them about peace.

### Exhibit Two: Exegetical Evidence (24:44-49)

44 He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

With the two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus, Jesus began with the exegetical (biblical) evidence concerning His rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection. He then existentially (experientially) was revealed to them, only to immediately disappear. Here, the order is reversed, but both the existential and the exegetical elements are present.

The first thing that catches my attention in these verses is that there is nothing “new” here, either concerning what has happened to the Lord Jesus, or concerning what was to take place in and through the disciples. All of it has been prophesied in the Scriptures, and also foretold by the Lord Jesus. There are three specific areas of focus here: (1) the rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; (2) the proclamation of the gospel to all nations; and, (3) the promise of the Holy Spirit, coming on the disciples to endue them with power.

The first of these three will come as no surprise to us. The rejection, death, and resurrection of Messiah was one of the prominent (albeit perplexing, cf. [1 Peter 1:10-12](javascript:%7b%7d)) prophetic themes of the Old Testament. The rejection and suffering of the Lord Jesus was alluded to by Simeon ([Luke 2:34-35](javascript:%7b%7d)). It was hinted at by the treatment of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. It was anticipated by the rejection of Jesus on the occasion of His first (recorded) public presentation of Himself as Messiah in the synagogue at Nazareth ([Luke 4:14-30](javascript:%7b%7d)). As Jesus’ ministry and message became more widespread, the opposition of the Jewish religious leaders became more intense and organized. On several occasions or Lord told His disciples that this would be His divinely determined destiny (cf. [Luke 9:21-23; 9:44-45; 18:31-34](javascript:%7b%7d)). While the disciples did not grasp this truth, and even resisted what they knew of it, they needed only to be reminded that this is what He had told them.

The rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus was not only something which He had told them previously, on a number of occasions, it was also that concerning which the Old Testament prophets had foretold, beginning with the Law Moses, and including the Prophets and the Psalms. These three—the Law of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets—are not just references to general witnesses to the suffering and Messiah; they are the three main categories or divisions into which the entire Old Testament was sub-divided. Thus, Jesus was reminding His disciples that the entire Old Testament, in all of its three major divisions, bore witness to His suffering and death. All of the Old Testament, beginning with the Law of Moses, looked ahead to the coming of Jesus as the Messiah. And all of the Old Testament spoke of His rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection, either by direct statement or by inference. Thus it was the Jesus could say, as recorded in John’s gospel, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad” ([John 8:56](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Twice now, in the last chapter of Luke’s gospel, Jesus had made reference to the prophecies of the Old Testament referring to His rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection. At least in His conversation with the two men on the road to Emmaus (24:27), Jesus specifically referred to a number of Old Testament texts and explained them in the light of their fulfillment in Him. But we are not given so much as one reference here. Why did Jesus spell out to His disciples the Old Testament prophecies which referred to Him, but Luke does not enumerate them for us? I suspect that there are at least two reasons. First, we will see what some of the key prophecies are when we get to the Book of Acts. In Acts chapter two, for example, Peter will refer to some Old Testament texts to prove that Jesus had to suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. Luke is simply waiting for a better time. Second, however, I think that God may have intended for us to search out these texts for ourselves. He chose not to give us a concordance or a topical reference set to this subject. He expects us to read our Old Testament with an eye for those prophecies pertaining to Messiah. God does not do all our homework for us.

Verse 45 is crucial, I believe, for it indicates to us that while there was an unbelief of which the disciples were guilty, and for which they were rebuked (e.g. [Mark 16:14](javascript:%7b%7d)), there was also a natural inability to understand the Scriptures, which had to be divinely removed. In verse 45, Luke informs us that Jesus removed that veil, enabling the disciples to understand, for the first time, the Old Testament Scriptures pertaining to Him as Messiah, especially as related to His rejection, suffering, and death. This is consistent with what Paul will later write in his first epistle to the Corinthians:

But we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for it they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written,

“THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.” For to us God revealed them through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ ([1 Corinthians 2:7-16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

From this text we can see that all men, unaided by the Spirit of God, are incapable of understanding the things of God because God, His ways, and His means, are vastly beyond our ability to comprehend. In addition to this barrier, there is an additional “veil” which must be removed from the eyes of the Jews. Of this Paul also wrote in his second epistle to the Corinthians:

But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; BUT WHENEVER A MAN TURNS TO THE LORD, THE VEIL IS TAKEN AWAY. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit ([2 Corinthians 2:14-18](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It was not until after His resurrection that the eyes of the disciples were opened to understand all that the prophets had spoken pertaining to the ministry of the Messiah, and especially of His rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection. That veil was now removed. From this point on the disciples will turn to the Old Testament prophecies to prove the Jesus was the promised Messiah, and that all that happened to Him was a prophetic necessity.

The second facet of Old Testament prophecy to which Jesus pointed the disciples was the proclamation of the gospel to all nations, and not just to Israel:

46 He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things ([Luke 24:46-48](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Notice the “and,” the only thing between the first facet and the second. There is no disjunction here, but conjunction. It was written that the “Christ must suffer and rise on the third day,” and it was also written that “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.” Here was a truth just as difficult to grasp as the first. How the Jews resisted this aspect of Christ’s Messiahship, as He clearly indicated it must be at the very outset of His ministry ([Luke 4:24-27](javascript:%7b%7d)). And this was not the first time that the salvation of the Gentiles would be spoken of in Luke. At the birth of the Lord Jesus, the angel told the shepherds that the “good news of great joy” which he was bringing to them was “for all the people” (2:10). The universality of the gospel—the fact that the Messiah would die for the sins of all who would believe, Jew or Gentile—was one of the greatest irritations for the Jews, especially for those who did not see themselves as “sinners.”

The Abrahamic Covenant, which was made with Abraham, is usually viewed as focusing on the blessings which will come to Israel, but the blessings God promised Abraham were those which would extend to all nations:

“And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” ([Genesis 12:3](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB).

The later prophets will affirm this same promise of salvation and blessing for the Gentiles. We see, for example, these prophecies:

28 “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. 30 I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 31 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 32 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls ([Joel 2:28-32](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB, emphasis mine).

3 ‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? 4 But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,’ declares the Lord. ‘Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the Lord, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the Lord Almighty. 5 ‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’ 6 “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. 7 I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty. 8 ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the Lord Almighty. 9 ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the Lord Almighty” ([Haggai 2:3-9](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB, emphasis mine).

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations ([Isaiah 42:1](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB, emphasis mine).

In the light of the fact that the salvation which Messiah came to bring was for all nations, the Great Commission comes as no new revelation, but as an outflow, both of the work of Christ on the cross of Calvary, and of the Old Testament prophecies which foretold of the salvation of men of every nation. Notice that Luke (both here and in [Acts 1:8](javascript:%7b%7d)) records the Great Commission, not so much as a command as a promise, a certainty.

In order for the gospel to be proclaimed to men of every nation, beginning at Jerusalem, the disciples must be endued with power, the promised power of the Holy Spirit, which would turn hearts of stone to hearts of flesh, which would convict and convert some of the very ones who, only a little more than a month before, had called out for the murder of Messiah. This promise of the Holy Spirit was, like the two previous areas of prophecy, something of which Jesus spoke to His disciples, and which the Old Testament prophets had foretold. Let us look briefly at some of these references to the Holy Spirit’s coming.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was a “clothing with power from on high,” as Jesus said (verse 49). It was also that which the Father had promised. This “promise of the Father” (cf. [Acts 1:4](javascript:%7b%7d)) must have its roots in the Old Testament prophets, and so it does. Once again, however, if Jesus told the disciples what the specific prophetic texts were, Luke did not record them. We know from Acts chapter 2 that Joel chapter 2 will be one of those texts. But let us look at several other texts which promise the coming of the Spirit in a greater way than Israel had experienced to that point in time:

12 Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vines 13 and for the land of my people, a land overgrown with thorns and briers—yes, mourn for all houses of merriment and for this city of revelry. 14 The fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever, the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks, 15 till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest. 16 Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness live in the fertile field. 17 The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. 18 My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest. 19 Though hail flattens the forest and the city is leveled completely, 20 how blessed you will be, sowing your seed by every stream, and letting your cattle and donkeys range free ([Isaiah 32:12-20](javascript:%7b%7d)).

1 “But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen. 2 This is what the Lord says—he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. 3 For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. 4 They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams. 5 One will say, ‘I belong to the Lord’; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, ‘The Lord’s,’ and will take the name Israel ([Isaiah 44:1-5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

20 “The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,” declares the Lord. 21 “As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord. “My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever,” says the Lord ([Isaiah 59:20-21](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” … Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord’” ([Ezekiel 37:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d)a,11-14).

I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign Lord” ([Ezekiel 39:29](javascript:%7b%7d)).

10 “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. 11 On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. 12 The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, 13 the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, 14 and all the rest of the clans and their wives ([Zechariah 12:10-14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The “promise of the Father” was reiterated by John the Baptist, who contrasted his baptism with that of the Messiah who would come after him (cf. [Luke 3:16](javascript:%7b%7d)). Jesus also spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit in [Luke 11:5-13](javascript:%7b%7d). When the disciples were drug off and put on trial for their faith, they were told not to prepare their defense in advance, but that in that hour the Holy Spirit would give them the words to speak ([Luke 12:12](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 13:11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Matthew 10;20](javascript:%7b%7d)). It the Gospel of John primary source of our Lord’s teaching on the Holy Spirit. Jesus offered the Holy Spirit to all who thirsted ([John 7:37-39](javascript:%7b%7d)), and He especially promised the Holy Spirit to His disciples in His absence ([John 14-16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The nature of the ministry of the Holy Spirit will be taken up in our study of the Book of Acts, but suffice it to say that Jesus commanded His disciples not to go forth with their witness to the things which had happened apart from the power which He would provide through His Spirit. He who commanded the disciples to be His witnesses also commanded them only to witness in the power that He would provide. He who commands is He who enables.

