

Introduction: This week and next we will celebrate Christ's resurrection *in the light of His Ascension*. Ascension Day's observance this year was on May 18, 2023. But Christ's anticipating this great day of being taken up to Heaven's glory (Acts 1:9-11) was a deep hope and joy throughout His ministry. More than a year before His death, when He began to set His face to go to Jerusalem for His death on the cross, Luke says that Christ's focus was on His being "taken up to Heaven" (Luke 9:51)! May we likewise in our study of this great day see the glory of Christ's ministry after His resurrection, climaxing with His being taken to heaven.

Monday: Read John 20:1-15

Peace...from Whence?

The more we study Scripture, the more we find ourselves magnifying the death of Jesus. For example, in Romans 5:6-10, the Apostle argues that it is through the death of Jesus that we are saved from the wrath of God (v.9). Then, tying Christ's death to His resurrected life, Paul cannot contain himself in Romans 5:10 as he declares, "If by his death we were reconciled, how much more shall we be saved through His life" (v. 10)! Thus it is always the peace procured by Christ's blood sacrifice which makes the resurrection such a joyful reality. The cross and the empty tomb can never be separated.

Ask yourself why it is that, every time Christ appears in His resurrection body the first words out of His mouth convey "Peace" as His greeting and blessing upon the Apostles? The answer is tied to His death:

When Jesus came to His disciples in the upper room at evening on Easter, He said, 'Peace be unto you'; 'and when He had so said, He showed them His hands and His side; (John 20:19f.). Why did He do that? Not just to establish His identity, but to remind them of the propitiatory death on the cross whereby He had made peace with His Father for them. Having suffered in their place, as their substitute, to make peace for them, He now came in His risen power to bring that peace to them. 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.' It is here, in the recognition that, whereas we are by nature at odds with God, and God with us, Jesus has 'made peace through the blood of His cross' (Colossians 1:20), that true knowledge of the peace of God begins.

J.I. Packer *Knowing God* p. 177

Meditate and Pray: Do you know this peace? Do your loved ones? For those being tossed and troubled in this peace-less world, let us ask the Lord Jesus through His gospel to come to us, "preaching peace to those far and near" (Ephesians 2:17). He still speaks, and, hearing His voice, "new life the dead receive."

Tuesday: Read John 20:11-18 and Acts 1:1-3

Beginning the Business

Christ's heavenly ministry of mediation and intercession was uppermost in His mind after rising from the dead. For example, notice how He tells Mary that she was to go and tell the disciples that He was literally already ascending in John 20:17. His instructions are clear on this point: "Say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" The reality of His ascension was on His mind because He knew that it was in ascending to the heavenly Holy of Holies that He would effectively cleanse us of sin, pay the price of our guilt and save us. Never before had God's people had a physically present Mediator in God's court in heaven until Jesus ascended to that post at the right hand of God! This is why Jesus speaks in the present tense: He wanted to ascend to God's right hand, knowing that there He would exercise His world-wide reign – rather than remaining localized on earth, limited to being in one place at a time.

Meditate and pray: Lord Jesus, thank you for your eagerness that we should be saved, preserved and redeemed by your intercessions for us in heaven. Thank you for how eagerly you looked forward to beginning the business of interceding in heaven on our behalf. Thank you that every day you are up early to order and shape

the daily experiences of our lives – quickly forgetting our failures and sins against you from the day before in order to begin afresh with us each day as a day of grace! Who would not want to follow such an eager Savior who has gone not only to His Father but to ours as well to be our Advocate there! Thank you Jesus, Amen!”

Wednesday: Read Luke 24:50-53 and Hebrews 4:14-16

Blessings at the Right Time

What causes the disciples' joy at the Ascension of the Lord Jesus? It was the posture of blessing which He adopted as He was taken up from them. With His hands raised He blessed them, and, “while He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.” Who can tell on a daily basis what such blessing means on our lives, as He lives to intercede for us, and to carry our every need in prayer to the Father? Jesus is no weak Moses whose hands grew weary so that the battle went poorly for Israel (Exodus 17:11).

Meditate and Pray: Once again, Lord Jesus, we thank you that with your Father and the Holy Spirit it is your will to keep watch over your people – even as you did over Israel in the past (Psalm 121:3-4). Thank you also that your watch-care is an active oversight, and that you can intervene at any point of need. Please, therefore give us boldness to enter into your throne room when we need help in our time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16). Thank you that your aid is never premature or tardy but always exactly on time. Please, therefore, order the events of our lives according to your heavenly timetable and persevere with your Father in asking for all that we need at every moment. Amen.

