



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 26:57-66

"The Life of Christ: The Ascension of Christ"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] As we continue our study in, "The Life of Christ", our subject today is, "The Ascension of Christ" and we're turning to two passages; one in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 26, verse 57 through verse 66 and then Acts 1, verse 6 through verse 11. And Matthew writes in Matthew chapter 26, verse 57,

"And those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. But Peter also following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome. Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, in order that they might put Him to death and they did not find it, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, and said, 'This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.' And the high priest stood up and said to Him, 'Do you make no answer? What is it that these men are testifying against you?' But Jesus kept silent and the high priest said to Him, 'I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God.' Jesus said to him, 'You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and

COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.' Then the high priest tore his clothes saying, 'He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; and what do you think?' They answered and said, 'He is deserving of death!' (The second passage is Acts chapter 1, verse 6 through verse 11, in which Luke records the ascension.) And so, when they had come together, they were asking him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time you're restoring the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.' And after he had said these things, he was lifted up while they were looking on; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while he was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside him. And they also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? 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.'"

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

[Prayer] ...approval that has been placed upon it and we rejoice in the fact that through him we have access unto God in the Spirit. We thank Thee, Lord, for these who are gathered here today to listen to Thy word, for the needs that exist. We thank Thee for the children. We pray, O God, that the ministry of the word may strengthen them and build them up, enlarge their vision. Give them, Lord, right perspectives in life. We pray for the young people, for anticipating maturity soon. We pray, O God, that Thou wilt stabilize them through the ministry of the word. And for the adults who are here, Lord, we pray that the ministry of the word may meet our needs, the problems that we have. And may, O God, through the word we find that which ministers to us in the sphere of

life in which we are at this moment. We know that regardless of our age, regardless of our environment, we each...

[Message] We have been studying, "Highlights of the Greatest Life" centering our attention primarily in the Gospel of Matthew. The subject for today is, "The Ascension of Christ." This subject is a luscious morsel upon which the sheep of God are not often found feeding: the ascension of Christ. If the first step in the exaltation of Christ is his burial in a new tomb, and if the second step in his exaltation is his resurrection, the third is as expressed in the Apostles' Creed, "He ascended into heaven."

It's perhaps surprising that Matthew and John have no account of the ascension. It is confined to Luke and Acts and the disputed last few verses of the Gospel of Mark. But Matthew and John, while they do not give us an account of the ascension, presuppose that ascension. In the Scripture reading, which I read this morning, you'll remember the 64th verse of the Gospel of Matthew in which the Lord Jesus says, "Nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING ON THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." That text presupposes the ascension of Jesus Christ. And so, while Matthew does not give us an account of it, still there is that presupposition of its having taken place.

For the account, we must go to one of the Lukan passages and since the passage in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is the fullest, I want to consider this morning in our study of the ascension, the verses that are found in Acts chapter 1, verses 6 through 11. When we turn the Book of Acts, there are many things that suggest themselves to us immediately. I look at my text, which is before me and I notice that the title of this book is, "The Acts of the Apostles."

And one of the things I learned when I opened up my Greek New Testament was that this title may not be true to the Greek text. The Greek text could be rendered, because it is a title, "The Acts of the Apostles", but I'm not so very sure that that was ever

the intention of those who gave it a title in the middle of the 2nd Century. For you know, when you read through the Book of Acts, I think, if I remember correctly, that only four of the apostles are mentioned in the Book of Acts, and only one or two of the twelve really are prominent: James, John, Peter are there. Peter is the prominent one. John is fairly prominent and then the latter part of the book is concerned with a newcomer apostle, the Apostle Paul.

This title is not an inspired part of the Book of Acts. The titles to the books were given in the middle of the 2nd Century and so, if I should say to you that this title is not a very good title, you'll understand that I'm not passing judgment on the apostles, but I'm passing judgment on someone in the 2nd Century who gave it this title.

As a matter of fact, when you read through the Book of Acts, almost everyone is convinced that this book should be given a different title, because its subject is quite different. Arthur T. Pierson, one of the great Bible students of a couple of generations ago, entitled it "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." And that, I think, is closer to what we find in the book, but it still is not the title that I would give to it.

And I'm not, by the way, claiming inspiration for my title when I give it to you, it's too long; but nevertheless, I think this book should be entitled, "The Acts of Jesus Christ, Which Were Performed through the Apostles in the Power of the Holy Spirit." But you wouldn't want to say, "Now will you open your Bibles to the 16th chapter of "The Acts of the Lord Jesus Christ Which Were Performed through the Apostles in the Power of the Holy Spirit." So I have a little bit of sympathy with the simple title, "The Acts of the Apostles." But nevertheless, the point of the Book of Acts, is not to record the Acts of the Apostles; the point of the Book of Acts is to record the acts of the risen and ascended Jesus Christ.

