Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Significance of the Ascension
Scripture: Luke 24:50-53
Code: 42-298

Well, this is a special Lord's day in the sense of our text of Luke because we have finally come to the final paragraph in Luke's gospel, and we close out this great history with many wonderful memories of what we have learned in these ten years in Luke, many wonderful benefits spiritually to these great truths, this great account of Christ. Let's look together at the final paragraph, verses 50 to 53.

Before I read them to you, just simply to make a comment. This is the brief account of the ascension of Christ into heaven, having completed His earthly journey and His earthly work. It is a significant event, maybe, in some ways, far more significant than most people give it credit for. In our culture we have a tradition of honoring the birth of people. We celebrate birthdays. When there is someone important, we make note of their birthday. Sometimes we even make national holidays out of the birthday of famous people, Presidents, and so forth. We do that not because their birth was significant, because none of their births were really significant. And when they were born, they had accomplished absolutely nothing. So at the risk of seeming a little bit odd, may I suggest another approach? That we begin to celebrate the death day of significant people which marks the culmination of their achievement.

At their birth, nothing was yet accomplished, nor could anything be determined as to what the future might hold. We might not be sure that they would amount to anything. But when it was over, then we could look back and see the real value. The only person who ever lived whose accomplishments were written before He was born was Jesus Christ. And so while it makes sense to celebrate His birthday because it was already written what He would accomplish, it also makes equal sense to celebrate His ascension which ended His earthly journey...not in death the way everybody else's earthly journey ends, but in simply transporting Himself in full view of His followers into heaven.

And again, I suggest that the ascension of Christ doesn't get anywhere near the attention that it should. We celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ because of what we know He accomplished, though it was still future when He was born. And sometimes that celebration of His birth gets a little bit filled with sentimental things about a baby in a manger and Joseph and Mary and shepherds and wise men. And for many people, they never really get much beyond that. If, on the other hand, we were to celebrate the end of His life on earth, we were to have a celebration and a great holiday marking the ascension of Christ, which, by the way, we know the exact date of, then we would really remove all the sentimentalism and we would be left to celebrate all His achievements. That celebration might be the greatest of all celebrations because when Jesus ascended into heaven, that

was heaven's affirmation that He had accomplished everything He had come to do.

So, for at least this Sunday, we're going to shift our celebration from His arrival to His departure. Luke began with His arrival, and Luke ends with His departure. Let's look at the text, verse 50. “He led them out as far as Bethany and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple praising God.”

The story of Jesus began in heaven when He left and came to earth. And it ends when He leaves earth to return to heaven. The story began with condescension and ends with ascension. Began with incarnation and ends with exaltation. Begins with expectation and ends with consummation. It began with the Son of God being born of a virgin, descending to earth and it ends with the Son of God being born from the dead, ascending to heaven. The story began with hope unrealized and ends with hope fully realized. It began with a promise and ends with a fulfillment and a new promise.

And the story began with praise and worship. And it ends the same way. It began with the praise of Mary and Zechariah and Simeon and Anna all praising God in anticipation of the coming of Messiah. It began with the praise of angels. And it ends with worship and praise. The story even began in the temple when the baby Jesus was taken to the temple and there being offered for dedication in the Jewish custom, He was taken up in the arms of Simeon who offered praise to God. Then there was Anna who was always in the temple praising God. And so it began with praise and ends with praise. It began in the temple, it ends in the temple.

We have come from the beginning to the end. And in between is the incomparable magisterial of His life, His teaching, His miracles, His rejection, His death and His resurrection, a history written majestically by Luke and not only Luke, but Matthew, Mark and John as well.

However, only Luke is given the sole privilege of recording the culminating event, the ascension. And Luke tells us about the ascension twice. It's how he ends his gospel and it's how he begins his next volume of history called the Book of Acts. Luke tells the story of Christ on earth. Acts tells the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the fulfillment of the Great Commission in the establishment of the church.

So Luke again in his two overlapping, interlocking histories ends with the ascension and begins with the ascension, which then should affirm to us its importance. It is the culminating end of one history and it is the inaugural beginning of another history.