### The Ascension and the Disciples’ Boldness in Worship (24:50-53)

50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. 52 Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Forty days have passed, as Luke will make clear in [Acts 1:3](javascript:%7b%7d). The disciples are now led to the outskirts of Jerusalem, a “Sabbath day’s journey” for that city, to the mount called Olivet ([Acts 1:12](javascript:%7b%7d)). As He lifted His hands in blessing, He was taken up from them. A slightly more detailed account will follow in Acts. Luke jumps ahead to those days which will follow (I think that these are after Pentecost). These disciples who were so distraught and disarmed by the death of Jesus are now described as transformed.

Notice the change that Luke describes here. These once despondent disciples are now characterized by praise. And these followers of Jesus who only days before were cowering behind locked doors, hidden from the Jewish religious leaders who crucified their Lord, are now persistently, publicly praising God—in the temple, the very headquarters of Judaism. The change is briefly described. The transformation will be depicted in much greater detail in the Book of Acts, the sequel volume, which perhaps is already under way.

### Conclusion

The last chapter of Luke serves as a kind of conclusion, as we would expect. But in reality it is hardly a conclusion. There is but one verse, the very last verse, which gives us any sense of conclusion, and that is incredibly brief. The reason should be obvious. The Gospel of Luke cannot provide us with an ending. It is a gospel, and as such, it can tell us of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, but it cannot tell us the whole story. This is precisely why Luke found it necessary to write another volume, a sequel to the gospel. In this book, Luke will continue the story of the work of Christ in the world through His church, empowered by His Spirit.

As I read the Gospel of Luke and then the Book of Acts, I can rather easily understand why the disciples felt and acted as they did in the Gospel of Luke. I can even somewhat grasp how their feelings and actions changed in the Book of Acts. But what troubles me is that the church today seems to act more like the disciples in Luke than they do the apostles in Acts. Is it possible that we need to undergo the same change of heart, mind, and action that the disciples did? Are we so much like they were then? I think so.

How, then, must we change, to be more like the apostles in Acts than to continue to be like the disciples in Luke? What must change? First of all, I think that we believe, far more than the disciples did, that Jesus had to be rejected, put to death, and rise again. I don’t think our problem is understanding what the Old Testament taught about Jesus. To take this a step further, I don’t think that we have a great problem understanding what the gospels teach, concerning the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. I think our problem is that in spite of all that we know about Jesus, we don’t really believe it. Our “profession” (our creed—what we say we believe) may be post-Pentecost, but our practice, our conduct is pre-Pentecost. We live more like the disciples lived in Luke than like they lived in Acts. The facts we know, but do we really believe them. The power we profess, but do we really practice it?

In short, I see the problem exposed here in Luke, but the solution is yet to be worked out. It is solved in Acts. While a believe in the resurrection of Christ is vital, there is yet more that is needed. What is it? Let us press on to Acts to see what it is. On to volume 2!

Not quite so fast. Before we press on, let me give you a hint. The disciples had come to believe that Jesus had not only died, but had risen again. The nature of the resurrection, as the disciples grasped it, was inadequate—they thought of it only as a “spiritual” resurrection. They did not really believe Jesus was present with them. That was the truth that was so hard to grasp. Jesus was not only alive. Jesus was with them, in their very midst. He would be even more present with them, and in them, through His Spirit, but this was the promise of what was still to come. The resurrection of Christ is so much sweeter when we come to realize that Him whom God raised from the dead is not only alive, but present, by means of His Spirit. May we come to grasp His presence in us, individually and corporately. Herein in joy and power. As Paul will later put it,

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you ([Romans 8:11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The greatest reality of the resurrection that can be seen today is the reality that a body which is incapable of living in a way that pleases God and fulfills His commandments, which is subject to the power of sin, can be given life by the same Spirit that raised the dead body of our Lord to life. The Spirit who raised Christ from the dead can give life to our dead bodies. Here is a reality of the resurrection which the disciples were soon to experience. May we experience it as well.

153 It may well be, as some have suggested, that Luke had already begun to write Acts by this time.

154 Interestingly enough, the marginal notes and references are virtually barren at this point, not giving us specific texts, either. The commentaries, too, are not very helpful.

155 This emphatic “himself” seems to underscore the fact that it was Jesus himself, the same Jesus as had been with them, the one about whose resurrection they were talking, was among them. He was personally present.

156 Compare [Matthew 14:26](javascript:%7b%7d) and context, where Jesus was seen by His disciples, walking on the water near their boat. Thinking that He was a ghost, they were very frightened.

157 Some have thought our Lord’s invitation to “touch” Him to be a contradiction to His words to Mary: “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father… ” ([John 20:17](javascript:%7b%7d), KJV). The problem is mainly with the translation of the King James Version. The NASB renders the Lord’s words: “Stop clinging to Me; for I have not yet ascended to the Father… ” It was not her touching Jesus which was forbidden, but her clinging to Jesus as though she would never let Him go. The fact was, He must go to the Father, and thus she must “let go.” The contradiction thus vaporizes. Jesus invited men to touch Him, to see that His body was real, but not to attempt to keep Him with them forever. His presence would be more intimate after His ascension, because He would not only dwell among them, but in them, through His Spirit.

158 The word peace is often found in the epistles, especially in the introductions. While “peace” may be a common form of salutation, its meaning is much deeper. Thus, the term should and must be understood in terms of the meaning given to it by our Lord, by the gospel, and by the epistles. Neither Jesus nor the apostles used words lightly.

Kevin DeYoung’s “Primer” on the Ascension at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-the-ascension/>

From time to time I make new entries in this continuing series called “Theological Primer.” The idea is to present big theological concepts in around 500 words. Today we will look at the ascension, as tomorrow marks Ascension Day in the church calendar (the 40th day of Easter), and the next Lord’s Day is Ascension Sunday.

Having triumphed over death and the devil in his resurrection, Christ ascended into heaven locally, visibly, and bodily—locally in that he spatially left earth below for heaven above, visibly in that the disciples saw with their own eyes (as a public event) that he departed from them, and bodily in that the physical flesh of the Son of God is no longer with us on earth.

We can think of Christ’s state of exaltation (as opposed to his state of humiliation) as consisting of four events, each part tracking with a phrase in the Apostles’ Creed: resurrection (he rose again from the dead), ascension (he ascended into heaven), session (and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty), and physical return (from there he will come to judge the living and the dead).

The ascension is more prominent in Scripture than we might realize. Luke describes the ascension in the most detail, first in his Gospel ([Luke 24:50-53](https://www.esv.org/Luke%2024%3A50-53/)) and then in Acts ([Acts 1:9-11](https://www.esv.org/Acts%201%3A9-11/)). Peter’s Pentecost sermon on Pentecost is, in part, about the ascension and enthronement of Christ ([Acts 2:32-36](https://www.esv.org/Acts%202%3A32-36/)).

Likewise, John’s Gospel is full of references to the ascension of the Son of Man ([John 3:13, 6:62](https://www.esv.org/John%203%3A13%2C%206%3A62/)) and the importance of Jesus returning to the Father ([John 14:2-3; 16:5](https://www.esv.org/John%2014%3A2-3%3B%2016%3A5/)). The ascension is not simply how Jesus gets to heaven, it is a further fulfillment and vindication of the triumph of the resurrection ([John 16:5; 20:17](https://www.esv.org/John%2016%3A5%3B%2020%3A17/)).

It’s no wonder that the ascension is highlighted throughout the New Testament, as a necessary precursor (1) to the giving of Messianic gifts ([Eph. 4:8-10](https://www.esv.org/Eph.%204%3A8-10/)), (2) to the intercession of our High Priest ([Heb. 4:14-16](https://www.esv.org/Heb.%204%3A14-16/)), and (3) to the subjection of all things under Christ’s feet ([1 Peter 3:22](https://www.esv.org/1%20Peter%203%3A22/)).

What, then, does the oft-overlooked ascension mean for us?

**First, the ascension means that we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous** ([1 John 2:1](https://www.esv.org/1%20John%202%3A1/); [Rom. 8:34](https://www.esv.org/Rom.%208%3A34/)).

**Second, the ascension means God’s people are, in a manner of speaking, already in heaven.** We set our minds on things that are above, because our lives are hidden with Christ who dwells above ([Col. 3:2-3](https://www.esv.org/Col.%203%3A2-3/)).

**Third, the ascension means we can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** Once ascended to heaven, Jesus sent another Helper ([John 14:16; 16:7](https://www.esv.org/John%2014%3A16%3B%2016%3A7/)) to give us power from on high and to be with us forever.

**Fourth, the ascension means human flesh sits enthroned in heaven.** God has granted all power and authority to a man ([Matt. 28:19](https://www.esv.org/Matt.%2028%3A19/); [Eph. 1:21-22](https://www.esv.org/Eph.%201%3A21-22/)). Jesus Christ is exercising the dominion that human beings were made to have from the beginning ([Gen. 1:28](https://www.esv.org/Gen.%201%3A28/)). The ruin of the first Adam is being undone by the reign of the second.

