

Martin White. 17th January, 2010. Acts 1:6-11

The Ascension

I don't know what the most extreme emotions you have ever felt were; maybe you were hoping something would happen, then your hopes were wrecked, then they amazingly worked out.

What we have been looking over the last couple of weeks was definitely the most despairing and joyful and confusing time for Jesus' disciples.

They had seen Jesus' despair in the Garden of Gethsemane; they had witnessed the crowd turning on Him and shouting out "Crucify, Crucify"; they had seen Him betrayed and they had all deserted Him; they had watched, most of them from a distance, as Jesus was nailed to the Cross and died in agony crying out "My God, why have You forsaken me?" They had shivered as the sky went dark and had felt the earth tremor as Jesus had died; and then some of them and some women had taken His body and begun to prepare it for burial.

As they walked away from this scene, all of them must have been in utter despair – The One they had put their hope in was gone; all they had hoped for was not going to happen and although Jesus had talked about the Resurrection, their grief and their lack of understanding blinded them from believing in this as something that would happen soon – at best, it was a theological truth for the future.

But then, early in the morning a couple of days later, they had heard an excited knock on their door, and Mary Magdalene had burst in – almost too excited to get the words out, and had said "I have seen the Lord!"

They had spent that day debating what it meant – was she just delirious in grief, or could it be true? When, that evening, Jesus had appeared among them and had talked with them – not like a ghost, but very much alive!

And then the following evening again he appeared – this time to all of them – including Thomas who had missed the earlier evening; and He even let Thomas touch his wounds – showing beyond doubt that He really was alive.

Then He appeared to them again – and Peter – restoring him where he had denied Jesus; and He ate a meal with them – barbecued fish.

Then to two disciples on the road to Emmaus; then repeatedly, unmistakably, to over 500 people (1 Corinthians 15:3-7) over a period of 40 days.

After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)

I guess that during this time He reminded them of the promise He had made, that their grief would turn to joy (John 16:20) as well as teaching them about the Kingdom.

And then, after the 40 days, they went with Him to the Mount of Olives – still trying to get their heads around the fact of Jesus' Resurrection and what it meant for them.

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:6-11)

This time when Jesus left them, it was different – it was clear to them that this time He was not going to reappear – at least anytime soon.

This time He was hidden in a Cloud – and some of them had seen this Cloud before – at the Transfiguration when the bright cloud enveloped them and they heard God saying "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5)

This was the same Cloud that led the Israelites through the desert, and would descend on the Tent of Meeting where Moses met with God; it was the same Cloud that filled the Temple when Solomon dedicated it (2 Chronicles 6:13-14)

Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God. (2 Chronicles 6:13-14)

So after this extreme grief, and extreme joy; and hope brought back to life – “At this time are you going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?” Again, Jesus leaves them.

This is another change of circumstances that again must have left them confused – and amazed at what they were witnessing – seeing God the Son ascending before their eyes – being received by God the Father – enveloped in The Cloud of His Presence.

And then they are joined by two men dressed in white – angels, who almost rebuke them – “Why are you still looking into the sky? Jesus will come back...now get on with your work!”

Imagine the conversation & the scene!

“Did you see...He just...but we thought...!”

Jon spoke last week about the Great Commission – to be Jesus’ Witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria & the Ends of the Earth; the Ascension is a vital part of this.

Jesus had to go in order that the Great Commission would be achieved.

In Matthew 28, giving the great Commission, Jesus said that all authority had been given to Him.

What the Disciples were witnessing was the giving of this authority.

In Philippians 2 it says this:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

but **made himself nothing,**

taking the **very nature of a servant,**

being **made in human likeness.**

And being found **in appearance as a man,**

he **humbled** himself

and became **obedient to death--**

even **death on a cross!**

Therefore **God exalted** him to the **highest place**

and gave him the **name that is above every name,**

that **at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,**

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and **every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,**

to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

Elsewhere – in Psalm 110, which is a passage about the Messiah, which is quoted several times through the New Testament, it also says:

The LORD says to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand

until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet."

The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion;

you will rule in the midst of your enemies. (Psalm 110:1-2)

What this is all describing is what is known as the Demotion and Exaltation of Christ; Jesus made Himself nothing – humbled Himself – became obedient to death → so God exalted Him.

The disciples had seen His resurrection; now this – the Ascension, and then Him being seated at God’s Right Hand (Session) are what is known together as His Exaltation.

It is not just about where Jesus is as a location; it is about Him being given *The* ultimate position of authority – “Exalted to the Highest Place” Seated on His Throne – given the Name above every name (again a mark of authority) with all His enemies being made a footstool for His feet.

So when He said “All authority is given to me...therefore go...” He means ALL authority; over EVERYTHING!

There is NOTHING that can stand against Him.

And out of this Authority, we are commissioned – “You will receive power...”

There are times when I have said “I wish Jesus was here now”, but actually that wouldn’t be the best thing.

I guess the disciples were thinking at this point “It’s great that we will receive power – but we’d rather you stayed!”

In fact Jesus had already spoken about this in John 16:

"Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:5-7)

From His position of perfect authority, he sends the Holy Spirit to **empower us for His Mission**; and be our **Comforter** and our **Friend**; and lead us into all **Truth** and bless us with His **Gifts** and bring us into **unity** – and for us, this is good.

This wasn’t the second best plan; it was the best and only plan.

Jesus goes so the Holy Spirit can come

The Holy Spirit comes in order that we go

And we go in order that Jesus will come again.

The two “Men dressed in white” – the angels asked the question "[why do you stand here looking into the sky?](#)

Why are you wasting time looking up there when you have work to do? Don't dwell on this – don't grieve; this is a time full of joy because now the Church is going to be established; the Kingdom is extending! There are nations to reach!

We are now equipped for the mission.

And then they left them with this encouragement:

[This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.](#)

Jesus will return “in the same way” – not necessarily exactly the same – when He returns it will be in Glory and every eye will see Him.

But the point to the mission is it is not an endless, unwinnable battle; we are fulfilling the Great Commission for a purpose – and one day, when He returns, our joy will be complete; as He leaves the Glory of Heaven one last time – this time as a Bridegroom, coming to claim His Bride – the Church (including you and me) and takes Her to be with Him in Glory, wrapped in the Cloud of God's Presence forever.

The disciples were on a mission, and they were ‘clothed with power from on high’ to equip them.

We are on the same mission – so I think it would be good to pray for the same power.