As we look at this massive miracle, I want you to consider three aspects...the event itself, miraculous ascension, the response, and then we'll talk about its significance. And in so doing, we will transition, if we can, our praise from the birth of our Lord to His ascension. From His humiliation to His

exaltation, from His condescension to His coronation.

Let's begin with the miraculous ascension in verses 50 to 51. Now we could wish we had a little more here, how about a whole lot more? We could wish that the Holy Spirit had been willing to give us some details about this that our curiosity longs to know, something of just exactly how this could happen, such a staggering, stunning miracle. But we have a very simple description. “He led them out as far as Bethany, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.”

In the usual understated form of the biblical writers, they have just described something that is beyond comprehension with very simple language. They rarely even used multiple syllable words to explain this. There is the ascension described in those verses.

Just give you a little bit of background, where we are in the chronology of Luke's gospel? If you were to go back to verse 36 when Jesus appeared to His followers, the Apostles and the disciples, you would be back on Sunday night of the resurrection. That's when He appeared and said, “Peace be to you.” And He revealed Himself to them and to prove that He was actually alive, you remember, He asked if they had anything to eat and they brought Him some cooked fish and He ate. So they know now that He is alive from the dead. And verse 43 simply ends, “He took it and ate it before them.” That's the last scene Luke gives us on that resurrection Sunday.

Starting in verse 44, Luke gives us an incident that features two things, two components, instruction on the Old Testament prophecies related to the Messiah's suffering and dying and rising, and His provision of forgiveness and the proclamation of the gospel to all nations.

In other words, our Lord goes back and instructs them from each section in the Old Testament, and for the Jews, there were three...there was the Law and the Prophets and the Writings, or the Psalms as they are referred to here because Psalms is the first book in the Writings. And He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures concerning His suffering and death and resurrection and His provision of salvation and the need to proclaim this to the ends of the earth.

So, Luke doesn't give us a time, doesn't give us a place, but sometime in the period from Sunday night until His ascension He opened the Scriptures, the Old Testament, the only Scripture that existed at this point, and He instructed them out of the Scriptures regarding everything they now knew had come to pass.

Second thing He did was give them a commission to proclaim repentance for forgiveness of sins to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem to be witnesses on His behalf. And then He ends in verse 49 by telling them, “Don't go anywhere yet, the promise of My Father must come upon you...that's the Holy Spirit...stay in the city of Jerusalem until you're clothed with power from on high.” You have your

commission, you now understand the Old Testament, you now understand the fulfillment in My life and death and resurrection. You are now ready with an understanding of Scripture. You now know that I am alive. You are now ready to go and proclaim the message of the forgiveness of sins, the gospel to the ends of the earth. But don't go anywhere until you're empowered from on high.

Now Luke doesn't tell us anything about when and where this was said. It is the same commission essentially as given in Matthew 28:16 to 20. That specific commission was given in a mountain in Galilee during the 40 days. This is the same in content but this may be another occasion where the Lord repeated it in a different way. We don't know that because Luke doesn't give us that information. If this was part and parcel of the commission that was given by Matthew, then it occurred in a mountain in Galilee and you have to have some days for all of them to come back to Jerusalem because that's where they are when He ascends because Bethany is right near Jerusalem.

So Luke isn't concerned about the timing. The Lord may have repeated the commission, He may have repeated it several times in several different ways over the 40 days. So in that 40-day period, all we know from Luke is that our Lord instructed them out of the Old Testament as to what the Old Testament said that He fulfilled, and our Lord gave them the commission. That's all we get from Luke. If you want more details about the 40 days, and about the ministry in Galilee, you can go to John 21, John 21 gives a wonderful history and accounting there of our Lord's interaction with His disciples while He was in Galilee which was where He spent much of the time over the 40 days. But as Luke ends his gospel, he says no more than the Lord did these two things.

Now as he begins his history in Acts, and I want to show this to you, he does fill in more detail about the 40 days. In fact, Luke begins to write in Acts 1:1 and makes reference to the gospel of Luke, back to his own gospel. “The first account I composed,” that's a reference to his gospel, Theophilus, the one to whom he writes this history. “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when He was taken up to heaven.” So here he also refers to His ascension. That's why I said he ended his gospel with the ascension, he begins his history of Acts with the ascension.

