



Notes for Preaching - Doug Beacham

Ascension Sunday (May 24, 2020)

Introduction

The Ascension of Jesus from earth to the right hand of the Father occurred forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3-11). Ten days after the Ascension, one hundred twenty of his disciples, men, and women waited in Jerusalem for “the promise of the Father,” which was received on the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).

In these notes, I am going to focus on the major Biblical texts and major theological themes related to the Ascension. On a personal note, I rarely have heard IPHC message attention, teaching, and preaching on the Ascension. That may be different for some of you. It was in seminary that I first began to learn about the Ascension. In my pastoral preaching experience, the Ascension took on greater meaning as it relates to the reality of the kingship of Jesus over the earth. It is more than a prelude or introduction to Pentecost. While it sets the stage for Pentecost, it does so from the perspective of heaven preparing to touch earth through the body of Christ and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Major Theological Themes

Here is a general survey of the major theological themes related to the Ascension:¹

1. Jesus is reigning with His Father in heaven. Because of His triumph over death on the Cross and His Ascension, Jesus is affirmed as Messiah of Israel and Lord over the created cosmos. Psalm 110 lays a foundation for the meaning of Christ’s victories over sin and death.

¹ “Ascension of Jesus,” by Steve Walton in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, Nicolas Perrin (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 59-61. Specific sources for these themes are noted in the Ascension article cited in this book. Walton is a Ph.D. Honorary Research Fellow, Tyndale House, Cambridge, United Kingdom.

2. The Ascension is related to eschatology in that the One who ascended will return to the earth. In light of this, Pentecost is the empowerment of God's people to live as kingdom people awaiting the return of the Creator, Lord, and Sovereign.
3. Related to point two above, Jesus ascended to send the Holy Spirit to Jesus' followers. It is through the Holy Spirit that the kingdom is manifested through the church to the world until Jesus Himself returns.
4. Jesus "welcomes believers" to Himself in heaven (Stephen, Acts 7:55-56), and those who have died before Jesus returns are with Him. Our destiny is not to remain "in heaven," in a disembodied state, but to be raised from the dead in a new body and reign with Jesus in "new heavens and earth."²
5. Though Jesus is "in heaven," Jesus can appear and be present on the earth as He wills. He did this to Saul/Paul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3-8). Jesus can speak to His followers (Ananias, Acts 9:10-15). Jesus also speaks to His church in Revelation 1-3.³
6. "Jesus' ascension pierces the barrier between earth and heaven, and two-way traffic between them then flows" (i.e., Acts 1:10, 11; 5:19). "Heaven is permanently 'open for business' in a way that is unprecedented in Scripture."⁴
7. Jesus' presence in heaven means He is interceding for us at the right hand of the Father (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). Jesus is also revealed as the permanent High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 4:14 through 5:4, 9-11; 6:19, 20; 7:26-28).

² The phrase "welcomes believers" is from Walton on page 60 of the previous citation.

³ An important insight related to this is made by Jeffrey S. Lamp in an essay titled "N.T. Wright - Right or Wrong for Pentecostals? A Survey of His Thought and Its Implications for Pentecostals" in *Pentecostal Theology and the Theological Vision of N.T. Wright: A Conversation*, eds. Janet Meyer Everts and Jeffrey S. Lamp (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2015), 17. In referencing Wright's understanding of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, Lamp wrote these intriguing sentences, "...The ascension, in which the bodily Christ enters heaven, stands as testimony that human beings have a place in God's presence. If the resurrection marks the incursion of heaven into earth, then the ascension marks the incursion of humanity into heaven, all anticipatory of the eschaton when heaven and earth will come together into one."

⁴ Walton, p. 61. Walton's sentence that "heaven is permanently 'open for business'" is a powerful theme around which strong preaching about prayer can be developed.

8. Ephesians 4:7-24 reveals that in His triumph over death and His Ascension, Jesus “gave gifts” to His people: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.⁵
9. The period between Ascension and Pentecost is important because several critical events occurred:
 - a. Jesus addressed the issue of restoring the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6-8).
 - b. Jesus affirmed the mission of His followers to disciple the lost (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).
 - c. The disciples were filled with joy following Jesus’ Ascension (Luke 24:52).
 - d. The disciples worshiped, praised, and blessed God as they awaited Pentecost (Luke 24:52).
 - e. The disciples addressed a vacancy in leadership (Acts 1:15-26).
 - f. The disciples along with other men and women were “in one accord in prayer and supplication” (Acts 1:14).
 - g. The disciples obeyed Jesus' command not to depart from Jerusalem but “to wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4).