Because of Christ’s ascension we know that the resurrection is real, the incarnation continues, Christ’s humanity lives on in heaven, the Spirit of Jesus can live in our hearts, and a flesh-and-blood, divine human being rules the universe.

# A person wearing a hat Description automatically generated with low confidence3 Benefits Imparted to our Faith by Christ's Ascension

### by John Calvin

From [Christ's ascension] our faith receives many benefits.

**First** it understands that the Lord by his ascent to heaven opened the way into the Heavenly Kingdom, which had been closed through Adam [John 14:3]. Since he entered heaven in our flesh, as if in our name, it follows, as the apostle says, that in a sense we already "sit with God in the heavenly places in him" [Eph. 2:6], so that we do not await heaven with a bare hope, but in our Head already possess it.

**Secondly**, as faith recognizes, it is to our great benefit that Christ resides with the Father. For, having entered a sanctuary not made with hands, he appears before the Father's face as our constant advocate and intercessor [Heb. 7:25; 9:11–12; Rom. 8:34]. Thus he turns the Father's eyes to his own righteousness to avert his gaze from our sins. He so reconciles the Father's heart to us that by his intercession he prepares a way and access for us to the Father's throne. He fills with grace and kindness the throne that for miserable sinners would otherwise have been filled with dread.

**Thirdly**, faith comprehends his might, in which reposes our strength, power, wealth, and glorying against hell. "When he ascended into heaven he led a captivity captive" [Eph. 4:8, cf. Vg.; cf. Ps. 68:18], and despoiling his enemies, he enriched his own people, and daily lavishes spiritual riches upon them. He therefore sits on high, transfusing us with his power, that he may quicken us to spiritual life, sanctify us by his Spirit, adorn his church with divers gifts of his grace, keep it safe from all harm by his protection, restrain the raging enemies of his cross and of our salvation by the strength of his hand, and finally hold all power in heaven and on earth. All this he does until he shall lay low all his enemies [1 Cor. 15:25; cf. Ps. 110:1] (who are our enemies too) and complete the building of his church. This is the true state of his Kingdom; this is the power that the Father has conferred upon him, until, in coming to judge the living and the dead, he accomplishes his final act.

-----

From [Institutes of the Christian Religion](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0664220282/ref=as_li_qf_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=thethreshold-20&creative=9325&linkCode=as2&creativeASIN=0664220282&linkId=5485b7c22f0768daf5e7a95cb4b2008f) by John Calvin

**The Ascension and the Second Advent Practically Considered**

December 28th, 1884 by  
C. H. SPURGEON at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/1817.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/1817.htm)  
(1834-1892)

*"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."—*Acts 1:10, 11.

Four great events shine out brightly in our Savior's story. All Christian minds delight to dwell upon his birth, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension. These make four rounds in that ladder of light, the foot of which is upon the earth, but the top whereof reacheth to heaven. We could not afford to dispense with any one of those four events, nor would it be profitable for us to forget, or to under-estimate the value of any one of them. That the Son of God was born of a woman creates in us the intense delight of a brotherhood springing out of a common humanity. That Jesus once suffered unto the death for our sins, and thereby made a full atonement for us, is the rest and life of our spirits. The manger and the cross together are divine seals of love. That the Lord Jesus rose again from the dead is the warrant of our justification, and also a transcendently delightful assurance of the resurrection of all his people, and of their eternal life in him. Hath he not said, "Because I live ye shall live also"? The resurrection of Christ is the morning star of our future glory. Equally delightful is the remembrance of his ascension. No song is sweeter than this—"Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."  
  
Each one of those four events points to another, and they all lead up to it: the fifth link in the golden chain is our Lord's second and most glorious advent. Nothing is mentioned between his ascent and his descent. True, a rich history comes between; but it lies in a valley between two stupendous mountains: we step from alp to alp as we journey in meditation from the ascension to the second advent. I say that each of the previous four events points to it. Had he not come a first time in humiliation, born under the law, he could not have come a second time in amazing glory "without a sin-offering unto salvation." Because he died once we rejoice that he dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him, and therefore he cometh to destroy that last enemy whom he hath already conquered. It is our joy, as we think of our Redeemer as risen, to feel that in consequence of his rising the trump of the archangel shall assuredly sound for the awaking of all his slumbering people, when the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout. As for his ascension, he could not a second time descend if he had not first ascended; but having perfumed heaven with his presence, and prepared a place for his people, we may fitly expect that he will come again and receive us unto himself, that where he is there we may be also. I want you, therefore, as in contemplation you pass with joyful footsteps over these four grand events, as your faith leaps from his birth to his death, and from his resurrection to his ascension, to be looking forward, and even hastening unto this crowning fact of our Lord's history; for ere long he shall so come in like manner as he was seen go up into heaven.  
  
This morning, in our meditation, we will start from the ascension; and if I had sufficient imagination I should like to picture our Lord and the eleven walking up the side of Olivet, communing as they went,—a happy company, with a solemn awe upon them, but with an intense joy in having fellowship with each other. Each disciple was glad to think that his dear Lord and Master who had been crucified was now among them, not only alive but surrounded with a mysterious safety and glory which none could disturb. The enemy was as still as a stone: not a dog moved his tongue: his bitterest foes made no sign during the days of our Lord's after-life below. The company moved onward peacefully towards Bethany—Bethany which they all knew and loved. The Savior seemed drawn there at the time of his ascension, even as men's minds return to old and well-loved scenes when they are about to depart out of this world. His happiest moments on earth had been spent beneath the roof where lived Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. Perhaps it was best for the disciples that he should leave them at that place where he had been most hospitably entertained, to show that he departed in peace and not in anger. There they had seen Lazarus raised from the dead by him who was now to be taken up from them: the memory of the triumphant past would help the tried faith of the present. There they had heard the voice saying, "Loose him, and let him go," and there they might fitly see their Lord loosed from all bonds of earthly gravitation that he might go to his Father and their Father. The memories of the place might help to calm their minds and arouse their spirits to that fullness of joy which ought to attend the glorifying of their Lord.  
  
But they have come to a standstill, having reached the brow of the hill. The Savior stands conspicuously in the center of the group, and, following upon most instructive discourse, he pronounces a blessing upon them. He lifts his pierced hands, and while he is lifting them and is pronouncing words of love, he begins to rise from the earth. He has risen above them all to their astonishment! In a moment he has passed beyond the olives, which seem with their silvery sheen to be lit up by his milder radiance. While the disciples are looking, the Lord has ascended into mid-air, and speedily he has risen to the regions of the clouds. They stand spell-bound with astonishment, and suddenly a bright cloud, like a chariot of God, bears him away. That cloud conceals him from mortal gaze. Though we have known Christ after the flesh, now after the flesh know we him no more. They are riveted to the spot, very naturally so: they linger long in the place, they stand with streaming eyes, wonder-struck, still looking upward.  
  
It is not the Lord's will that they should long remain inactive; their reverie is interrupted. They might have stood there till wonder saddened into fear. As it was, they remained long enough; for the angel's words may be accurately rendered, "Why have ye stood, gazing up into heaven?"  
  
Their lengthened gaze needed to be interrupted, and, therefore, two shining ones, such as aforetime met the women at the sepulcher, are sent to them. These messengers of God appear in human form that they may not alarm them, and in white raiment as if to remind them that all was bright and joyous; and these white-robed ministers stood with them as if they would willingly join their company. As no one of the eleven would break silence, the men in white raiment commenced the discourse. Addressing them in the usual celestial style, they asked a question which contained its own answer, and then went on to tell their message. As they had once said to the women, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen;" so did they now say, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." The angels showed their knowledge of them by calling them "men of Galilee," and reminded them that they were yet upon earth by recalling their place of birth. Brought back to their senses, their reverie over, the apostles at once gird up their loins for active service; they do not need twice telling, but hasten to Jerusalem. The vision of angels has singularly enough brought them back into the world of actual life again, and they obey the command, "Tarry ye at Jerusalem." They seem to say,—the taking up of our Master is not a thing to weep about: he has gone to his throne and to his glory, and he said it was expedient for us that he should go away. He will now send us the promise of the Father; we scarcely know what it will be like, but let us, in obedience to his will, make the best of our way to the place where he bade us await the gift of power. Do you not see them going down the side of Olivet, taking that Sabbath-day's journey into the cruel and wicked city without a thought of fear; having no dread of the bloodthirsty crew who slew their Lord, but happy in the memory of their Lord's exaltation and in the expectation of a wonderful display of his power. They held fellowship of the most delightful kind with one another, and anon entered into the upper room, where in protracted prayer and communion they waited for the promise of the Father. You see I have no imagination: I have barely mentioned the incidents in the simplest language. Yet try and realize the scene, for it will be helpful so to do, since our Lord Jesus is to come in like manner as the disciples saw him go up into heaven.  
  
My first business this morning will be to consider *the gentle chiding* administered by the shining ones:—"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up unto heaven?" Secondly, *the cheering description* of our Lord which the white-robed messengers used,—"This same Jesus"; and then, thirdly, *the practical truth* which they taught—"This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."  
  
I. First, then, here is A GENTLE CHIDING. It is not sharply uttered by men dressed in black who use harsh speech, and upbraid the servants of God severely for what was rather a mistake than a fault. No; the language is strengthening, yet tender: the fashion of a question allows them rather to reprove themselves than to be reproved; and the tone is that of brotherly love, and affectionate concern.  
  