And then he goes on to say some things that happened prior to His ascension after He had by the Holy Spirit...”He ascended after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the Apostles whom He had chosen.” What were those orders? “To go into all the world and preach the gospel,” as Matthew puts it, or in Luke's case, “to proclaim forgiveness of sins in His name to all nations.” That's the orders that He had given them.

And, of course, “During the 40 days He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs such as see My hands, see My side, such as give Me a piece of fish and I'll eat, such as having breakfast with them in Galilee, appearing to them...in verse 3...over a period of 40 days and speaking of the things concerning the Kingdom of God.”

So He filled out their Old Testament messianic theology; He filled out their understanding of the Kingdom of God. He gave them this great commission. He affirmed that He was truly alive physically from the dead with many convincing proofs, all of this over a period of 40 days. “Gathering them together, this time they're back in Jerusalem, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but wait for what the Father had promised, which He said you heard of from Me, namely the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower them for this great mission. For John baptized with water but you'll be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Actually it was ten days later. “So when they had come together, they were asking Him, ‘Lord, is it at this time of ten days later, not many days when the Spirit comes? Is this going to be the time when You restore the Kingdom to Israel?' He said, ‘It's not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed in His own authority.'” You don't need to know the timetable. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria even to the remotest part of the earth.”

Now, folks, that was a hint that the Lord wasn't coming in ten days because those guys were not about to cover the remotest part of the earth in the next week and a half. So again Luke begins with giving us more information about the period between His resurrection and His ascension so that Acts 1:8 ends at the same place Luke 24:49 ends, stay in Jerusalem until you're clothed with power from on high, namely the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Now with that, we can come to the text and look at the marvelous miracle of the ascension. “And when He had led them out as far as Bethany,” they were in Jerusalem, right? We saw in Acts that they were in Jerusalem and He told them to stay there. We saw from verse 49 that they were in the city and He told them to stay there. Bethany is a suburb, I guess you could say, of Jerusalem. If you out the eastern gate of Jerusalem and you'll see a Mount of Olives and just go a little to the south and over the edge of the Mount of Olives, you will arrive in Bethany. It is a little village on the back slope of the Mount of Olives. Literally the original text could be translated, “He led them in the vicinity of Bethany.” Acts 1:12 says, “It was at the Mount of Olives.” That is consistent, just to the east of Jerusalem is the Mount of Olives and just on the back slope of that hill is the little village of Bethany.

I have a lot of memories of Bethany, having visited a number of times. What makes it so memorable to me is, of course, visiting Lazarus' tomb there but it was there that an Arab woman tried to sell me her baby one time. And so it sticks in my mind as indicative of some of the desperation of people who would be willing to do anything for money. But that little village to this day is still a very simple and humble little village.

It was a very familiar little village to Jesus. He had stayed there often during His ministry because He had a family there that He loved, two ladies, sisters, very famous Mary and Martha and their brother, Lazarus, whom He had not long before this raised from the dead. And during Passion Week it seems

that He would stay there with that family if He wasn't in the deeps of the Mount of Olives in prayer with His Father. So it was a very familiar place for Him. And because of its proximity to Jerusalem, it was a great place to go to get away from everything because it was the Mount of Olives which is right there near the village of Bethany where the Gardens were, the people inside the city wall very often had gardens outside the wall and, of course, Jesus went into the garden that we call Gethsemane. An olive press, olive trees covered that area, still many exist today there. So it was a restful place, it was a park-like environment. It was a place that He had familiarized Himself with many times in prayer. And then, of course, during Passion Week, it was there that He went with His followers after the Last Supper and it was there that He agonized and sweat, as it were, great drops of blood in anticipation of His sin-bearing. It was there that they came and arrested Him. And it was there that Peter pulled out his sword and there that He healed the servant's ear. And it would be there at the Mount of Olives that He would return, Zechariah 14:4 says He will come back in His Second Coming to the Mount of Olives.

