

Intro: SC III: Greatness of God

We continue our “Supernatural Church” series with the first supernatural event in the Book of Acts, the “Ascension” of Jesus. Come with me now to Acts 1:9-11

9 After [JESUS] said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 “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.”

Jesus promised in John 12:32 that when he is “Lifted up from the earth” he would “draw all people” unto himself. He then shocked his followers when he asked, “What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before” (John 6:62) and promised,

You will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.

He meant here that not only that he must be lifted-up on a cross but also lifted-up by God into heaven. Thus, Jesus was lifted-up, not once but twice: on the cross and in the clouds. It is this second “lifting up” that we will focus on today as we talk about the “Ascension Essentials.”

A.E. I: What Comes Down Must Go Up

We’ve all heard the old “Blood, Sweat, and Tears” song, “What goes up must come down.” Our first Ascension Essential is just the opposite, “What comes down must go up.” “He came from heaven to earth...from the grave to the sky” says a contemporary praise song. In Ephesians 4:9, Paul highlights the downward and subsequent upward trajectory of Jesus: “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended to the lower regions of the earth?” The Apostle’s Creed also speaks to Jesus’ Ascension, “He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.” These lines and lyrics trace the most excellent journey of our Lord. It is important that we know where Jesus is, and what he is doing. Jesus initially came low profile incognito, i.e., born to a humble maiden and peasant carpenter in a tiny, obscure village called Bethlehem. However, He went home in a blaze of glory. His is the original riches-to-rags-to-riches story. Two other times in history we have seen similar ascension phenomena. Genesis 5:24 tells us “Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.” 2 Kings 2:11 speaks of Elijah’s “whirlwind” ascension, “Suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them,

and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.” God took these righteous men, not allowing them to experience death, after their work on earth was concluded. However, Jesus ascended after he descended after experiencing death for us. When Jesus was on earth, he repeatedly said that he must return to his Father, that he was not from the earth and his kingdom was not of this world. The Ascension simply confirms that Jesus went home.

4 Things He is Doing

If the Ascension concludes Jesus earthly ministry, then it only begins his heavenly one. What is Jesus doing now? Four things:

(1) Running the affairs of the universe. Psalm 115:3 tells us, “Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases.” Isn’t assuring to know that Jesus, not Washington, Beijing, or Moscow, is orchestrating the affairs of our world from his Father’s throne?

(2) Praying for us. Hebrews 7:25 tells us,

**He is able for all time to save those who approach God through him,
since he always lives to make intercession for them.**

(3) Continuing his earthly ministry. The Ascension concluded Jesus’ physical time on earth and began his earthly one through his church.

(4) Calendaring. Jesus is setting the date of his return with his Father.

A.E. II: What comes Down stays Down

The 2nd Ascension Essential is, “What comes down, stays down.” Jesus ascended into the heavens to send the Holy Spirit to guide and empower his church. Unlike Jesus, the Holy Spirit descends to the earth and stays on the earth. This second essential is why Jesus said in John 16:7

**It is better that I go away, for if I do not go away,
the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.**

The disciples who watched Jesus being taken up in the cloud probably didn’t feel it was better. They were confused. When Jesus gave them the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20, he promised to be with them until the end of history. But now he is leaving? Wouldn’t it be better for them, and us, if Jesus just stayed on earth? If so, we could fly

over to Jerusalem see him, snag some good advice, and come back all pumped up. Wouldn't our faith be stronger, and our world be better, if he was still living in the Middle East? No! "Better" means better. If Jesus were still in Jerusalem, he'd be a localized deity and still limited to space-time physics. "Better" means better because he will give us "Another Comforter," so that each of us can experience his empowering presence, simultaneously, throughout the world, at the same time. Jesus is keeping his promise to be with all of us until the end through the Holy Spirit. So, when we sing, the old Easter Classic, "I serve a risen Savior he's in the world today" we mean he is in the world today through the Holy Spirit. Jesus' Ascension begins his heavenly ministry and begins the earthly ministry of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Jesus' Ascension, along with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, inaugurates the last days. Yes, the end-time clock began its countdown over 2000 years ago (and lately seems to be ticking faster).

A.E. III: What comes Down, Goes Back Up & Comes Back Down

Our 3rd Ascension Essential is "What comes down, goes back up, and comes back down again." As the disciples are watching Jesus ascend, Luke tells us,

Suddenly two men in white robes stood by them and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

Our Great Thanksgiving liturgy reinforces this 3rd Ascension Essential, "Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again." This is the promise of the 2nd Coming, i.e. The "Blessed Hope of the Church." Listen to how Paul describes it in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

16 For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.

That Jesus will return at the end of history means that history is not circular chaotic, or repeating, but linear, marching, relentlessly straight forward towards one climatic event.

Conclusion:

With our Ascension Essentials in mind, let us be a glad-hearted church always eager to do what Jesus instructed in places like Matthew 24. Namely, the "3Ws": "Work, Watch,

& Wait.” We “work” the Great Commission as we “watch” for the signs of his return, and “wait” in prayer and with hopeful expectation. And then we will see him come again, in precisely the same way he exited, in a cloud of glory.