Notice, that *what these saintly men were doing seems at first sight to be very right.* Methinks, if Jesus were among us now we would fix our eyes upon him, and never withdraw them. He is altogether lovely, and it would seem wicked to yield our eyesight to any inferior object so long as he was to be seen. When he ascended up into heaven it was the duty of his friends to look upon him. It can never be wrong to look up; we are often bidden to do so, and it is even a holy saying of the Psalmist, "I will direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up"; and, again, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." If it be right to look up into heaven, it must be still more right to look up while Jesus rises to the place of his glory. Surely it had been wrong if they had looked anywhere else,—it was due to the Lamb of God that they should behold him as long as eyes could follow him. He is the Sun: where should eyes be turned but to his light? He is the King; and where should courtiers within the palace gate turn their eyes but to their King as he ascends to his throne? The truth is, there was nothing wrong in their looking up into heaven; but they went a little further than looking; they stood "gazing." A little excess in right may be faulty. It may be wise to look, but foolish to gaze. There is a very thin partition sometimes between that which is commendable and that which is censurable. There is a golden mean which it is not easy to keep. The exact path of right is often as narrow as a razor's edge, and he must be wise that doth not err either on the right hand or on the left. "Look" is ever the right word. Why, it is "Look unto me, and be saved." Look, aye, look steadfastly and intently: be your posture that of one "looking unto Jesus," always throughout life. But there is a gazing which is not commendable, when the look becomes not that of reverent worship, but of an overweening curiosity; when there mingles with the desire to know what should be known, a prying into that which it is for God's glory to conceal. Brethren, it is of little use to look up into an empty heaven. If Christ himself be not visible in heaven, then in vain do we gaze, since there is nothing for a saintly eye to see. When the person of Jesus was gone out of the azure vault above them, and the cloud had effectually concealed him, why should they continue to gaze when God himself had drawn the curtain? If infinite wisdom had withdrawn the object upon which they desired to gaze, what would their gazing be but a sort of reflection upon the wisdom which had removed their Lord? Yet it did seem very right. Thus certain things that you and I may do may appear right, and yet we may need to be chidden out of them into something better: they may be right in themselves, but not appropriate for the occasion, not seasonable, nor expedient. They may be right up to a point, and then may touch the boundary of excess. A steadfast gaze into heaven may be to a devout soul a high order of worship, but if this filled up much of our working time it might become the idlest form of folly.  
  
Yet I cannot help adding that *it was very natural.* I do not wonder that the whole eleven stood gazing up, for if I had been there I am sure I should have done the same. How struck they must have been with the ascent of the Master out of their midst! You would be amazed if some one from among our own number now began to ascend into heaven! Would you not? Our Lord did not gradually melt away from sight as a phantom, or dissolve into thin air as a mere apparition: the Savior did not disappear in that way at all, but he rose, and they saw that it was his very self that was so rising. His own body, the materialism in which he had veiled himself, actually, distinctly, and literally, rose to heaven before their eyes. I repeat, the Lord did not dissolve, and disappear like a vision of the night, but he evidently rose till the cloud intervened so that they could see him no more. I think I should have stood looking to the very place where his cloudy chariot had been. I know it would be idle to continue so to do, but our hearts often urge us on to acts which we could not justify logically. Hearts are not to be argued with. Sometimes you stand by a grave where one is buried whom you dearly loved: you go there often to weep. You cannot help it, the place is precious to you; yet you could not prove that you do any good by your visits, perhaps you even injure yourself thereby, and deserve to be gently chidden with the question, "why?" It may be the most natural thing in the world, and yet it may not be a wise thing. The Lord allows us to do that which is innocently natural, but he will not have us carry it too far; for then it might foster an evil nature. Hence he sends an interrupting messenger: not an angel with a sword, or even a rod; but he sends some man in white raiment,—I mean one who is both cheerful and holy, and he, by his conduct or his words, suggests to us the question, "Why stand ye here gazing?" *Cui bono?* What will be the benefit? What will it avail? Thus our understanding being called into action, and we being men of thought, we answer to ourselves, "This will not do. We must not stand gazing here for ever," and therefore we arouse ourselves to get back to the Jerusalem of practical life, where in the power of God we hope to do service for our Master.  
  
Notice, then, that the disciples were doing that which seemed to be right and what was evidently very natural, but that it is very easy to carry the apparently right and the absolutely natural too far. Let us take heed to ourselves, and often ask our hearts, "Why?"  
  
For, thirdly, notice that what they *did was not after all justifiable upon strict reason.* While Christ was going up it was proper that they should adoringly look at him. He might almost have said, "If ye see me when I am taken up a double portion of my spirit shall rest upon you." They did well to look where he led the way. But when he was gone, still to remain gazing was an act which they could not exactly explain to themselves, and could not justify to others. Put the question thus:—"What purpose will be fulfilled by your continuing to gaze into the sky? He is gone, it is absolutely certain that he is gone. He is taken up, and God himself has manifestly concealed all trace of him by bidding yonder cloud sail in between him and you. Why gaze ye still? He told you 'I go unto my Father.' Why stand and gaze?" We may under the influence of great love, act unwisely. I remember well seeing the action of a woman whose only son was emigrating to a distant colony. I stood in the station, and I noticed her many tears and her frequent embraces of her boy; but the train came up and he entered the carriage. After the train had passed beyond the station, she was foolish enough to break away from friends who sought to detain her; she ran along the platform, leaped down upon the railroad and pursued the flying train. It was natural, but it had been better left undone. What was the use of it? We had better abstain from acts which serve no practical purpose; for in this life we have neither time nor strength to waste in fruitless action. The disciples would be wise to cease gazing, for nobody would be benefitted by it, and they would not themselves be blessed. What is the use of gazing when there is nothing to see. Well, then, did the angels ask, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"  
  
Again, put another question,—What precept were they obeying when they stood gazing up into heaven? If you have a command from God to do a certain thing, you need not inquire into the reason of the command, it is disobedient to begin to canvas God's will; but when there is no precept whatever, why persevere in an act which evidently does not promise to bring any blessing? Who bade them stand gazing up into heaven? If Christ had done so, then in Christ's name let them stand like statues and never turn their heads: but as he had not bidden them, why did they do what he had not commanded, and leave undone what he had commanded? For he had strictly charged them that they should tarry at Jerusalem till they were "endued with power from on high." So what they did was not justifiable.  
  
Here is the practical point for us:—*What they did we are very apt to imitate.* "Oh," say you, "I shall never stand gazing up into heaven." I am not sure of that. Some Christians are very curious, but not obedient. Plain precepts are neglected, but difficult problems they seek to solve. I remember one who used always to be dwelling upon the vials and seals and trumpets. He was great at apocalyptic symbols; but he had seven children, and he had no family prayer. If he had left the vials and trumpets and minded his boys and girls, it would have been a deal better. I have known men marvellously great upon Daniel, and specially instructed in Ezekiel, but singularly forgetful of the twentieth of Exodus, and not very clear upon Romans the eighth. I do not speak with any blame of such folks for studying Daniel and Ezekiel, but quite the reverse; yet I wish they had been more zealous for the conversion of the sinners in their neighborhoods, and more careful to assist the poor saints. I admit the value of the study of the feet of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's vision, and the importance of knowing the kingdoms which make up the ten toes, but I do not see the propriety of allowing such studies to overlay the common-places of practical godliness. If the time spent over obscure theological propositions were given to a mission in the dim alley near the good man's house, more benefit would come to man and more glory to God. I would have you understand all mysteries, brethren, if you could; but do not forget that our chief business here below is to cry, "Behold the Lamb!" By all manner of means read and search till you know all that the Lord has revealed concerning things to come; but first of all see to it that your children are brought to the Savior's feet, and that you are workers together with God in the upbuilding of his church. The dense mass of misery and ignorance and sin which is round about us on every side demands all our powers; and if you do not respond to the call, though I am not a man in white apparel, I shall venture to say to you, "Ye men of Christendom, why stand ye gazing up into the mysteries when so much is to be done for Jesus, and you are leaving it undone?" O ye who are curious but not obedient, I fear I speak to you in vain, but I have spoken. May the Holy Spirit also speak.  
  