So this little hill on the backside of Jerusalem has a very, very important place in God's plan. And so He leads them out. In fulfillment of Zechariah 14:4, because He's going to leave and an angel's going to come and say, “He's going to come back the same way He left,” so it had to happen near Bethany at the Mount of Olives because that's where He's coming back. So He led them out as far as Bethany. “And then He lifted up His hands,” which would be a common gesture for people to make upon offering blessing. By lifting up your hands, you're pointing to the source of all blessing. Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of life. And He lifted up His hands, pointing toward heaven to symbolize the place from where all blessing descends and He blessed them.

I don't want you to sort-circuit that statement, “He blessed them,” because I think sometimes we might think of that as some kind of a symbolism, some kind of a symbolic gesture. It isn't that at all. It's not some kind of a mystical sign. When He blessed them, it simply means that He pledged to them blessing. Now according to Ephesians 1:3, “We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus,” right? According to Ephesians 2:6 and 7, the promise through grace is that God will demonstrate in Christ through all the ages to come His mercy and His kindness toward us. He will lavish us with the riches of His grace forever and ever and ever and ever. And so I think what happened here, I think the last thing Jesus said was blessing. He had given them the commission, that's responsibility, that's duty. But the final word is the word of blessing. What would He have said? “Everlasting grace is yours, everlasting mercy is yours, everlasting salvation is yours, comfort is yours, peace, everlasting peace is yours. I pledge to you My care, My love. I promise you all the things again that I have promised you all along. I am going to heaven to fulfill all My promises to you.”

You remember on the night of His betrayal in the Last Supper, the Lord said, “Stop letting your heart be troubled,” John 14. “Why are you troubled?” You're not losing Me, and then He launched in John 14 to 17 in all those promises, “I promise you heaven, I promise you the Holy Spirit, I promise you

love, I promise you mercy, I promise you grace, I promise you power, I promise you all your prayers will be answered according to My name and whatever you ask I will do that the Father may be glorified." He just gives them one promise after another that night in the upper room. But they were having a hard time receiving it at that point, processing it because this is pre-cross and it doesn't make sense to them yet. And He may have gone right back to those same things, what else would He promise but everlasting grace, mercy, salvation, comfort, peace, power, joy, care?

And they received it because the questions were all answered now. They've all...all their doubts have vanished, all their fears have dissipated and there's no question left. They know who He is. They know He is alive from the dead. They know He had to die because they now have an accurate Old Testament theology. They understand the Kingdom because for 40 days He spoke to them about the Kingdom, all its essences. They've had their final lessons and they get it and they understand it.

And He just reiterates as He parts everything that is pledged to them and to all who believe by the goodness and grace of God in Christ. It must have been an exhilarating experience. It must have been beyond comprehension to have Him now you know He is God incarnate, now you know why He died and why He rose and that He rose and that He's alive and you understand the fullness of the Old Testament and all the prophecies fulfilled and all your doubts are gone and your faith is solid. And He reiterates all the promises that you had a hard time comprehending and you get it. You can't calculate what joy filled their hearts. They went from the depths of fear and doubt that week of His passion to this most exhilarating moment 40 days later. They understood it all.

Nothing left to say, so while He was blessing them, which tells you that it took time, He didn't pronounce some formula blessing, in the process of reiterating all the blessings that are in Christ, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. Never has so little been said about such a monumental moment. Elijah went to heaven without dying. Enoch, Genesis 5, went to heaven without dying. But apart from those two guys, it doesn't happen.

Jesus had a new glorified body, the likes of which the world had never seen. And He had demonstrated this ability to transport Himself because earlier in the twenty-fourth chapter of Luke, you will remember, won't you, when He was meeting with the two in their house in Emmaus, just as they were eating dinner He vanished? They wouldn't have been able to follow Him in whatever way He vanished because they were inside a house. But here when He parts from them and is carried up into heaven, they actually watch.

This is the record of Acts again, Luke, Acts 1:9, Luke writes this, "After He had said these things," and that would indicate to me after He had given them blessing, and the final note of His blessing is verse 8, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the remotest part of the earth," that would have been the last part of His blessing. I'm going to empower you for this.

