

THINGS ARE LOOKING UP!**Acts 1:1-11****(Read Acts 1:1-11)**

Intro: If you want to be obnoxious, stand in some busy place, looking up into the sky, and see how many people join you, looking up at the sky, and wondering what you're looking at or for. Sooner or later they may ask you what you are looking for. And you can be even more obnoxious and tell them, "Nothing, I just felt like looking up." and they'll know they've been had. And they'll be embarrassed and look around for the Candid Camera cameras or bless you with some choice words and storm away. It's an interesting experiment actually.

Anyone happening along as the disciples stood, mouths open wide, staring into the sky, no doubt looked up too. But the two men, angels actually, who pulled them out of their astonishment, or probably making them even more astonished, were not curious. Instead, being the messengers they are (the literal meaning of angel is "messenger"), they had a word from heaven for the gaping apostles. "Stop staring into space and get ready to get the world ready for when Jesus comes back in the same way he just left." Those words were a call to action of sorts and it ensured for us that no matter what, things are looking up.

I'm talking about the Ascension this morning. Plain groups like the Amish and conservative Mennonites actually consider this day a holiday.

But for us, it's something we kinda forget about in a holy calendar that ensures that Christmas and Easter and Pentecost get all the attention. And they should to a certain extent. But we must not overlook it. Charles Erdman says "*The Ascension of Christ includes two great realities: he then passed from the sphere of the scene and temporal into the sphere of the unseen and eternal and he then assumed all authority in heaven and on Earth. The event is quite distinct from the resurrection which took 40 days before, and also from the gift of the Holy Spirit which occurred 10 days later at Pentecost. In the preaching of the apostles and in their inspired writings, this event took a prominent place. It is possible that it should be given more serious consideration and a new emphasis in the present day.*" So that's what I'm doing today.

The Ascension is essential because it was the seal that showed that all that had occurred with Jesus was . . .

For Real

- Chris Hulshof says, "*Practically speaking, the ascension should remind us that if there's nothing left for Christ to do to accomplish our salvation, there's nothing for us to add to earn it. Salvation is complete with the finished work of the ascended Christ.*"
- The gawking disciples notwithstanding, Luke's description of Jesus returning to the side of his heavenly Father was not a stretch for the Christ Followers he was addressing as he wrote to his friend Theophilus. They had seen Jesus in action. They had witnessed his miracles. Several of them had seen him transfigured and speaking to Elijah and Moses on the mountaintop. And certainly, his resurrection sealed the fact that there was always something greater going to happen when it came to their Lord. But, from a distance, some find it difficult to believe, so they attempt to throw some wrenches into the Gospel cogs.
- A question that is sure to come up in everyone's mind, I know it has for me, and it surely does for detractors, is "Where is heaven?" Sixty years ago last month the first Soviet in space Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin supposedly reported "*I went up to space, but I didn't encounter God.*" It turns out that was just Soviet propaganda promoting its atheism. The truth is Gagarin was a strong Christ Follower who felt he grew closer to God with his 1 hour and 15 minute flight. Nevertheless, it is a good question – if Earth is spinning through space, orbiting the Sun in just one of many galaxies in the universe, how did Jesus know when to launch in order to make his target which is heaven? That's reasonable, but it's simplistic. One commentator put it this way, "*We know that the Earth is a ball whirling through space. We cannot locate heaven as up or Earth as down. This need not destroy for us the realities of the Ascension story because heaven is not a part of our space-time universe, but a realm which our space-time minds cannot picture. It is the seat of God's authority from which he rules the entire universe that he has made. Even the New Testament seems to imply that the place to which Jesus ascended is not to be found in the physical universe, for it says he ascended far above the heavens in Ephesians 4:10.*" He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, Ephesians 4:10a.