Others are contemplative but not active,—much given to the study of Scripture and to meditation thereon, but not zealous for good works. Contemplation is so scarce in these days that I could wish there were a thousand times as much of it; but in the case to which I refer everything runs in the one channel of thought, all time is spent in reading, in enjoyment, in rapture, in pious leisure. Religion never ought to become the subject of selfishness, and yet I fear some treat it as if its chief end was spiritual gratification. When a man's religion all lies in his saving his own self, and in enjoying holy things for his own self; there is a disease upon him. When his judgment of a sermon is based upon the one question, "Did it feed *me?"* it is a swinish judgment. There is such a thing as getting a swinish religion in which you are yourself first, yourself second, yourself third, yourself to the utmost end. Did Jesus ever think or speak in that fashion? Contemplation of Christ himself may be so carried out as to lead you away from Christ: the recluse meditates on Jesus, but he is as unlike the busy self-denying Jesus as well can be. Meditation unattended with active service in the spreading of the gospel among men, well deserves the rebuke of the angel, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"  
  
Moreover, some are careful and anxious and deliriously impatient for some marvellous interposition. We get at times into a sad state of mind, because we do not see the kingdom of Christ advancing as we desire. I suppose it is with you as it is with me,—I begin to fret, and I am deeply troubled, and I feel that there is good reason that I should be, for truth is fallen in the streets, and the days of blasphemy and rebuke are upon us. Then we pine; for the Master is away, and we cry, "When will he be back again? Oh, why are his chariots so long in coming? Why tarries he through the ages?" Our desires sour into impatience, and we commence gazing up into heaven, looking for his coming with a restlessness which does not allow us to discharge our duty as we should. Whenever anybody gets into that state, this is the word, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"  
  
In certain cases this uneasiness has drawn to itself a wrong expectation of immediate wonders, and an intense desire for sign-seeing. Ah me, what fanaticisms come of this! In America years ago, one came forward who declared that on such a day the Lord would come, and he led a great company to believe his crazy predictions. Many took their horses and fodder for two or three days, and went out into the woods, expecting to be all the more likely to see all that was to be seen when once away from the crowded city. All over the States there were people who had made ascension-dresses in which to soar into the air in proper costume. They waited, and they waited, and I am sure that no text could have been more appropriate for them than this, "Ye men of America, why stand ye here gazing up into heaven?" Nothing came of it; and yet there are thousands in England and America who only need a fanatical leader, and they would run into the like folly. The desire to know the times and seasons is a craze with many poor bodies whose insanity runs in that particular groove. Every occurrence is a "sign of the times": a sign, I may add, which they do not understand. An earthquake is a special favourite with them. "Now," they cry, "the Lord is coming"; as if there had not been earthquakes of the sort we have heard of lately hundreds of times since our Lord went up into heaven. When the prophetic earthquakes occur in divers places, we shall know of it without the warnings of these brethren. What a number of persons have been infatuated by the number of the beast, and have been ready to leap for joy because they have found the number 666 in some great one's name. Why, everybody's name will yield that number if you treat it judiciously, and use the numerals of Greece, Rome, Egypt, China, or Timbuctoo. I feel weary with the silly way in which some people make toys out of Scripture, and play with texts as with a pack of cards. Whenever you meet with a man who sets up to be a prophet, keep out of his way in the future; and when you hear of signs and wonders, turn you to your Lord, and in patience possess your souls. "The just shall live by his faith." There is no other way of living among wild enthusiasts. Believe in God, and ask not for miracles and marvels, or the knowledge of times and seasons. To know when the Lord will restore the kingdom is not in your power. Remember that verse which I read just now in your hearing,—"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons." If I were introduced into a room where a large number of parcels were stored up, and I was told that there was something good for me, I should begin to look for that which had my name upon it, and when I came upon a parcel and I saw in pretty big letters, *"It is not for you,"* I should leave it alone. Here, then, is a casket of knowledge marked, *"It is not for you* to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." Cease to meddle with matters which are concealed, and be satisfied to know the things which are clearly revealed.  
  
II. Secondly, I want you to notice THE CHEERING DESCRIPTION which these bright spirits give concerning our Lord. They describe him thus,—"This same Jesus."  
  
I appreciate the description the more because *it came from those who knew him.* "He was seen of angels"; they had watched him all his life long, and they knew him, and when they, having just seen him rise to his Father and his God, said of him, "This same Jesus," then I know by an infallible testimony that he was the same, and that he is the same.  
  
*Jesus is gone but he still exists.* He has left us, but he is not dead; he has not dissolved into nothing like the mist of the morning. "This same Jesus" is gone up unto his Father's throne, and he is there to-day as certainly as he once stood at Pilate's bar. As surely as he did hang upon the cross, so surely does he, the self-same man, sit upon the throne of God and reign over creation. I like to think of the positive identity of the Christ in the seventh heaven with the Christ in the lowest deeps of agony. The Christ they spat upon is now the Christ whose name the cherubim and seraphim are hymning day without night. The Christ they scourged is he before whom principalities and powers delight to cast their crowns. Think of it and be glad this morning; and do not stand gazing up into heaven after a myth or a dream. Jesus lives; mind that you live also. Do not loiter as if you had nothing at all to do, or as if the kingdom of God had come to an end because Jesus is gone from the earth, as to his bodily presence. It is not all over; he still lives, and he has given you a work to do till he comes. Therefore, go and do it.  
  
"This same Jesus"—I love that word, for "Jesus" means *a Savior.* Oh, ye anxious sinners here present, the name of him who has gone up into his glory is full of invitation to you! Will you not come to "this same Jesus"? This is he who opened the eyes of the blind and brought forth the prisoners out of the prison-house. He is doing the same thing to-day. Oh that your eyes may see his light! He that touched the lepers, and that raised the dead, is the same Jesus still, able to save to the uttermost. Oh that you may look and live! You have only to come to him by faith, as she did who touched the hem of his garment; you have but to cry to him as the blind man did whose sight he restored; for he is the same Jesus, bearing about with him the same tender love for guilty men, and the same readiness to receive and cleanse all that come to him by faith.  
  
"This same Jesus." Why, that must have meant that he who is in heaven is the same Christ who was on earth, but it must also mean that *he who is to come will be the same Jesus that went up into heaven.* There is no change in our blessed Master's nature, nor will there ever be. There is a great change in his condition:—

"The Lord shall come, but not the same  
As once in lowliness he came,  
humble man before his foes,  
A weary man, and full of woes."

He will be "the same Jesus" in nature though not in condition: he will possess the same tenderness when he comes to judge, the same gentleness of heart when all the glories of heaven and earth shall gird his brow. Our eye shall see him in that day, and we shall recognize him not only by the nail-prints, but by the very look of his countenance, by the character that gleams from that marvellous face; and we shall say, "'Tis he! 'tis he! the self-same Christ that went up from the top of Olivet from the midst of his disciples." Go to him with your troubles, as you would have done when he was here. Look forward to his second coming without dread. Look for him with that joyous expectancy with which you would welcome Jesus of Bethany, who loved Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus.  
  
On the back of that sweet title came this question, "Why stand ye here gazing into heaven?" They might have said, "We stay here because we do not know where to go. Our Master is gone." But oh, it is the same Jesus, and he is coming again, so go down to Jerusalem and get to work directly. Do not worry yourselves; no grave accident has occurred; it is not a disaster that Christ has gone, but an advance in his work. Despisers tell us nowadays, "Your cause is done for! Christianity is spun out! Your divine Christ is gone; we have not seen a trace of his miracle-working hand, nor of that voice which no man could rival." Here is our answer: We are not standing gazing up into heaven, we are not paralyzed because Jesus is away. He lives, the great Redeemer lives; and though it is our delight to lift up our eyes because we expect his coming, it is equally our delight to turn our heavenly gazing into an earthward watching, and to go down into the city, and there to tell that Jesus is risen, that men are to be saved by faith in him, and that whosoever believeth in him shall have everlasting life. We are not defeated, far from it: his ascension is not a retreat, but an advance. His tarrying is not for want of power, but because of the abundance of his long-suffering. The victory is not questionable. All things work for it; all the hosts of God are mustering for the final charge. This same Jesus is mounting his white horse to lead forth the armies of heaven, conquering and to conquer.  
  
III. Our third point is this, THE GREAT PRACTICAL TRUTH. This truth is not one that is to keep us gazing into heaven, but one that is to make each of us go to his house to render earnest service. What is it?  
  
Why, first, that *Jesus in gone into heaven.* Jesus is gone! Jesus is gone! It sounds like a knell. Jesus is taken up from you into heaven!—that sounds like a marriage peal. He is gone, but he is gone up to the hills whence he can survey the battle; up to the throne, from which he can send us succour. The reserve forces of the omnipotent stood waiting till their Captain came, and now that he is come into the centre of the universe, he can send legions of angels, or he can raise up hosts of men for the help of his cause. I see every reason for going down into the world and getting to work, for he is gone up into heaven and "all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth." Is not that a good argument—"Go ye *therefore* and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"?  
  
*Jesus will come again.* That is another reason for girding our loins, because it is clear that he has not quitted the fight, nor deserted the field of battle. Our great Captain is still heading the conflict; he has ridden into another part of the field, but he will be back again, perhaps in the twinkling of an eye. You do not say that a commander has given up the campaign because it is expedient that he should withdraw from your part of the field. Our Lord is doing the best thing for his kingdom in going away. It was in the highest degree expedient that he should go, and that we should each one receive the Spirit. There is a blessed unity between Christ the King and the commonest soldier in the ranks. He has not taken his heart from us, nor his care from us, nor his interest from us: he is bound up heart and soul with his people, and their holy warfare, and this is the evidence of it, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."  
  
Then, moreover, we are told in the text—and this in a reason why we should get to our work—*that he is coming in like manner as he departed.* Certain of the commentators do not seem to understand English at all. "He which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven,"—this, they say, relates to his spiritual coming at Pentecost. Give anybody a grain of sense, and do they not see that a spiritual coming is not a coming in the same manner in which he went up into heaven? There is an analogy, but certainly not a likeness between the two things. Our Lord was taken up; they could see him rise: he will come again, and "every eye shall see him." He went up not in spirit, but in person: he will come down in person. "This same Jesus shall so come in like manner." He went up as a matter of fact: not in poetic figure and spiritual symbol, but as a matter of fact,—"This same Jesus" literally went up. "This same Jesus" will literally come again. He will descend in clouds even as he went up in clouds; and "he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth" even as he stood aforetime. He went up to heaven unopposed; no high priests, nor scribes, nor Pharisees, nor even one of the rabble opposed his ascension; it were ridiculous to suppose that they could; and when he comes a second time none will stand against him. His adversaries shall perish; as the fat of rams shall they melt away in his presence. When he cometh he shall break rebellious nations with a rod of iron, for his force shall be irresistible in that day.  
  