Thurs/Fri: Read John 16:5-16 and Acts 1:6-7

A Little While

Because of His strong faith and His victory over every evil through the cross, Christ is full of joy at the prospect of his work for us in heaven. As we saw earlier, He is so full of joy prior to His ascension that He speaks of it as a present reality in John 20:17! In the same way, He amazingly views the time between His ascension and His second coming as just “a little while” in John 16:16! Let's look at this verse more closely now.

At first glance Jesus could be understood as speaking in verse 16 of His impending death, (“a little while and you will see me no more,” followed “a little while” later by His post-resurrection appearances. But notice how the Apostles talk among themselves in John 16:17, connecting this “little while” of Jesus' departure and return with what Jesus has said in verse 10 about “going to His Father.” It seems most natural, then, to understand that Jesus is speaking about His ascension to the Father, and then “after a little while”, His return at His second coming and judgment. That is what the disciples seem to think they hear from Jesus.

But wait, how can Jesus speak of the long period until His return as just a little while? The timing of all this confuses us as much as it confused the Apostles!

But, once again, we fail to appreciate the strength of Jesus' love for us. Through church history, how eagerly Christ works each day to make His bride ready! For Him, the time between our conversion to be the Lord's and His return to wed us at the supper of the Lamb – is a “little while!”

Meditate and Pray: It is much like Jacob's seven years of labor to win Rachel to be His wife in Genesis 29:20 – “they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.” In the same way, how beautifully comforting for us to learn that Jesus is counting the days and busying Himself to make all necessary preparations in heaven for us. As soon as all that work is done up there, He will return without a moment's delay.

Sing about Christ's return in this old redemption hymn H.L. Turner:

1 It may be at morn, when the day is awaking,
When sunlight through darkness and shadow is
breaking,
That Jesus will come in the fullness of glory,
To receive from the world "His own."

Refrain:

O Lord Jesus, how long, how long
Ere we shout the glad song,
Christ returneth!
Hallelujah! hallelujah!
Amen, Hallelujah! Amen.

2 It may be at midday, it may be at twilight,
It may be, perchance, that the blackness of midnight
Will burst into light in the blaze of His glory,
When Jesus receives "His own." **(Refrain)**

3 While its hosts cry Hosanna, from heaven
descending,
With glorified saints and the angels attending,
With grace on His brow, like a halo of glory,
Will Jesus receive "His own." **(Refrain)**

4 Oh, joy! oh, delight! should we go without dying,
No sickness, no sadness, no dread and no crying,
Caught up through the clouds with our Lord into glory,
When Jesus receives "His own." **(Refrain)**

Sat/Sun: read Acts 1:21-26, 2:32; 17:18 and 1 Corinthians 9:1

Resurrection Gospel

It is good to conclude these notes on Christ's resurrection and ascension with these powerful words about the centrality of Christ's resurrection to our Christian faith:

In the earliest days of Christianity an "apostle" was first and foremost a man who claimed to be an eye-witness of the Resurrection. Only a few days after the Crucifixion when two candidates were nominated for the vacancy created by the treachery of Judas, their qualification was that they had known Jesus personally both before and after the His death and could offer first-hand evidence of the Resurrection in addressing the outer world, (Acts 1:22). A few days later St. Peter, preaching the first Christian sermon, makes the same claim – "God raised Jesus, of which we all (we Christians) are witnesses" (Acts 2:32). In the first Letter to the Corinthians St. Paul bases his claim to apostleship on the same ground – "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen the Lord Jesus?" 1 Cor. 9:1.

As this qualification suggests, to preach Christianity meant primarily to preach the Resurrection. Thus people who had heard only fragments of St. Paul's teaching at Athens got the impression that he was talking about two new gods, Jesus and Anastasis (i.e. Greek for Resurrection) (Acts 17:18). The Resurrection is the central theme in every Christian sermon reported in the Book of Acts. The Resurrection and its consequences were the "gospel" or good news which the Christians brought..."

C.S Lewis *Miracles*

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for the truth of Resurrection imbedded by God in the heart of Christian faith. All Christians agree: If dead men are not raised, then there is no Savior named Jesus, no judgment to come, and no eternal inheritance. Ask God to give your church new boldness to declare this "Resurrection Gospel" and new boldness in prayer, believing that the real answer to all our prayers is nothing less than the drawing near of the Risen Lord Jesus, speaking to us through the Scriptures as He spoke to the first disciples: "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?" (Luke 24:38).