- For forty days Jesus has met with his disciples frequently teaching them, eating with them, drinking with them. But now he leaves them in a cloud – up, out of sight. One writer put it this way, “*He was taken up, but we are not to suppose that he passed through infinite spaces, and is now at a vast distance, and some remote sphere. There is no up or down in this universe. To say that he ascended is a correct but merely conventional use of speech; it fitly describes his disappearance from earthly sight and from material conditions even into the heavenly and spiritual.*”
- David Guzik writes, “*It was important for Jesus to leave His disciples in this manner. In theory, He certainly could have simply vanished to heaven and the Father’s presence in a secret sort of way. But by ascending in this manner, Jesus wanted His followers to know that He was gone for good, as opposed to the way He appeared and reappeared during the 40 days after His resurrection.*”
- So, while Psalty sang,
*Heaven is a wonderful place,
Filled with glory and grace.
I wanna see my Savior’s face,
‘Cause Heaven is a wonderful place.*
I wanna go there! is true, and wonderful to anticipate, where heaven is, is a moot point – the truth is heaven just is, and that’s for real.
- Moving on, the ascension is . . .

For Now

- Notice that the passage begins with Luke talking about what Jesus began to do and teach after he rose from the tomb. Listen, *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.* Acts 1:1-2. When Jesus cried “*It is finished*” (John 19:30) from the Cross – he wasn’t saying everything was done, instead he was saying the debt for Adam’s sin was paid in full. In the same way, the resurrection was not the end even though Jesus defeated death. The truth is the Cross and the Resurrection, and NOW the Ascension were all the beginning. So the Ascension is for now as Jesus moved into heaven, to make intercession, to guide the course of his church, and to sit at the right hand of the father till his enemy should be made his footstool. It is ongoing.
- Hulshof writes, “*It’s Jesus Christ who pleads our case when Satan attempts to prosecute us before God for the sins we’ve committed. Christ, as our advocate, mediator, and high priest pleads our case before God. The case He presents His Father doesn’t rest on our successes or fall apart because of our failures. Instead, the case Christ presents is based on His perfect life and His shed blood. Christ, our advocate, has never lost a case.*”
- Jesus is no longer merely the sinless human he was as he ministered, he has now returned to the glory which he had with the Father before the world was; he again exists in the form of God the Son. We are not a creedal tradition, but the Creed is still true, and it says *Jesus Christ. . . ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.* That is where he is and through his Holy Spirit he is directing the work of his Kingdom though his people – THAT’S US! But we will look at that over the next two weeks. That’s where we’ll leave it for now and look at how the Ascension is . . .

Forever

- We know it has been 40 days since Jesus had risen. We’ve seen in the first verse of our text how Jesus was putting the finishing touches on his Apostles before he returns to the Father. As they stood gawking skyward, it’s not a stretch to think the disciples, who were on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, 70 or 80 miles from their homes in Galilee, might be thinking of going home. Holy City or not, home is where the heart is, but the angels told them to stay because even better things were about to unfold. Yes, Jesus would someday return in the same way, but things with eternal ramifications would unfold soon. Hold on to your keffiyeh and get ready for the ride of your life eternal. Jesus’s Ascension was the next step in a wonderful forever.
- I can’t put it better than Chris Hulshof, “*The ascension of Jesus Christ means the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is within us. On two occasions, Jesus prepared His followers for the coming of the Holy*

Spirit. In John 14:16 He tells them, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.” He builds on this a little later in John 16:7. Jesus says to His disciples, “Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don’t go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you.” These two passages are filled with practical significance for us. It’s the responsibility of the ascended Christ to send the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God indwells us and is with us forever. As our helper, He guides us into all truth (John 16:13). This permanent and guiding helper, this Spirit of God, indwells every believer. Without the ascension of Christ, there’s no indwelling Spirit inside of us.” This should be building anticipation for you as we look at Pentecost of the next two weeks.

Conclusion: The angels asked the disciples, “*Men of Galilee why are you looking into heaven?*” This is because no time was to be lost in grief at seeing their great friend vanish into the clouds. Yes, it was true he was gone, but an even greater truth was, and still is, that someday he’s coming back in the same way he left. Meanwhile there is work to do. The Ascension is for real! It had to happen so that NOW can happen. So the Ascension is for now and for the work of the Great Commission. And, finally, the Ascension is forever. So things ARE looking up, and because of that we best get to work – there is no time to lose. Amen.

Prayer Circle! If you want to pray about something you’ve learned in this message, or anything at all, for that matter – please come up. Someone will be there to pray with you.