Brethren, do not let anybody spiritualize away all this from you. Jesus is coming as a matter of fact, therefore go down to your sphere of service as a matter of fact. Get to work and teach the ignorant, win the wayward, instruct the children, and everywhere tell out the sweet name of Jesus. As a matter of fact, give of your substance and don't talk about it. As a matter of fact, consecrate your daily life to the glory of God. As a matter of fact, live wholly for your Redeemer. Jesus is not coming in a sort of mythical, misty, hazy way, he is literally and actually coming, and he will literally and actually call upon you to give an account of your stewardship. Therefore, now, to-day, literally not symbolically, personally and not by deputy, go out through that portion of the world which you can reach, and preach the gospel to every creature according as you have opportunity.  
  
For this is what the men in white apparel meant—*be ready to meet your coming Lord.* What is the way to be ready to meet Jesus? If it is the same Jesus that went away from us who is coming, then let us be doing what he was doing before he went away. If it is the same Jesus that is coming we cannot possibly put ourselves into a posture of which he will better approve than by going about doing good. If you would meet him with joy, serve him with earnestness. If the Lord Jesus Christ were to come to-day I should like him to find me at my studying, praying, or preaching. Would you not like him to find you in your Sunday-school, in your class, or out there at the corner of the street preaching, or doing whatever you have the privilege of doing in his name? Would you meet your Lord in idleness? Do not think of it. I called one day on one of our members, and she was whitening the front steps. She got up all in confusion; she said, "Oh dear, sir, I did not know you were coming to-day, or I would have been ready." I replied, "Dear friend, you could not be in better trim than you are: you are doing your duty like a good housewife, and may God bless you." She had no money to spare for a servant, and she was doing her duty by keeping the home tidy: I thought she looked more beautiful with her pail beside her than if she had been dressed according to the latest fashion. I said to her, "When the Lord Jesus Christ comes suddenly, I hope he will find me doing as you were doing, namely, fulfilling the duty of the hour." I want you all to get to your pails without being ashamed of them. Serve the Lord in some way or other; serve him always; serve him intensely; serve him more and more. Go to-morrow and serve the Lord at the counter, or in the workshop, or in the field. Go and serve the Lord by helping the poor and the needy, the widow and the fatherless; serve him by teaching the children, especially by endeavoring to train your own children. Go and hold a temperance meeting, and show the drunkard that there is hope for him in Christ, or go to the midnight meeting and let the fallen woman know that Jesus can restore her. Do what Jesus has given you the power to do, and then, ye men of Britain, ye will not stand gazing up into heaven, but you will wait upon the Lord in prayer, and you will receive the Spirit of God, and you will publish to all around the doctrine of "Believe and live." Then when he comes he will say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." So may his grace enable us to do. Amen.

# The Heavenly Priestly Activity of Christ John Murray at [*https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\_christ\_murray.html*](https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_christ_murray.html)

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Bottom of Form

### The Campbell Morgan Memorial Bible Lectureship, No. 10 - 18[th] June, 1958. Westminster Chapel, Buckingham Gate, London, S.W.1 [Reproduced by permission]

It was in pursuance of his priestly office that Christ offered himself a sacrifice to God upon the cross. "Every high priest taken from among men is ordained on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb. 5:1). And since every high priest is thus ordained "it was necessary that this one also have something which he might offer" (Heb. 8:3). The sacrifice he offered was none other than himself - "he offered himself without spot to God" (Heb. 9:14). That this priestly function is not continued in the heavens is the unambiguous witness of the New Testament and particularly of this same epistle. "Who needs not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the people's: for this he did once for all when he offered up himself" (Heb. 7:27). "Through his own blood he entered in once for all into the holies, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). "Nor that he should offer himself often, as the high priest enters into the holies every year with blood of others, for then must he often have suffered from the foundation of the world. But now once in the consummation of the ages hath he been made manifest for the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:25, 26).

But that he does not discontinue his priestly office and function is equally patent. That Jesus is a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek is the refrain of this epistle. "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 7:21). "But this one because he continueth ever has the priesthood unchangeable" (inviolable) (Heb. 7:24). There must therefore be a high priestly activity perpetually carried on by Jesus in the heavenlies, in what this writer calls "the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1). And so the question arises: what is this high priestly activity in the heavenlies? It is usually spoken of as intercession. That it includes intercession is beyond question. Paul, delineating for us the pivotal events of Jesus' accomplishment, is careful to remind us that co-ordinate with the death, resurrection, and session of Christ at the right hand of God is the fact that "he also makes intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34). And in the epistle to the Hebrews we read: "Wherefore he is able to save also to the uttermost those who come to God through him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). It is a mistake, however, to conceive of Christ's heavenly priestly activity as consisting merely in intercession.

In the epistle to the Hebrews we also read that Christ is entered into heaven itself" now to be made manifest in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24). Our attention is here drawn to a representative mediatory office, exercised in the presence of God at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, which embraces much more than the making of intercession. Again, the confidence enjoined upon us by which we may draw near in full assurance of faith is not only inspired by the faith that a new and living way has been consecrated by the blood of Christ but also by the assurance of Christ's continued priestly rule over the house of God. "Having, therefore, breathren boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus... and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:19-22). Furthermore, we note in this same epistle the extent to which the sympathy of the exalted Christ is related to his priestly activity or springs from his priestly role. "Wherefore it behooved him to be made like to his breathren in all things, in order that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to the end that he might make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:17, 18). "Seeing then that we have a great high priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not an high priest who cannot sympathize with our infirmities, but was tempted in all things by way of likeness without sin" (Heb. 4:14, 15).

There is not only this multiformity of aspect derived from the epistle to the Hebrews but there is confirmation and addition supplied by other New Testament data. In Johannine usage the term that closely corresponds to the terms used in the epistle to the Hebrews is that of paraclete - "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). The paraclete is the person who is called to help, to plead, to comfort, to support. So Jesus in heaven is the pleader, the helper, the comforter of those who come to God through him. That this must be referred to the priestly activity of the Saviour is surely borne out by the analogy of the teaching in the epistle to the Hebrews, particularly that Jesus appears in the presence of God for us and dispenses succour in his capacity as the high priest, touched with a feeling of our infirmities. It is also borne out by the fact that the heavenly advocacy is in 1 John 2, as in Hebrews 2:17, 18, directly related to the propitiation which Jesus Christ the righteous one has performed and which he ever continues to be. So the activity as paraclete should most suitably be viewed as pre-eminently priestly activity based upon his finished priestly action in making propitiation.

These considerations provide the basis for a broader concept of Christ's high priestly activity in heaven than that involved in intercession. But there are considerations which open up a still wider perspective. In the epistle to the Hebrews Christ is represented as high priest over the house of God, and it is put beyond question that it is as the apostle and high priest of our confession, faithful to him who appointed him as Moses was faithful in all his house, that Christ as Son exercises the rule over his own house. There is an administration exercised over the house of God, and the writer forthwith proceeds to identify this house as the people of God who hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope stedfast unto the end (Heb. 3:1-6). When we correlate this with the teaching of Peter to the effect that believers are built up a spiritual house for a holy priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5), we can scarcely doubt that the church of God on earth is viewed as the house over which Christ exercises the rule and administration as the high priest of our confession. The church on earth as the body of Christ is the sphere of his activity in his capacity as high priest at the right hand of God. To use the symbolism of the book of Revelation it is as the high priest that he walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks and in that capacity he addresses the seven churches in Asia. The epistles to the seven churches are, therefore, examples of the way in which, as a Son over his own house and as our apostle and high priest, he administers this heavenly office. Truly Christ executes his kingly office as head over all things to his body the church. But Christ is a priest upon his throne, and we must not allow the consideration of his kingly office to eclipse that aspect of Christ's heavenly activity with which we are now concerned. There is here an inter-permeation of the various offices. What we are concerned with now is to recognize that his specifically high priestly ministrations are more operative and pervasive in the church upon earth than we are frequently disposed to appreciate. And when his specifically priestly function is duly appreciated, new perspectives are opened up in the interpretation of the activity of our exalted Lord. The definition of the office of high priest that he is "ordained for men in things pertaining to God" (Heb. 5:1) is brought to bear upon the continued high priestly activity of the Redeemer. His continued activity has a Godward reference as truly as did his finished priestly offering. This adds new richness to our conception of the relation he sustains to his people and enhances our understanding of the significance for us, as individual believers and as members of the body which is the church, of the activity which Christ in heaven continues to exercise in reference to God on behalf of those whom he has purchased with his blood.

There is another consideration, derived also from the epistle to the Hebrews, that gives the broadest possible scope to Jesus' high priestly activity. It is the fact that Jesus as high priest is the surety and mediator of the new and better covenant. The new covenant is contrasted with the Mosaic. Just as the high priest of our profession is counted worthy of more glory than Moses because he is the Son over his own house, so his pre-eminence over Moses consists also in the fact that he is the surety of a new and better covenant. "And inasmuch as not without an oath... by so much the more did Jesus become the surety of a better covenant" (Heb. 7:20, 22). And the oath was, "Thou art a priest for ever" (vs. 21; cf. 9:15). The new covenant brings to its consummation the communion which is at the heart of all covenant disclosure from Abraham onwards, "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people". Redemptive grace reaches its zenith in the full and final realization of this promise. And if Christ as priest after the order of Melchizedek is the mediator and surety of the new covenant as the everlasting covenant, this means that his priestly function is operative in the consummating action which will bring to final and perfect fruition the redemptive counsel of God. The ever-active priestly activity of Christ is thus brought into relation with the consummation of redemption, just as it is his priestly function of making propitiation which insured by its once-for-all transcendent efficacy and perfection that redemption would be consummated. In other words, the priestly activity of the Redeemer is central in the whole redemptive process. It is because he is a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek that redemption in its Old Testament adumbration had saving effectiveness, that redemption in its objective accomplishment has meaning, and that redemption in its consummation will be achieved.