Will you look at the 1st verse of this book, "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus BEGAN both to do and to teach." As if to suggest that, "Now, Theophilus, I want to give you the things that Jesus continued to do and to teach" and I

think that is true to the Book of Acts. And then will you also notice the last verse of the last chapter, because here we have a kind of an abrupt ending to this book that suggests the fact that Jesus Christ is still alive and still working, "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came to him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence." (Unhinderedly, the Greek text puts it; unhinderdly) In other words, Jesus Christ is still working and even though the apostle may be a prisoner of the Roman Empire, the truth of God is not bound.

In John Masefield's play *The Trial of Jesus*, Longinus, the Roman Centurion who stood at the foot of the cross is heard speaking with Claudia Procula, the wife of Pilate, just after the crucifixion. She says to him, "Do you think that he's dead?" and Longinus says, "No lady, I don't."; "Then where is he?"; "Let loose in the world, lady, where neither Roman nor Jew can stop his truth." That's a pretty good picture of what we have in the Book of Acts. Jesus Christ let loose in the world by the resurrection and let loose in such a way that neither Roman nor Jew can stop his truth.

If I may just take another moment or so to stress this, if we now turn to the Books of Acts and think of some of the texts of this book this, I think, will come out. In the very first chapter, the apostles are together and they have a problem. Jesus had said that twelve apostles would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, but there are only eleven apostles. How is it possible for us to fulfill the word of our Lord Jesus Christ? And so, they choose a twelfth in order that there may be twelve apostles sitting on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The lot, you'll remember, ultimately fell upon Matthias who took his place with the apostles.

But when Peter prayed, he said, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men show whether or these two Thou hast chosen." In other words, in the choice of Matthias, there is a recognition of the fact that Jesus Christ is still alive and still working. He will make that choice. Then when Peter preaches on the Day of Pentecost and speaks about

the Holy Spirit in the 2nd chapter, he says, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." Jesus Christ is still alive and he is still working.

At the end of that chapter we read, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." In other words, Luke regards the Lord as risen, ascended and living and working in forming the local church after the coming of the Holy Spirit. In the 3rd chapter of the Book of Acts, a lame man is healed and then you'll remember when the apostles explained this they say, "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at us, as if we by our own power or holiness had made this man walk? I want you to know that his name through faith and his name hath made this man strong. Jesus Christ is alive. He is the risen and ascended Lord and he is the one who is working."

You remember this same risen one appeared to the Apostle Paul on the Damascus Road and Paul had that great conversation with him when the Lord Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"; "Who art Thou, Lord?" And, of course, it was the Jesus whom they had persecuted who was still alive, who was, as a matter of fact, exalted to the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being subject unto him.

And then later when Peter healed Aeneas, he spoke to Aeneas and he did not say to Aeneas, "Now, Aeneas, you must remember that I am the pope and I'm going to speak *ex cathedra* now and I'm going to forgive sins" as if he had been given the right to forgive sins. But Peter, the apostle and true to the word of God said, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals thee." In other words, the whole point of the Book of Acts is that Jesus Christ is alive and working and it is not then the Acts of the Apostles, but the acts of our Lord Jesus Christ, which were done through the apostles in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And you know, if you read the Bible and particularly this book, and this does not come home to your heart that the whole point of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ has not only died but is now alive and risen and ascended and sitting at the right hand of the throne of God, then you've missed the whole point of the New Testament.

If you think, for example, that all the New Testament truth is that we should believe the Apostles' Creed as a kind of intellectual assent to that truth and that that is New Testament Christianity, then you have a long way to go to understand what is in this dynamic book, which we have opened up this morning.

May I tell you a story, which I have told the congregation before? But it's a good story because it's about a professor and since you know I'm a professor also, I like this story. This professor was a relatively young man. He was a very learned man. He had all of the degrees necessary to carry on his work and, furthermore, he liked to do research and he had as his topic, the subject love and he wrote a very great poem on love.

The only thing that mattered with it was that the professor had never been in love, but he wrote his very learned treatise on love and when he got his manuscript together, he looked for a typist. And hearing about a typist, he took his manuscript to the typist and as he walked into the room where the typist was, it turned out to be a very lovely looking young girl and when the professor's eyes met the girl's eyes, something happened that wasn't in his book. [Laughter] The professor was happier after five minutes of contact with genuine love than he had been after thirty years of studying the concept of love.

And I think this is the point of the New Testament, you see. The point of the New Testament is that if we have come into contact with Jesus Christ then after five minutes of real contact with him, we know more about him than we do after thirty years of the study of the doctrines of the word of God. So the Book of Acts is the book of the acts of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the book of the acts of the risen and ascended Christ.

