

Week 2 – 39 December 24th 2022 The Ascension

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Background:

We are approaching the end of the story of Jesus' life on earth in human form. He has achieved what he came to accomplish – giving his life to rescue humanity from the power of evil and demonstrate to the universe the power of God's love. One final step remains: he must return to heaven, present himself to his Father and then take his place at the right hand of God in the heavenly sanctuary. We will try to follow his journey upward and onward

Scripture: Please read the following (as supplied on the associated PDF file)

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| He's leaving: | Matthew 28: 16-20; Mark 16: 19-20; Luke 24: 50 – 53; Acts 1: 6-11; Exodus 40:34 |
| He's on his way | Psalm 24: 7-10 (read this aloud, as loud as you can! Never mind what the neighbours think!) |
| He's arriving | Daniel 7: 13-14 |
| He's arrived | Revelation 1: 9-18; Revelation 4, 5 (just a quick scan through) |
| He's enthroned | Hebrews 4: 14-16; 6: 19-20; 8: 1-2; 9: 12,24; 10:11 |

Note from Edwards' commentary "Gospel according to Luke", p.741:

"First, the ascension of Jesus follows logically from the bodily resurrection. If Jesus rose from the dead with a glorified body that superseded the physical properties governing mortal bodies, then it would appear inappropriate for him to retain permanently subject to the physical properties on earth. His translation to his essential celestial state follows both naturally and inevitably. The ascension thus signals the transition from Jesus' earthy embodied existence to his heavenly embodied existence. Second, the crude objectivity of his ascension, offensive though it may be to modern sensitivities, may have been necessary to convey that Jesus would not appear again in the spiritually embodied state in which the disciples had experienced him as resurrected Lord. It is hard to imagine that the disciples would have believed or grasped the finality of his departure, even if he had not performed an empirical object lesson such as the ascension. In respect, the ascension was not necessary for Jesus: he had, after all, entered into human existence without similar drama. It was necessary for the disciples to acknowledge his future spiritual presence rather than bodily presence. Finally, and most important, Jesus did not discard his body and return to the Father, in contrast to the incarnation, in which he had 'departed' from the Father as a purely spiritual being to take on human flesh. **His identification and embracing of humanity are so complete that he returns to the Father as the incarnate Son. Jesus is not simply the saviour of humanity, but in his bodily ascension he exalts humanity with himself. Humanity is now present in the Godhead through Jesus the incarnate Son. As Jesus is now, believers will someday be.** 'What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him' (1 John 3:2)"

Questions for Discussion:

1. **Why do the synoptic gospels contain so little information regarding this event?**
2. **What is meant by “but some doubted” in Mt 28: 17?**
3. What would have been going on in your mind if you had witnessed this event?
4. **What do you think was going through the minds of those who witnessed the disappearance of Jesus as they went back to Jerusalem?**
5. How much time should we spend doing as the disciples did (Lk 24:53)? (Blessing [Gk *eulogew*] = “speaking well of, praising; asking for bestowal of special favour – esp. call down God’s gracious power) and how much effort should we put into Jesus’ command in Mt 28:19-20a?
6. Where would *we / Christianity* be if there had been no book of Acts?
7. **What might Acts 1:9 tell us about a physical/material change in Jesus having taken place? See the quote from Edward’s “The gospel according to Luke” as supplied.**
8. **Compare Exodus 40:34 with Acts 1:9. Was this a meteorological ‘cloud’?**
9. **How does reading Psalm 24 make you *feel*?**
10. **On arrival in the heavenly sanctuary is Jesus: (i) fully human (ii) fully divine (iii) fully human *and* fully divine (iv) something different?**
11. **Does Daniel’s vision refer to the occasion of Jesus’ ascension? Why / why not?**
12. **Taking the references from Hebrews what can we learn about Jesus’ status and function in heaven and our relationship with Jesus the Son and God the Father?**
13. **What do you make of the sentences highlighted in the Edwards’ quote?**
14. What encouragement can be gained from Mt 28:20b?

There are too many questions here to be discussed at length in just 90 minutes. We will attempt to cover those highlighted in bold. The rest are offered for private pondering and meditation.