The heavenly high priesthood of Christ means, therefore, that Christ appears in the presence of God at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens to present himself as the perfected high priest to plead on the basis of what he has accomplished the fulfilment of all the promises, the bestowment of all the benefits, and enduement with all the graces secured and ratified by his own high priestly offering. This is a ministry directed to the Father. This it is pre-eminently.

The Godward reference is primary here as it is also in the once-for-all priestly offering. But it is also a ministry on behalf of men. As directed to the Father it has no relevance except as he is appointed for men in things pertaining to God (cf. Heb. 5:1). But since it is a ministry on behalf of men it is also a ministry which reaches to men in that it involves the administration of the house of God upon earth and the ministration of succour to the people of God in all their temptations and tribulations.

There are two aspects of this high priestly activity on which we may reflect as they bear directly upon the succour and comfort afforded to the people of God on earth.

#### I. The Sympathy of Christ

This is reflected on expressly in the two texts already referred to (Hebrews 2:17, 18; 4:14, 15). These texts make it clear that this sympathy is derived from the experience of suffering, trial, and temptation which he endured during his humiliation. This exemplifies what appears all along the line of his high priestly functions; the heavenly exercise of this office is based upon the accomplishments of his earthly ministry in the days of his flesh. In this instance the particular aspect of the earthly ministry upon which the heavenly is based is that of the sufferings and temptations to which he was subjected while on earth. This requires us to take a much more expansive view of the earthly accomplishment which provides the basis for his heavenly priestly activity. The work once for all accomplished upon earth reached its climax and finds its focal point in the death upon the cross. The whole course of obedience moved to its climactic demand and fulfilment in the yielding up of his life in death. I say climactic fulfilment though not terminal fulfilment. For his resurrection from the dead, insofar as Jesus was active in the resurrection, was an integral element of his messianic commission and obedience. The death on the cross it was, however, that placed the resources of obedience under the most exacting demand. Likewise his sufferings reached their most demanding expression in those of Gethsemane and Calvary. Yet his obedience, sufferings, and temptations covered the whole course of his humiliation. And it is the experience derived from these sufferings and temptations that equips him with fellow-feeling or sympathy so that he is able to support and succour his own people in their sufferings and temptations. His earthly undertaking, therefore, was not only that he should offer himself once for all as a sacrifice, not only that he should have learned obedience through sufferings so as to be able in obedience to fulfil the climactic demand of his commission, but also that he might be fully equipped with the fellow-feeling requisite to the discharge of his priestly ministry of succour. We need to appreciate the continuity and inter-dependence of our Lord's earthly and heavenly ministries. For we are too ready to construe the exaltation of Christ and the ministry which he performs in the state of his exalted glory in disjunction from the state of humiliation. Or, to look at this from another angle, we are prone to emphasize the once-for-allness of his earthly accomplishment to such an extent that we fail to take account of the unity and continuity of the earthly and heavenly aspects of his high priestly function. This is but another way of recognizing the reality of our Lord's human nature in heaven and that it is in human nature that the Son of God in heaven exercises his heavenly priesthood. Once we say human nature, we must remember that his human nature in heaven cannot be conceived of apart from the progressive developments which characterized that human nature on earth and which condition the state of consciousness, feeling, and will of that human nature in heaven.

To view the heavenly sympathy of our Lord from the aspect of our existential need, how indispensable to comfort and to perseverance in faith to know that in all the temptations of this life we have a sympathiser, and helper, and comforter in the person of him from whom we must conceal nothing, who feels with us in every weakness and temptation, and knows exactly what our situation physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual is. And this he knows because he himself was tempted, like as we are, without sin. That he who has this feeling with us in temptation appears in the presence of God for us and is our advocate with the Father invests his sympathy and help with an efficacy that is nothing less than omnipotent compassion.

We sometimes entertain difficulty with the fact of Jesus' sinlessness in this connection. How can he have sympathy with us when there is the total discrepancy between our situation and his, both in the state of humiliation and exaltation. But when we pursue the subject a little more carefully we find that it is the fact that he was tempted without sin, without sin as antecedent, concomitant, or consequent, that charges his fellow-feeling with unique virtue and consolation. In our relationship to our fellowmen do we receive much help or comfort from the person who as respects weakness and sin is in the same position as we are ourselves? Misery likes company and it may be that we receive some comfort from the fact that others are as weak and sinful and miserable as we are ourselves. But this is a sinister kind of comfort and it is not godly consolation. On the other hand, how great is the uplift we receive when one who is immeasurably above and beyond us in sanctification helps and succours us from the similarity of his own experience with the same temptation. How much more then when Jesus Christ the righteous, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, affords us sympathy derived from his own experience of suffering and temptation. The fact that he lends this succour from the presence of the Father enhances the marvel of its exercise. And the thought that we in the stresses and conflicts associated with the body of our humiliation are objects of the solicitude and compassion of him who sits at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens and who dispenses from the reservoir of his knowledge and experience consolation, fellow-feeling, and strength injects into our fainting hearts the confidence of his invincible grace. How devastating to the faith which is the anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast, entering within the veil, and how lacking in appreciation of the existential demands of the believer's situation is any conception of the Redeemer which does not take account of the reality of his human nature in heaven and of the reservoir of sympathy stored up in that human nature because the great high priest of our profession was tempted in all points like as we are and learned obedience from the things which he suffered. Any conception that robs our Lord of the reality and continuity of his human nature and experience is but a form of docetism which deprives the Saviour and our faith of what is indispensable to both.

#### II. The Intercession of Christ

Whether the idea denoted by the term translated as "intercession" is more inclusive than that of intercession, nevertheless it must include intercession. This is apparent from Romans 8:26, 27. For there the term refers undoubtedly to the intercession of the Holy Spirit. And it would be necessary to include that same notion in Romans 8:34. In Acts 25:24 a closely related idea is present. No more appropriate import could belong to the term in Hebrews 7:25. Hence we shall have to reckon with a heavenly intercession of Christ on the basis of Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25 and possibly Isaiah 53:12.

We could readily encounter difficulty in entertaining the doctrine of a heavenly intercession on the part of the exalted Lord. There is some plausibility to the argument that petition, though appropriate while Jesus was upon earth as a necessity of his humiliation and of his being made in all things like unto his brethren, would be neither necessary nor fitting in his exalted state. There are various angles from which the apparent incongruity could be viewed. Is not Jesus given all authority in heaven and in earth as head over all things to his body the church and therefore in possession of all the resources for the perfecting of the church and of all the grace to be bestowed upon its members? Is he not the Lord of the Spirit and does he not himself send forth the Holy Spirit as the advocate and comforter of the people of God upon earth? Would it not be inconsistent with his own sovereignty to exercise a function which implies dependence and subordination? And does it not detract from the high exaltation bestowed upon him to suppose that he must resort to the Father in the capacity of mediator and intercessor?

Or to view the question from another angle, is it not a reflection upon the knowledge, love, and beneficence of the Father to suppose that solicitation on the part of Christ is necessary to the bestowments of grace of which the Father is the agent? Did not Jesus say while on earth," In that day ye shall ask in my name, and I do not say that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you" (John 16:26)? So the notion of heavenly intercession could be placed in a light that would seem dishonouring to both the Father and the Son.

These objections point up the necessity of avoiding assumptions and conceptions that are divorced from the data of revelation or at least the necessity of taking all the data of revelation into account when we think of Jesus' heavenly ministry. If we are disposed to think along the lines of these objections it is because we are ready to indulge in abstract thinking and we betray a pattern of thought that is alien to the concreteness and diversity of the biblical witness. The biblical witness is to the effect that there is an economy of redemption and we must not discount the relations which the persons of the Godhead sustain to one another in terms of that economy. The process of redemption is not yet consummated, and, because so, the arrangements of that economy are still in operation. It is in terms of the fulfilment on the part of the three persons of the Godhead of their respective and distinguishing functions that the process of redemption progresses to its consummation. If we do not make allowance for, indeed thankfully entertain, the specific and distinguishing operations of the persons of the Godhead in the progressive realization of the counsel of salvation, then we are doing something dangerously akin to the demythologizing which relegates to the realm of myth the integral elements of our holy faith. It is not difficult to discover in the frame of mind which is inhospitable to the idea of the intercession of Christ the same tendency which eliminates the concreteness and factuality of the past historical in the once-for-all accomplishments of redemption. There is an indestructible relationship between the economical arrangement whereby Jesus intercedes with the Father in heaven and the concrete facts of Jesus, humiliation as the servant of the Father. If it was not dishonouring to the Father to send his own Son into this world, it is not dishonouring for the Father to act now in the progressive realization of his saving counsel through a mediation which the Son exercises through the mode of intercession. Divine exigencies required that redemption should have been wrought through mediation of the Son, and it only enhances our view of the knowledge, love, and beneficence of the Father to discover the economy in terms of which he brought to fruition the designs of his love. And, as far as the exaltation of Christ is concerned and the sovereignty he exercises by reason of that exaltation, we must not forget that it is an economical exaltation. It is one awarded to him because he took the form of a servant and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And if it is an economical exaltation, it is an exaltation that does not suspend economical arrangements. There is a continuity between that phase of the process of redemption which is complete and the phase that is still unfolding itself. It is a patent fact written in the boldest fashion on the New Testament witness that the mediation of Christ is not suspended and the intercession is but one concrete aspect of that mediation.