Now Luke, in his desire to make the connection between the things that Jesus did when he was in the flesh and the things that he is doing now, has given us a brief introduction in the first five verses. But now after he has stated that Jesus in his post resurrection ministry of forty days had taught them the things concerning the kingdom of God, he says that the disciples asked him at this point a question. And this introduces us

to the new commission which the church has. They ask him and they say to him, "Lord, will Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Now mind you this was a perfectly natural question. As a matter of fact, the Old Testament had said that Jesus the Messiah would rule and reign over the earth. His kingdom would stretch from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth and so it would be only natural for Israelites to be interested in the redemption of Jerusalem. So they asked a very natural question. It is even more appropriate in the light of the ministry of the Lord Jesus, which he had in the flesh, for he went about saying, "Repent for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand." And since he had just spent forty days talking to them about the kingdom of God, this question is a very natural question, "Wilt Thou, at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel?" You are about to ascend or to leave us as you have said, "Wilt Thou at this moment restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Interpreters, because they have had some ideas regarding an earthly kingdom, not scriptural, suggesting that there is no such earthly kingdom, have said that this was a kind of carnal question and, hence, it should never have been asked by the apostles. I say that is very, very wrong because Jesus in his answer does not say to them, "Now wait a minute. There's not going to be any kingdom given to Israel." He doesn't say that at all. His answer has to do with the time. He does not question at all that there will be kingdom to Israel, but the point is, it is not at this moment. For we read in the 7th verse, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. You have a wrong emphasis at the present time. The matter of the time of the restoration of the kingdom is left to the Father, but in the meantime I have a task for you and it comprehends more than just waiting for the kingdom."

And so, we turn to the 8th verse, because this gives us the task this new commission of the church in this age, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." In other words, you

have asked a question the time of which you cannot know. The question may be all right, but in the meantime, I want you to understand that while you cannot know the time, I still have something for you to do and it doesn't mean simply that you will just sit and wait. In the meantime, you are going to be witnesses unto me.

Now it is necessary, of course, if we are to be witnesses unto him that we receive power. This, I think, is very, very important. I think it's illustrated today and it's illustrated here in Dallas when a number of evangelicals in this city are engaged in witnessing at the Billy Graham film, *The Restless Ones*. Now last night in one of the showings of the film at a certain place, one of the men stood up to give the invitation following and he invited those to come forward for reformation, not regeneration, but for reformation. It's only natural, of course, that some came forward for reformation. In other words, he didn't really understand the gospel himself, gave a wrong invitation.

You see, it is not only necessary that we be engaged in church work to be witnessing for the Lord Jesus, but we must know the Lord who is at the right hand of the Father. We must know him as the one who died for us, and furthermore, not only know him, but have had some personal relationship to him, some experiences with him. And, most of all, if we are going to witness for him, we need the power of the Holy Spirit. It is obvious that we cannot do the work of God if we do not have the power of God. And so, the Lord says, very properly, "And ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto me." In other words, there is to be a new program until the time of the restoration of the kingdom and it is a time of witnessing.

I've always loved the definition of witnessing that was given by a little child in one of Kate Oliver's classes. Ms. Oliver, as many of you know, has been a teacher of children in Dallas for a couple of decades. Now I don't want to say how long because it might give you some clues about her age and I'm sure that Kate would be very angry with me for doing it. But she's a very experienced teacher, one of the best in the city. And I

remember her once saying that a little child answered a question that she put to him in a very telling way once. She said, "Children, what is a witness?" and one of the little children spoke up and said, "Somebody that's seen something and can swear to it that it's so."

Now that's a pretty good testimony to a testimony, a pretty good description of what a witness is, "Somebody who has seen something and can swear to it that it's so", that's what the apostles were. And you'll notice, too, that Jesus says, "I want you to be witnesses unto me" not to the church, not to the doctrines of the church, but witnesses unto me.

Now, of course, if they are witnesses unto him, they will be witnesses unto him in the light of the doctrines of the word of God. And, of course, ultimately their testimony shall relate them to the local church, which is, according to Paul, the pillar and ground of the truth. So this witness will ultimately be related to doctrine and church, but it is primarily a personal witness to him.

Karl Barth has said somewhere in his outline of theology that, "The present age is the time of the word" and how true that is. It is the time of seed sowing. And then he also went on to say something very vivid, and I must stop for just a moment and say, I do not subscribe to everything that Professor Barth says, but he does say many good things. He has said that, "This is a time of the word. It is a time of seed sowing. It's a time of running and racing." And that, I believe, is a good description of just what this age is. It's a time when Christians who have come into contact with Jesus Christ should be running and racing to make that information known to others, "Be witnesses unto me."