“After He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, all the way up into the clouds until a cloud received Him out of their sight.” They watched Him go in a physical, literal form. They had walked with Him, talked with Him, eaten with Him on the night of His resurrection and later had meals with Him during the 40 days such as the breakfast in Galilee recorded by John. And then this is amazing, verse 10, Acts 1, “As they were gazing intently into the sky, while He was going,” which indicates that they were watching as long as they could see, “two men in white clothing stood beside them,” angels. “They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky?’” That seems like a pretty obvious answer, doesn't it? Where would you be looking if somebody was going up? Is the question as trivial as it might appear? I don't think so. It's really in the structure of the original language, “Why are you looking longingly? Why are you looking as if you're losing someone? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” He went up physically and bodily and that's exactly the way He'll come back. He went up from the Mount of Olives, He'll come back to the Mount of Olives. “And when He comes back, every eye will see Him.”

He took His glorified humanity out of the grave. He lived for 40 days with those who loved Him as a glorified God/Man. He then took His glorified manhood straight into heaven, all the way back to where He had come from in a completely different dimension than time and space. But He went back different than He had left. He had left as pure Spirit, He went back as pure Spirit and pure glorified humanity. No more just Spirit but glorified humanity. And this is proof that heaven is a place which accommodates glorified humans and it will accommodate us. This is a preview of the Rapture when believers are taken up and transformed on the way. This is a preview of the resurrection of the dead, whether it's the resurrection of the dead at the Rapture or the resurrection of the dead at a later time in the eschatological plan, or the resurrection of the Old Testament saints written of in Daniel “We will receive a body like unto His glorious body,” Philippians 3 says.

And so He went. The work was done, it was complete. And more importantly He had secured the complete faith and understanding of His followers. That was critical because theirs was the responsibility to proclaim the message.

If you were on the heavenly side, what would have happened when He arrived there? Well, Scripture says He went to the right hand of God. That's a way to describe the place of association with God, the highest most exalted place that God could give. He sat down at the right hand of God, Hebrews says. He sat down because His work was over. Hebrews even compares Him to Old Testament priests who never sit down because their work is never over. But He having made purification for sins once for all, sat down. Scripture also says that when He took His place, He was given a name which is above every name, and the name is Lord and at that name every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God. He was declared to be the name above every name. He is far above all rule, all power, all authority, all dominion, Ephesians 1 says. Colossians 3 says He

ascended into heaven and took His place at God's right hand. So if you were on the heavenly side, it would have been a coronation.

Now just a footnote. Before He left, according to Matthew's account of the Great Commission, Jesus had said this, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the consummation of the present age.”

How could He say that? If He's leaving how could He say, “Lo, I am with you always?” Answer: because He sent the Holy Spirit who is allos Comforter. Two words in the Greek for “other,” heteros, other of a different kind, like heterodox, but other of the same kind is what Jesus said. He is another Comforter as of the same kind as Me, same essence. That is why the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ. And He said that back in John, you remember, 14, 15 and 16 He said, “I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you.” And He came in the form, and the presence of the Holy Spirit who is pure Spirit and takes up residence in us...ten days later.

So, we come then to the response. “And they..” we started out with “and He...while He...He...He,” now “and they.” How would you react? There could be no other way to react than the way they reacted. Why? Because they now understood everything. School was out permanently. They had their degrees. They were done. They understood the Old Testament. They understood every messianic reference in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Holy Writings. They understood who He was. They understood what He had done. They understood the necessity of His suffering and death as well as His triumph and exaltation. They knew that the salvation that He had come to provide had been accomplished and that forgiveness of sins could be preached to the ends of the earth. They knew that everything that the Bible prophesied about the Messiah, about His impact, about the world's access to this salvation grace was now possible. They also knew that He had risen from the dead and that guaranteed them their own resurrection and they knew what a glorified body looked like and they had experienced that, and so they had some kind of a knowledge of what their own experience would be in glory.