I hope that through this brief theological survey, you have already gained some insight from the Lord Himself about things you can emphasize as you minister the Word.

Observations and Commentary

Psalm 110

In earlier sermon notes I have commented about how Jesus fulfilled the Torah and Prophets, and the Psalms. When we read the Psalms, we are reading what Bonhoeffer called “the prayer book of Jesus Christ.”⁶ In relation to the Psalms and Ascension, this is

⁵ The first seven are drawn specifically from the Walton article. I have added the eighth and ninth as I believe they give us insight for how Jesus leads His church in the interim between His Ascension and Return.

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, location 482 in Apple Books edition.

particularly true of the “Enthronement Psalms.”⁷ Related to Psalm 110, James Mays wrote that “the psalm . . . is a prophetic text for an event—the incorporation of a person into a primary role in the order of God’s way with the world.”⁸

Psalm 110 is quoted in key places in the New Testament (see above where the Hebrews references are cited). Jesus Himself quoted verses from Psalm 110:1 in Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42, 43; and quoted by the Apostle Peter in Acts 2:34, 35. Psalm 110:4 is quoted in Hebrews 5:6, 10; 7:17, 21.⁹

1. Psalm 110:1, 2 – The Synoptic Gospels all have Jesus citing these verses in a conflict with the Pharisees. Interestingly, it is Jesus Himself who raised this Psalm and its implications. Matthew 22:41 shows that Jesus asked this about the Messiah, “Whose Son is He?” The Pharisees replied that the Messiah is the son of David. In 22:43, Jesus said that when David wrote Psalm 110, David was led by the Holy Spirit to write, “The Lord said to my Lord.” The point is that David knew there was another who would come as the eternal king of Israel, the Messiah.
2. The reference to “sit at My right hand” is a reference to Jesus being enthroned at the right hand of the Father.
3. Psalm 110:3 contains poetic language describing the power--“beauties of holiness”--and eternal vitality of the Son of God (note the “youth” theme).
4. Psalm 110:4 connects Jesus as the High Priest with Melchizedek (see the Hebrews passages cited above).¹⁰
5. Psalm 110:5-7 reveals the righteous judgment and justice of the Son of God upon the nations. It reflects the oft-noted phrasing that when Jesus first came, He came powerless as

⁷ The Enthronement Psalms are also called Royal Psalms. This category commonly includes Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144:1-11. They would be recited at the installation of a new Israelite king or as part of religious ceremonies where the king was remembered in prayer.

⁸ James L. Mays, *Psalms in Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 352.

⁹ Gleason L. Archer and G.C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago, Ill: Moody Press, 1983), 82, 83.

¹⁰ For more on Melchizedek and Hebrews, I encourage you to listen to *Thoughts*, the Hebrews episodes of my podcast, *Thoughts*, recorded in 2019 and early 2020.

a baby. But when He comes again, He will come as the rightful King of Israel and Lord of the cosmos and will deal once and for all with evil and death.

Matthew 28:16-20

1. While the Matthew text does not specifically refer to the Ascension of Jesus, it is an important part of our reflection because of the Great Commission. The teachings in this passage occurred in Galilee on a mountain. In this sense, it becomes a part of the “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5-7. Sort of a concluding crescendo to the ministry of Jesus and commission to the disciples.
2. The verbal forms of Matthew 28:19, 20, are interesting to me. In English, the verbs “Go and make disciples, baptizing them . . .” read like imperatives. But the Greek text is a little more nuanced. “Go” is an aorist passive participle, and has the sense of “when you are going.” The verb “make disciples” is an aorist imperative verb; it clearly defines that “making disciples” is the primary object of “the action of going.” The verbal form of “baptizing” is a present participle and denotes that newly converted people to Jesus are to be made disciples and baptized into the new life found in Christ. In verse 20, “teaching” is a present participle that goes along with baptizing. Baptism is not meant to be in the Christian life a water event that has no follow up. Teaching, which is a part of “making disciples,” is absolutely essential, according to Jesus.

