

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

Vance Havner

Text
Acts 1:9-12

Topic
Jesus' disciples stand gazing at the sky
as the Lord ascends into Heaven

Title
Sky Witnesses

Acts 1:9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Acts 1:10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,

Acts 1:11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Acts 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.

Introduction

Jesus could have gone home to Heaven some other way. He could have simply vanished from their sight, as He had been doing for the past forty days. Instead He ascended slowly, quite dramatically, taken up into Heaven.

Jesus was now in Heaven, while His disciples were left on the earth. He had begun a work; they would now continue it.

Among other things, the ascension was symbolic. We can describe it in terms of Jesus' body. **The body of Jesus, which began both to do and teach, went to Heaven to make way for the 'body' of Jesus that would continue both to do and teach.**

It was a mystery that was not yet fully revealed to the disciples, but they would come to understand, then teach, that the followers of Jesus on the earth during His absence are His *spiritual body*. He is the head, directing us from Heaven. We are His members, carrying out His will, on the earth.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Ascended And Sits In His Physical Body In Heaven, and #2 Jesus Ascended And Sends His Spiritual Body Throughout The Earth.

#1 Jesus Ascended And Sits
In His Physical Body In Heaven
(v9)

Take a moment to be awestruck by the thought that Jesus, Who from eternity past was fully God, not only took upon Himself a human body, **but will remain in a glorified human body for all eternity!** He will forever remain the God-man, fully God and fully human.

I don't begin to understand what it means to exist as God; but I'm pretty safe in assuming that it is something greater than even a glorified humanity. Yet our Lord chose not only to become man to save us; He chose to remain man in His love for us.

His ascension into Heaven is an event of real importance on many levels. It is so important that the Holy Spirit inspires the writers of the Bible to mention it in the Gospels and in *Acts* at least twenty times using thirteen different words and expressions to describe it.

Here in *Acts* it is presented in few, but elegant, words. We know from verse twelve they were in the vicinity of the Mount of Olives. Probably only the eleven apostles were on hand to receive final instructions. They certainly did not realize the Lord was leaving for Heaven until He lifted off.

Acts 1:9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Hold in your mind the **things** Jesus had **spoken** to them. They were to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Afterwards they would be witnesses to Him all over the earth.

They watched, as we'll see, intently, and with some fear that they were losing His presence.

Jesus was **taken up** rather slowly, deliberately, and very publicly. Others could have seen it; but like so many other events, they missed it.

Remember the birth of Jesus? The magi came from the east searching for the King of the Jews. When Herod inquired of the Jewish scholars where the child was to be born, they answered without hesitation it would be in Bethlehem. **But none of them went there to see it!**

Jesus was born; He lived; He ministered; He died; He rose from the dead; He ascended into Heaven. Most people go on with their lives, missing these events, when they could be impacted by them for eternity. When Jesus returns, in His Second Coming, everyone will be impacted by it – whether they are looking for it or not!

The mention of the **cloud** wasn't a weather forecast. It wasn't an overcast day in Jerusalem! The **cloud** that **received Him out of their sight** is reminiscent of the cloud in the Old Testament that represented the presence of the glory of God:

1. It was the **cloud** that hovered over the children of Israel by day as they wandered through the wilderness.
2. It was the **cloud** that filled the Tabernacle and later the Temple.

It is called the *Shekinah*, this cloud that visibly represented the presence of the glory of God.

Jesus ascended and, from our point of view, was gone. But note that it says the **cloud received Him**. From Heaven's point of view, the cloud was the beginning of His reception into Heaven! What an amazing, triumphant, jubilant, ceremony and celebration must have occurred in Heaven when the Son of God returned there. We know it culminated with His being seated at the right hand of His Father.

There are several very wonderful blessings we derive on account of the ascension of Jesus in His glorified body to sit next to His Father in Heaven.

First, because He ascended and is seated there, He has become our great high priest. It may not mean as much to us since we are unfamiliar with the Jewish system of sacrifice and offering. A Jewish priest never sat down after making a sacrifice or an offering. He never sat down because his work was never done. When Jesus sat down, it signified that there was no more offering, no more sacrifice, in order for you to have a relationship with God. The writer to the Hebrews put it like this:

Hebrews 10:12 **But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,**

Jesus ended the sacrifices that began in the Garden of Eden. The way into the presence of God is open to all by grace through faith in the Lord.

Second, seated there in His glorified body, Jesus is our Mediator. Hebrews 7:25 reads,

Hebrews 7:25 **Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**

Able stresses His innate power to achieve what He has willed to do. **Save** encompasses all the aspects of biblical salvation: election, justification, sanctification, and glorification. **Save to the uttermost** is sometimes interpreted by evangelists as "save from the guttermost." While it is true that Jesus can save the most wretched sinner from the gutter, the phrase doesn't look back; it looks forward. **Uttermost** is from two words meaning *all* and *complete*. You will arrive at your final destiny spiritually mature, whole, and complete.

You have only to [come unto God through Jesus Christ](#) and He will save you to the uttermost. He [always lives to make intercession for \[you\]](#) in heaven. His Father cannot help but answer His prayers on your behalf.

Third, seated in Heaven, Jesus is your Advocate.

[1 John 2:1](#) My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

An [Advocate](#) is someone who represents you before the Judge. After you are saved, and while the Lord is working to perfect you, you will still sin. When you do, the Lord Jesus Christ is in Heaven to represent you to the Judge. Because of His representation, when you confess your sin it is forgiven and you are cleansed.