Wow! So they did what anybody who loves Him does, they exploded in worship, fully informed worship, fully informed praise. “And they, after worshiping Him...” I suppose that began as He was going up. They worshiped Him.

What can we understand about that? It was the purest kind of worship of which human beings are capable, fully informed, first-hand experience. They knew the risen Christ just as they had known the incarnate God in the years of His ministry with them. They understood the Scripture and how it pointed to Him and how everything was fulfilled in Him, and they knew the future Kingdom was to come. And they knew He would be back and they exploded in worship then and there.

Isn't this wonderful? All those years He had struggled to get them to understand anything, now they get it all. All the doubts are gone, all the fears are gone, all the questions have been answered. And

they know He's the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior, the Redeemer and they're ready now to preach the gospel if it cost them their lives, that's fine.

By the way, the word “worship” here, Luke holds that word back until he gets here. He's never used it in his whole gospel. It's almost as if you've got to hold this word out for this moment because this is worship without parallel to express the final crescendo of pure confident adoration unmixed with any doubts. This is remarkable because these are Jews who lived under one dominating command their whole life...worship only God...the first commandment. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Don't have any other gods. This then is the affirmation that Jesus is God from Jews.

Now that to this day is the one thing that offends the Jewish people, to tell them that Jesus is God. This violates their monotheism. But they now know, this is pure worship of the pure true God. And then this, after worshiping Him, they return to Jerusalem with great joy.

Well I understand the joy...dominating joy. I just would love to have heard the conversations on the way back to Jerusalem and for the subsequent days, ten days until the Spirit came, as they rehearsed and rehearsed and rehearsed what they now knew, what they now understood.

Why did they go back to Jerusalem? Because in verse 49, when He had given them the commission some time during the 40 days and maybe reiterated it that day again, we can't necessarily know where Luke's timing is here. He said, at the end of verse 49, “Stay in the city until you're clothed with power from on high.” And they did exactly what He told them to do. And this again, folks, I just submit to you is a perfect illustration of how pure their worship is because pure worship always results in pure obedience. It wasn't just praise, it was instant obedience. And it wasn't reluctant obedience, it was obedience with great joy. They returned to Jerusalem with great joy, there's no more sorrow like in the upper room.

They worship and they obey and pure worship is undiminished. And that's exactly what verse 53 says, they were continually in the temple praising God. You couldn't stop them...couldn't stop them. If the little hymn in 1 Timothy had been written, they probably would have sung it. It was written at some time in the future. Paul gives it to us by common confession, great is the mystery of godliness, speaking of Christ, He who was revealed in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, and taken up in glory. And if that hymn had been written, they would have sung it.

So, they are a force to be reckoned with, folks. They get it. They understand. They are eyewitnesses. They are ready to preach. They are ready to pick up their quills, those of them who will do this, and write. They are ready to come alongside others who associate with them as they write under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the books of the New Testament. They are ready to go to the ends of the

world. They are ready to die and most of them will, for the sheer joy of what they now know to be true. And their praise cannot be contained, and they are continually in the temple praising God. This book began with Simeon worshiping in the temple. And it ends with them worshiping in the temple, praising in the temple.

Finally, we've seen the event and the response, what's the significance? I suppose you could approach it negatively, no more stupid questions for Jesus. That would be a certain amount of relief. No more having to deal with the foibles of fallen creatures on their own turf. No more hateful Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees. No more having to walk dirty robes with dirty people. No more agonizing rejection. No more indifference. No more hate. No more sleepless nights. That would be a very superficial look at the significance of the ascension.

But a much more significant way to look at it is to see what it signals by way of His accomplishment. So let me just give you some things you could think about quickly. It marked the completion of His salvation work...it marked the completion of His salvation work. After the cross and the resurrection, there was nothing more to do to provide any aspect of salvation. That was summed up in the words on the cross, “It is finished.” I glorified You on earth, He said to the Father in John 17. How? Having finished the work You gave Me to do. The work of redemption is done.

