

## **Jesus' Ascension, Luke 24:50-53 & Acts 1:3-11**

Sun 12-05-24

### **The Ascension of Jesus**

#### **Scene 1:**

<sup>50</sup> 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 worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. (Luke 24:50-53 NIV)<sup>i</sup>

In this scene there is a joyous parting. All is well, the disciples are having a lovely and deeply spiritual time with Jesus, they receive his blessing and joyfully watch him being lifted up to heaven, worshipping him. When they leave that place, their worship continues -at the temple.

#### **Like the Ascension of Elijah?**

It reminds me of the scenes between the prophet Elijah and his understudy Elisha. In those scenes Elisha refused to be parted from Elijah three times. He was told twice, by two different schools of prophets that Elijah was to be taken up to heaven and, on both occasions, he told them he knew this and to remain silent.

Eventually, after a miracle crossing of the Jordan river, Elijah asks Elisha what he wants and say it will be granted if the Lord allows Elisha to watch Elijah being taken up to heaven. Elisha gets his wish and is both awed by the scene of the chariots of fire taking Elijah and distraught at the loss of his friend and master. However, in the next scene he picks up Elijah's cloak, repeats the miracle crossing of the Jordan with it and takes over the ministry.

#### **What next?**

Elisha's example. Did Elisha, with the spectacle of fiery chariots and horses and in his memory, go home to normal life? No, Elisha took over the ministry, beginning with the performing of the same miracle to part the river as he returned to Jericho.

Disciples example. Did the disciples, with the memory of the lovely time and the worship of Jesus still in their hearts, turn back, go to their homes and carry on life as normal?

Using only this scripture, we don't know yet! They certainly had a confidence-boosting change of heart, for they were publicly praising God and celebrating Jesus' coming. Let's look at Luke's other account of Jesus' ascension:

#### **Scene 2: Acts 1:3-11**

<sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptised with water but, in a few days, you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'

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<sup>6</sup> Then they gathered round him and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'

<sup>7</sup> He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

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

<sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> '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.' (NIV)

Here, Luke shares some more detail.

We discover that the resurrected Jesus spent 40-days with them, before his ascension to heaven. A bit like the transition time between Elijah and Elisha, the disciples were able to get more used to the idea that one era was to end and another to start.

**Mixed Feelings:** However, we also discover that the disciples, like Elisha those many years before, had mixed feelings about this.

Luke's admits that the disciples gathered around Jesus thinking that maybe now was the time when Jesus was going to become the physical king of the Hebrews, overthrowing the Roman empire and establishing the new united kingdom of Israel's tribes. They had hoped for it before, especially in Jesus' triumphant entry to Jerusalem.

If not then, is it now? 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:6 NIV)

Jesus does not answer with a 'no.' Instead he confirms that the Father does have a plan, of his own timing and under his own authority, but it is not for the disciples or any other human to know.

**The Promise:** 'But' he says, 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' (Acts 1:8 NIV)

Jesus does tell them – 'hey guys, you get to take over from me, by the power of the Holy Spirit.'

And it is this sense of hand-over that Luke completes this scene. But there will be more...

The disciples see Jesus taken up to heaven and are still marvelling at the sight when two angels appear. 'So, what you are looking at?'

The question interrupts their thoughts and, answering their own question, the angels tell the disciples that Jesus will be coming back in the same way they have just seen him go.

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### What next?

In the first scene the disciples don't go home unchanged, but full of wonder and praise for God in what they have witnessed through Jesus.

In the second scene, they receive again the promise of power through the Holy Spirit that will empower them become witnesses throughout the world. They experience a wonder of worship coming into them, but it takes the Angels to prompt them to get on with it.

- ✓ The ascension is the beginning of the promise becoming a reality. How that reality plays out is yet to be seen.
- ✓ For sure, the disciples had been told to wait for this gift of God's power, but the promise is set and once received they live out the life of God's spirit.

### What about us?

No-one, having been met by God, should go home unchanged.

'No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden' (Luke 11:33 NIV)

Let us celebrate the Ascension by thanking Jesus for his ministry and asking for his promise to come into us.

**Sneak pre-view:** On receiving God's spirit, 10-days later, the day of Pentecost, Peter tells the crowds, 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people.' (Acts 2:17 NIV)

Today, as we celebrate Jesus' Ascension, we also hear this promise. Notice, he says, 'all people', meaning we are invited! So, let us move into the place of this promise:

### Step 1: Beginning the Transition - Prayer

"You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you." (Rom.8:9a NIV)

We say together:

Forgive us Lord when we are rooted to the earth, unable to see beyond the present to the glory of your presence.

We are so concerned with what is immediate, temporary, and short-lived that we leave ourselves no time for the things that are eternal and full of your love.

Lift up our heads, that we may see Christ in all his glory and all things in their true perspective.

We ask this with the forgiveness of our sins, in the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>ii</sup>

### Step 2, Permission

"The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:39 NIV)

We answer the Lord's call by giving him permission to work in and through our lives, saying:

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When we stand gazing upwards, bring us down to earth: with the love of a friend, through the songs of the sorrowing, in the faces of the hungry.

When we look to you for action, demand some work from us: by reminding and correcting us by your word in our heart & mind.

Love us into action, fire us with your zeal, enrich us with your grace, to make us willing subjects of your rule.<sup>iii</sup>

We give permission for you to be transforming us and ask you to work through us, by your loving and powerful Spirit.

### Step 3 – Be Present “why do you stand here looking into the sky?” (Acts1:11 NIV)

The disciples were not to be so heavenly minded as to be no earthly good.

God's Spirit is 'a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance' until Jesus comes again. (Eph.1:14 NIV)

1. We have prayed, asking God to give us long-term vision to understand the temporary world and eternal Kingdom as Jesus does.
2. We have given the Lord permission to work in and through us – and to demand work from us.
3. Let us be present, with God's Spirit, in the world.

Make time to be encouraged by his word; try reading Psalms 103-105 over a few days and/or reading/listening more about Jesus' ministry. Then, let us carry the wonder of his promise, presence and vision in your soul, allowing his to inform how we engage with the people we spend time with.

### Psalm 28:13&14, I remain confident of this:

I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. (NIV)

Receive this prayer,

'My prayer is this: that he will lay out all the riches of his glory to give you strength and power, through his spirit, in your inner being that the Messiah may make his home in your hearts, through faith; that love may be your root, your firm foundation'.<sup>iv</sup> (Eph.3:16-17. NTFE)

Next time... Pentecost and gifts of the Spirit.

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<sup>i</sup> Scripture references are from The Holy Bible, New International Version, Anglicised Edition (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011) except where noted.

<sup>ii</sup> Baptist Union of Great Britain, *Gathering for Worship*, 3<sup>rd</sup> impression, ed. by Christopher J Ellis and Myra Blyth (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012), p.389.

<sup>iii</sup> Baptist Union of Great Britain, pp.389-390.

<sup>iv</sup> Nicholas Thomas Wright, *The New Testament for Everyone* (London: SPCK, 2019)

<<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+3&version=NTFE>> [accessed 30 April 2024].