Luke 24:49-53

1. Luke, the author of the Gospel record and the first “history” of the church, the Book of Acts, has two accounts of what Jesus said at His Ascension. The conclusion to the Gospel record reflects similar themes of joy and the temple found in Luke 1, 2. The setting of Luke 24:49 is in the area of Jerusalem, probably on or near the Mount of Olives.
2. This passage begins with Luke’s closing words of Jesus in verse 49. The immediate context in verses 44-48 are themes I discussed with you in the notes for April 22 (<https://iphc.org/gso/2020/04/22/preaching-notes-3rd-easter/>). Those notes show that the mission and life of Jesus were firmly rooted in the Old Testament revelation to Israel. The key transition is found in verses 47, 48, where the disciples are informed that they are to

preach “repentance and remission of sins . . . in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.”

3. Luke 24:49 contains three major themes:

- a. “I send the Promise of My Father upon you.” The Greek text of “I send” is emphatic, *ego apostello*. In Greek, the personal pronoun is part of the ending of the verb and does not require an additional personal pronoun. Here, it is like Jesus said, “I, I am sending.” The “Promise of the Father” begs the question, which promise? It is the promise named in Ezekiel 36, 37; Joel 2:28, 29. The promise was reiterated by Jesus prior to His arrest in His final discourses to the disciples recorded in John 14:16-18; 16:5-15. The personal pronoun “upon you” is plural.¹¹
- b. Jesus commanded the disciples to “tarry,” which in the Greek means to “sit.” It is a euphemism for waiting. One “sits” because one is not moving in other directions. They are told to wait “in the city of Jerusalem.” The location is likely the same Upper Room where the Passover was held some forty days earlier.
- c. They are to wait “in the city” until they “are endued with power from on high.” To be “endued” is to “put on” something, in the sense of clothes. This same language is used by Paul in Colossians 3:10, “have put on the new man who is renewed” The Holy Spirit is the new clothing of our lives in Christ. An additional thought on this relates to Genesis 3:21 where “the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed [Adam and Eve].” The LXX uses the same word for *clothed* as is used in Luke 24, Colossians 3:10. We are spiritually naked in our lost condition; we are powerless and vulnerable, exposed to God, Satan, and others. An animal, perhaps a lamb, was slain by God Himself to provide cover for sinfully exposed humanity. We cannot clothe ourselves. The sewn fig leaves Adam and Eve made could not cover their exposed condition (3:7). Jesus, the Lamb of God, died in order that all humanity could be covered from their sins by His blood, and covered for service by the Holy Spirit. The word “power” is *dunamis*. The expression “from on high” is a euphemism for heaven, the sphere of God’s righteous reign.

¹¹ A good IPHC framework for understanding the Promise of the Father is Garnet E. Pike, [Receiving the Promise of the Father](#) (Franklin Springs: LifeSprings Resources, 2000).

4. Luke 24:50-53 described the actions that followed from the closing words of Jesus noted above. Just as 24:49 emphasized that Jesus would send the Father's Promised Holy Spirit, v. 50 emphasized that it was Jesus Himself who led the disciples to Bethany (near the Mount of Olives) for His final blessing and departure.
5. It is interesting that Jesus departed from earth while in the act of blessing the disciples. Luke wrote that Jesus was "carried up into heaven," that is, into the presence of His Father.
6. The Luke account concludes with the disciples engaged in worshipping the Lord. That worship was manifested in praise, blessing God, and in the Jerusalem temple. Their attitude of heart was one of "great joy."

Acts 1:4-11

1. This is Luke's expanded version of what occurred in the final moments that Jesus was present on earth in His resurrected body. It is clear from 1:12 that the Ascension took place on the Mount of Olives. This is particularly important in view of Zechariah 14:4 that the Messiah's "feet will stand on the Mount of Olives" when He returns. The passage breaks into the two sections discussed below.
2. Verses 4-8 include more of Jesus' final words to the disciples before His Ascension. The "Promise of the Father" referenced in Luke 24:49 is the connection to the main themes in Acts 1. The NKJV makes the editorial decision to capitalize the "Promise," showing the interpretative decision that the Promise is the Holy Spirit.
3. Jesus reminded the disciples that they had heard Him speak about the Holy Spirit (1:4). Thus teachings about the Holy Spirit were part of what Jesus taught throughout His ministry. Jesus used the metaphor of baptism to describe what occurs when the Holy Spirit comes upon someone: there is a covering, a sense of something being removed and something being added, in that symbol.
4. The disciple's question in 1:6 is important. I used to think that the disciples still didn't get it by asking about the kingdom and Israel. I have changed my mind about that. It was indeed the natural question to ask as Jesus had obviously defeated death as the ultimate weapon of the Roman Empire. As noted earlier from the enthronement Psalms, Jesus was