Secondly, it is the end of His limitation. He says in John 17:5, “Take Me back to the glory I had with You before the world began.” He set aside the independent use of His divine authority and power to become a slave to the Father and that was over. He came back into His preincarnate glory. He came back, in one sense, more than when He left. He left as Spirit. He came back as theos/anthropos, the God/Man whom He remains forever. And even when you go to heaven to worship Him, according to Revelation 5, you're going to see a lamb who has been wounded.

Thirdly, the ascension marked His exaltation and His coronation. It was then that God gave Him the name above every name, the name Lord and called on all to bow.

Fourthly, it signaled His sending of the Holy Spirit. John 16:7, “If I don't go, I can't send the Holy Spirit. It's better for you...He said...that I can send the Helper, the Holy Spirit who will be with you all the time. He has been with you, He shall be in you.”

Number five, His ascension marked the start of His preparation for our heavenly home. In John 14 when they were all moaning and sorrowing over His leaving, He saw it so very differently. “Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself that where I am, there you may be also.” He is there preparing our heavenly home.

Number six, the ascension marked the passing of the work of evangelism to His followers. That's why the book of Acts begins with Luke saying, “The former treatise,” namely the gospel of Luke, “I wrote, “O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began.” Yes there is the finished work of Christ, that's the redemptive work, the work of evangelism He only began and He passed the baton to His followers.

Number seven, the ascension signaled our Lord's headship over the church. He who is named Lord, He, according to Ephesians 1, who is far above all rule, power, dominion and authority is given as head over the church...which is His body in which all the fullness dwells. He's exalted then to be Lord and ruler of His church which embodies His person. That all is launched at the ascension.

Number eight, it marked His triumph over Satan. First John 3:8 says, “He came to destroy the works of the devil.” And in His triumph and coronation the Father was affirming that He had done that destruction in full. The serpent's head was crushed and Christ is supreme. Hebrews 2 puts it this way, “He took away from Satan the power of death by which He held men in bondage all their lives.”

Number nine, it signaled our Lord's giving the work of ministry to gifted men. He was the gifted man with His disciples. He never seemed to pass the teacher's mantle to any of them. But according to Ephesians 4:8, when He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives and gave gifts to men. Because of His work, when He ascended into heaven, He had provided a salvation that would capture souls who would be given back as gifts to men...some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastor/teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry. So in His earthly provision of salvation, He secured the salvation of all future leaders of the church who would be given to the church for its own edification to make it strong for the work of evangelism.

And then, as we indicated, number ten, the ascension marked the start of His High Priestly work. He now ever lives to intercede for us. He is our advocate before the Father no matter what accusations are brought against us by Satan and his emissaries. Who's going to lay any successful charge against God's elect? No Christ who justified us. He has been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. So He's a sympathetic and merciful High Priest, the writer of Hebrews says, who can come to us and nurture us in all our struggles.

And finally, the ascension guarantees and secures His Second Coming. “He has been taken from you, but He will come in like manner as you've seen Him go,”Acts 1:11. What an amazing event. Talk about something worth celebrating. If we can go all the way from the birth of Christ to the ascension of Christ, from His arrival to His departure, we'll get a picture of the whole thing.

He is exalted by His ascension, crowned as Lord. He sends the Holy Spirit. He begins to prepare our eternal home. He takes the headship of the church. He defeats Satan. He passes evangelism and ministry to His followers. He begins the blessed work of intercession on behalf of His people and

stands ready to return in God's perfect time.

Yes, in the words of Paul to the Corinthians, “He who is rich became poor, divesting Himself of all heaven's riches that we through His poverty might be made rich.” So as we come to Christmas this year, maybe we could go on to the end of the story, get pass the beginning and reflect on everything that He accomplished.

Father, we thank You for Your truth. The Word never disappoints us, it always overwhelms us. It is so consistent, so unassailable, so clearly divine in all that it affirms. We understand those on the road to Emmaus who said, “Did not our hearts burn within us while He spoke with us and explained the Scriptures to us?” We thank You for Your truth. Thank You for the work of Christ. We want to be like those followers who worship, who obey with great joy and who offer continual unceasing praise for this gift of gifts, our Savior. For all the wonders of this experience this morning and for the joy of our time together, we offer You thanks in His name. Amen.

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