Fourth, because Jesus is seated in Heaven at the Father's right hand, He is the Sovereign Lord Who is returning to finish the work of redeeming the whole earth. In [Philippians 2:9-10](#) you read,

[Philippians 2:9](#) Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,
[Philippians 2:10](#) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,
[Philippians 2:11](#) and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

One author put it like this: In His incarnation, Jesus was God with us; in His crucifixion, Jesus was God as us; in His ascension, Jesus is God for us.

If God be for you, who can be against you? It may seem like *everyone* is against you, or *everything*. That is to be expected until His coming. In the mean time, believers are described as being seated with Jesus in Heaven ([Ephesians 2:6](#)). It means that we can draw from all the spiritual resources we need, on a daily basis, to carry out our mission here on the earth.

#2 Jesus Ascended And Sends

His Spiritual Body Throughout The Earth

(v10-12)

This idea that believers on earth are Jesus' body is all through the New Testament:

[Ephesians 5:30](#) For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

It's a metaphor, but more. There is a real, mystical, spiritual connection between us and Jesus, and between every believer.

He's the Head; we, as His members, do what He directs. Instead of Jesus being in one place at one time – He can be anywhere and everywhere a believer finds him- or herself.

The disciples on the Mount of Olives understood none of this! They needed a little prodding just to go back to Jerusalem. There they would come to understand that they were now Christ's 'body' on the earth.

[Acts 1:10](#) And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,

Jesus had told them to go and to wait, not to stay and wait. They hesitated. How long do you suppose they might have stayed there? Every indication is that they still believed that the Lord was about to establish His kingdom.

The words used here indicate that they thought they were losing Jesus forever. After all, the cloud was receding, with Him in it. In the Old Testament, in Ezekiel, the cloud departed from the Temple as a sign of God's judgment (Ezekiel 10:18-19). They didn't understand that a mighty, rushing wind would fall upon them on the Day of Pentecost.

The Lord, in His love, sent them messengers to reinforce His words. Isn't it kind and considerate of Jesus to reinforce His words to you? He knows we are frail and weak.

I was going to title this message, *Men in White*. These [two men](#) are commonly considered to be angels. They may have been angels. I rather like to think they were Moses and Elijah. Once before, on a

mount, when Jesus was transfigured, Moses and Elijah appeared with Him. Luke, who wrote *Acts*, said this about Moses and Elijah in his Gospel:

Luke 9:31 who appeared in glory and spoke of His **decease** which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke of Jesus' **decease**. The word for **decease** is *exodus*. They spoke of His death, resurrection, and ascension. It seems fitting that they would be the ones to appear on the Mount of Olives.

Acts 1:11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

They could have called them apostles. Instead they addressed them as **men of Galilee**. They were all from Galilee, for sure; but why call them by their geography? For one thing, it emphasized that they were going to remain on the earth as they knew it. They were from Galilee, in Jerusalem, and would go from there to Judea and Samaria, and then to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Remember: They were wondering about Jesus establishing the promised kingdom on earth. He would – but not yet. In the pause, they would be ambassadors for the kingdom on the earth, going throughout it with the Gospel.

Another thing it emphasized is that Jesus could and would use the most ordinary, even despised, individuals. To be called a Galilean was an insult – and would later be used as an insult against them.

The two **men in white** testify that Jesus was indeed **taken into Heaven**. Then they immediately mention that the Lord will return. It's a big, sweeping statement to let them – and us – know that **everything is under control!**

Acts 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.

The rabbi's had determined just how far you could walk on the Sabbath and not violate God's Law. The distance was called a **Sabbath day's journey** and came into common use as a way of reckoning how far you traveled. It was about a half a mile.

Why mention it at all? *Not sure!* In Exodus 16:29 you read that, on the Sabbath, you are to remain in your place and not go out. The disciples had been told to go back to Jerusalem and wait until they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. It seems that they were to have a Sabbath-mindset by staying close to home until Jesus' promise was received. In other words, the Lord was dealing with them right where they were at, with their Jewish mindset.

They did not understand it yet, but the Lord was going to use them as His body on the earth. The Holy Spirit was *with* them; He was *in* them. He would shortly come *upon* them and then they would begin to **be witnesses** to the Lord. They would begin in Jerusalem; then spread out to Judea and Samaria; then to the whole earth.

Thousands upon thousands would get saved in their lifetimes. After these eleven died and went home to the Lord, multiplied millions more would be, **and yet will be**, saved.

It is as if Jesus were still physically on the earth – *but everywhere at once!* Wherever a believer is, there is the Lord – continuing both to do and teach.

Applying the Word...

One day, the Lord will return to remove His body from the earth. It's not His Second Coming; it's the Rapture of the Church, and it occurs before the Tribulation on earth and before His Second Coming.

I pose one question to you, whether you are born-again or yet unsaved: Are you functioning in the body of Jesus Christ on earth?

1. If you are a believer, well then, sure, you are a member of His body. But are you functioning? The other day I sat in one position too long and, when I tried to get up, I found that my foot and leg had 'fallen asleep.' A lot of believers are body-parts

- that have fallen asleep. They're not part of a local body; or, if they are, they're not functioning in it, serving their risen and ascended Lord. *They need to get up and shake off their sleep!*
2. If you have not been born-again, then you are not a member of this spiritual body of Jesus on the earth. When He returns to Rapture His body – **you will be left behind.**

Don't be asleep. Spend time with the Lord, in private, and ask Him what you are to be doing in His body on the earth. Then do it.

Don't be left behind! Admit you are a sinner, and call upon Him as your Savior. He is able to save to the uttermost.