viewed as the Messianic Royal King of Israel and the nations. Their question was a kingdom question; exactly the kind of questions we continue to ask in our day.

5. Jesus' answer did not reject the legitimacy of the questions about the kingdom and Israel. He simply answered that the timing of the fulfillment of the eschaton was in the Father's authority. In the answer the word for "times" is *chronos*, the word for "seasons" is *kairos*.

6. The connection to 1:8 is a stronger contrast, *alla*, "but." The emphasis that Jesus gave them was that His mission and the Holy Spirit are more important than their previous question about the timing of the coming kingdom.

7. Acts 1:8 describes the power that the Holy Spirit gives. It is power to witness to Jesus throughout the world. The geographical listing lays out the pattern that the book of Acts will follow as the Holy Spirit leads the disciples into witnessing to the ends of the earth. This is the proclamation to the nations that Jesus is truly the Lord and King of the entire earth.

8. Acts 1:9-11 records that the disciples actually saw Jesus being taken up. The reference to the cloud reminds us of the revelations in Daniel 7:13; Matthew 24:30; 26:64; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 1:7; 10:1; 11:12; 14:14, 15, 16.

9. Two present participles operate in Acts 1:10 that are translated as the disciples "looked" and Jesus "went up." The word "behold" *idou*, was used in Luke 24:49 in that ascension account. It's an interesting word and is meant to call attention to something important. It has a revelatory intention. Here *idou* introduced the two angelic visitors. Are they the same as who appeared following Jesus resurrection (Luke 24:4)? It seems likely as they are wearing "shining, white garments (Luke 24:4 is "shining, gleaming," while Acts 1:10 the garments are "white" *leukos*). Notice also that the two men appear standing with the disciples on the ground. The two messengers from God are not in the air on a cloud. This conveys the point made in the theological section that there is an active interchange between heaven and earth.

10. The two men provide additional instructions to the disciples, who are interestingly identified as "men of Galilee." Later in Acts their Galilean background is spoken of in a derogatory fashion (2:7). It is as if the messengers are preparing them to not be ashamed of their background.

11. The final message in 1:11 connects Jesus' Ascension to His return: "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." The construction reads like this in Greek: "This Jesus, the one who was taken up . . ." This is why the NKJV and some other translations use the English "same" to emphasize that the Returning Lord is the same Lord "who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; on the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father" (The Apostles Creed).

Preaching Thoughts

1. As you can see, there is much in the Bible related to Christ's Ascension. I suggest you do a review of the nine theological themes at the beginning of this study. There are some suggestions there, and in the footnotes, that may serve to engage your heart and mind.
2. You can easily focus on what Jesus is doing for us at this very moment. He is at the Father's right hand (the place of authority), interceding for us. The texts in Romans and Hebrews provide strong support in developing a message related to this truth. For people fearful due to the COVID-19 epidemic and its effects, the knowledge that Jesus is interceding for us is important. Added to that, is the knowledge of the intercessory effect of the Holy Spirit as described in Romans 8:18-27.
3. Another major preaching theme is related to eschatology. Acts 1:11 is clear that "this same Jesus" will return. You can build a message around "the blessed hope" we have in the gospel (Titus 2:13).
4. Another important teaching/preaching theme is found in the commissioning passages in Matthew 28, Luke 24, and Acts 1. The purpose of the Great Commission includes preaching repentance of sins, making disciples, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.
5. The Ascension becomes the staging ground for speaking more clearly about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The purpose of Spirit-baptism is empowerment for witnessing about Christ. This can be part one of a two-part message that would continue on May 31, Pentecost Sunday.

For more *Notes for Preaching*, [visit the Bishop's Blog at iphc.org](http://www.iphc.org).