That Jesus directed petition to the Father while he was on earth is apparent. To Peter he said, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:32). "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The fullest recorded example is the high priestly prayer of John 17. John 17 is not exclusively intercession, that is to say, petition on behalf of others. For Jesus there prays on his own behalf as well - "glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with theee before the world was" (vs. 5; cf. vs. 1). But it is to a large extent intercession. The intercession exemplified in John 17 was an essential part of his messianic undertaking and the appropriate expression of his concern for the fulfilment of his Father's will respecting his own. These recorded intercessions of our Lord in the days of his flesh provide us with some index to the content of his intercession at the right hand of God. It is unreasonable to suppose that such petitions as the following have ceased to have relevance. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one" (vs. 15). "Father, that which thou hast given to me, I will that where I am they also may be with me, in order that they may behold my glory which thou hast given to me" (vs. 24). Petitions more appropriate to the need of the people of God in the world could not be conceived of, and these surely indicate the lines along which the heavenly intercession proceeds. Another example is provided by John 14: 16. "And I will pray the Father, and he will give to you another comforter that he may be with you for ever." The giving of the Spirit refers specifically to Pentecost and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit with the people of God as a result of Pentecost. The prayer directed to the Father in reference to this event can scarcely be excluded from the heavenly intercession; it was subsequent to the ascension that the Holy Spirit was given. The most natural interpretation is that Jesus is referring to petition directed to the Father after his departure from this world. By good inference, therefore, from some of the recorded intercessions we may gather something of the direction which the heavenly intercession follows.

But in those contexts where the heavenly intercession is mentioned there is an indication of the type of intercession which Jesus offers. In Romans 8:34 the context is one in which the people of God are contemplated as being challenged by their adversaries. At least the apostle is adducing those considerations which provide the answer to any charge which may be laid against them. "Who shall lay a charge against the elect of God ? It is God that justifies: Who is he who condemns ? It is Christ Jesus who died, yea rather is risen, who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Rom. 8:33, 34). Whether the four data with reference to Christ - his death, resurrection, exalted state, and intercession - are the answer to the question, "who is he who condemns?", which precedes, or to the question "who shall separate us from the love of Christ?", which follows, it is obvious that the intercession of Christ is co-ordinated with the death, resurrection, and exalted glory as that which insures the vindication, on the one alternative, or the security, on the other alternative, of the people of God. And this means that the active and abiding intercession of Christ is engaged with the permanency of the bond that unites the people of God to Christ in the efficacy of his death, in the power of his resurrection, and in the security of his exalted glory. The intercession is appealed to here for the purpose of assuring believers that there is an abiding concern on the part of the exalted Lord with the conflicts and trials which beset the people of God and that this concern expresses itself in prayer on their behalf, that none of the assaults upon them will be successful in sundering the bond that unites them to him and that they will be more than conquerors in every engagement with their adversaries. In a word, it is intercession directed to every exigency of their warfare and therefore to the supply of grace for every need.

[p.13]

Likewise in Hebrews 7:24, 25, the thought is dearly to the effect that Christ is able to save to the uttermost because he has an unchangeable priesthood and ever lives to make intercession. "But because he abides for ever, he has the priesthood unchangeable: Wherefore he is able to save also to the uttermost them that draw nigh to God through him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them." The intercession is mentioned more specifically as that which insures salvation to the uttermost. The idea of saving to the uttermost is very inclusive and implies salvation to the full extent, salvation complete and perfect. The inference is inescapable that the intercession of Christ brings within its scope all that is necessary to salvation in the fullest extent of its consummated perfection. This is to say that the intercession covers the whole range of what is requisite to and of what is realized in the eschatological salvation. The intercession of Christ is interposed to meet every need of the believer. No grace bestowed, no blessing enjoyed, no benefit received can be removed from the scope of the intercession, and the intercession is the guarantee that every exigency will be met by its efficacy. The security of salvation is bound up with his intercession and outside of his intercession we must say that there is no salvation.

When we are thinking of the saving grace which is embraced in the scope of Christ's heavenly intercession, the intercession of Christ must be severely restricted to those who are the heirs of salvation. Jesus' intercession if always availing. "I know that thou hearest me always" (John 11:42). It would wreck the meaning of intercession on Jesus' part to suppose that he was ever denied what was the subject of his petition to the Father. The efficacy of Jesus' intercession includes, of course, those who are still unbeievers but who are among the elect. This appears in his high priestly prayer of John 17. "Not for these only do I ask, but also for those who believe on me through their word, that they all may be one, as thou, Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be in us, in order that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (vss. 20, 21). The intercession of which we have examples and which is referred to in Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25 is strictly within the realm of saving efficacy. The objects are the heirs of salvation.

This fact is correlative with another feature that bears closely upon the efficacy of our Lord's intercession. It is that of the unity and co-extensiveness of his high priestly accomplishments and activities. The intercessory aspect of the priestly function must never be divorced from the propitiatory. The intercession is based upon the atonement. In the two passages where intercession is expressly

[p.14]

mentioned this correlation and dependence are clearly implied. "It is Christ that died... who also makes intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34). And the context of Hebrews 7:25, specifically verses 26, 27, indicates this relationship. It was such a priest who was needed, the writer proceeds to say, who could offer himself once for all as a sacrifice (vs. 27). And the close parallel thought in Hebrews 9:24, that he is made manifest in the presence of God for us, is related directly to the fact that he purified the holies with better sacrifices than those of the Levitical antitypes and that once in the consummation of the ages he was manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (vss. 23, 26). There are two inferences that are unavoidable.

1. It would violate the implications of the unity of his priestly functions to give to the propitiatory a more inclusive extent, as respects its redemptive efficacy, than is given to the intercession. The security which is, on all accounts, bound up with the intercession is a security which must likewise inhere in the propitiation. Otherwise the intercession would not extend as far as the high priestly offering provided for and there would be an area of accomplishment which the propitiation embraced that would not be covered by the intercession. I am well aware that questions arise at this point respecting the privileges and opportunities accruing from the death of Christ for those who are not themselves the heirs of salvation and therefore privileges and opportunities that are comprised in the design of the death of Christ. This is the question of the relation of the death Of Christ to the gifts which fall into the category of what we call common grace. It is within the mediatorial dominion which Christ exercises as the reward of his once-for-all high priestly accomplishment that this common grace is dispensed, and the grace dispensed must sustain a relationship to his redemptive work. We must remember, however, that common grace by its very nature is non-saving grace and therefore does not fall within the sphere of that security of which we are now speaking nor is it to be defined in terms of that which propitiation, as propitiation, contemplates. And we do not have warrant from Scripture to include within what is called intercession on Christ's part that which falls within the non-saving grace which those who are not the heirs of salvation enjoy in this life. But, even if certain considerations arising from the universality of Christ's dominion and from the organic relations which the operations of non-saving grace sustain to the fulfilment of God's redemptive design, required us to bring the operations of common grace within the compass of Christ's intercession in some way or other, we must remember that such intercession cannot extend beyond the efficacy and effect of non-saving grace.

[p.15]

The intercession that is brought to our attention in these passages is intercession which cannot be reduced to lower terms than the efficacy of saving grace.

2. The heavenly intercession is a messianic function just as truly as was his propitiatory offering. It is therefore conducted in pursuance of the economy of salvation. It belongs to that arrangement designed by the love, grace, and wisdom of God. As in the propitiation itself, there is no place for the notion that the Father is won over to clemency and grace by inducements which the Son brings to bear upon him. Just as the propitiation is the provision of the Father's love, so must we say that the intercession is also. All messianic appointment and investiture has its origin, by way of eminence, in the Father's love. The intercession is simply one element or aspect of that provision which God in love and wisdom has made to bring to perfection his redemptive design. That mediation of this character should be continuously carried on in the holies of the heavenly sanctuary brings to our attention the condescensions of love and grace which the economy of salvation involves. It also advertises the divine exigencies which are met by that economy. And it is the fact that no humiliation for the Son of God attaches to the conduct of this phase of mediation that serves to exhibit the marvel of its grace. When Paul says of Christ that God "bath highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name" or again that he "set him at his right hand in the heavenlies far above all principality and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come," he implies that no humiliation now adheres to the human nature in which our Lord is glorified. And no humiliation, therefore, can characterize his intercessory activity. But the fact that from the seat of exalted and undimmed glory and in the exercise of high priestly prerogative he interposes petition to the Father on behalf of every one of his own, to the end that they also may be glorified with him, should cause us to be filled with holy and adoring amazement at the condescensions of trinitarian love and grace. And the effect will then be that we shall be humbled to the point of being speechless, in a true sense exasperated, at the thought of the intercession which is interjected to save us from the doom which our continuing sinfulness and unfaithfulness deserve and saved to a glory which consists in glorification with Christ.

### Prepared for the web by Robert I. Bradshaw in June 2005. Reproduced by kind permission of Westminster Chapel, London.