Now at this point, in the 9th verse, Luke introduces us to the new consolation, which brings us to the heart of the subject that we have this morning, "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." If you had read the Bible and you had read about Elijah or you had read about Elisha, how would you have supposed that Jesus would go into heaven? Well,

perhaps, you would have thought that surely if chariots of fire came to take Elijah to heaven, they would have come for the Lord Jesus. But you will notice that there is no chariot, there is no whirlwind, but there is a kind of remarkable, calm simplicity in this voluntary ascending of our Lord Jesus.

Now the text says that he was taken up and the text says that we went up. I would gather from this that there was a cooperation between the Son and the Father and just as the cross was voluntary, and yet at the same time the work of the Father, so the ascension was the work of the Father and also the work of the Son. There is cooperation between the two members of the Trinity as this event takes place. But what does the ascension signify?

I'm going to suggest to you six things that it signifies and then conclude in a moment with the seventh, but separate the seventh from the sixth. In the first place, the ascension of Jesus Christ confirms the destination of the risen Christ. He had said in the Upper Room Discourse, remember, that he was going to the Father. Now this ascension is a kind of confirmation of the words of our Lord Jesus. He had come forth from the Father and he had come to us. Then he said, "I am going to leave you and go again to the Father." And there is evidence here that he has now gone back to the Father and the apostles have seen him with their own eyes going upward toward heaven.

In the 32nd through the 36th verses of the 2nd chapter, we have that confirmed, but particularly verse 32, in which Peter writes,

"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand (or perhaps to the right hand) of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into heaven."

In other words, Jesus has ascended up to heaven to the right hand of the Father and there he is. His promise has been fulfilled.

Secondly, the ascension affirms the presence of a man in heaven. Now this is extremely remarkable. It is the first occurrence of any such thing of the history of humanity. A man is in the presence of God; a man in the presence of God with the authority that exists because he sits at the right hand of the throne of God. Some people have the strange idea that the incarnation is the entire work of God.

Some years ago, listening to the BBC, you would have heard Professor Barth answer a question given him by the BBC commentator. The question was this, "Professor Barth, if you only had one message to give to the world today, what message would you give?" He said, "I would give the message of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ."

Now, of course, we do not have any argument with the fact that that is an extremely important message and if Professor Barth meant all of the implications of that message then, of course, I would subscribe to what he said. But if he did not mean all of the implications of it, if he only meant the incarnation, then I would have to say that is not enough. I would have to say that it does not really agree with the apostles. Paul said, "I determine not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." I think the cross is extremely important.

Now I've already told you that I thought the resurrection was extremely important, too, because it is the evidence that the Father has accepted the finished work of the Son. But let me go on to say that the message of our Lord Jesus Christ is incomplete if we do not have the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the throne of God. Because, you see, actually this is the thing for which the whole program of God has been moving. It has been moving with this in mind that a man should come to the right hand of the throne of God.

Now this man is the representative man. He is at the right hand of God for you, who have believed, for me. In other words, there is a man in the glory and the point of

this, as Bible teachers have tried to point out through the years, is that God's purposes with regard to men are now kind of centered in this one person who is at the right hand of the throne of God. And when men put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, they come to be in him and they, too, are assured of the destiny which the Son of man has for himself.

Why if Jesus Christ only came to die, if he only took humanity to the cross in order to die there, then it might just have well been that he shed his humanity, after death has taken place, and ascend to heaven apart from his humanity. But, you see his humanity is something that he is taken to himself forever. Have you ever thought about that, what that meant the second person of the Trinity to take to himself human nature not just for a time, but for eternity, talk about a decision, talk about a problem?

Christians often talk about, "Boy I'm just overwhelmed with decisions that I have to make." What about that decision, a decision that is final for the Son of God? Forever after, Jesus is a man, the God-man. That's why Paul says, "There is one God and one mediator between men, the man Christ Jesus." There is a man by the side of God and he is by the side of God forever. Humanity has been brought into the presence of God. God was not satisfied until he brought humanity into complete union with himself through the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

It's no wonder then that I read in the Bible that I've been made a partaker of divine nature. Just take a look at me, I have divine nature. By the new birth, I have been born again and I have it. It is mine. You don't see it, I grant, in fact you see just the opposite. You see that which seems to say, "You're telling a lie, Dr. Johnson" and as the days go by, it becomes a bigger lie, I'm sure. But the point is, it's still true and the evidence of it is that the Son of God is at the right hand of the throne of God.

Thirdly, the ascension determines our position and our power in Christ. I would like to turn for a moment to Ephesians chapter 1. And so, if you have your Bibles, turn with me to the 1st chapter of this epistle of Paul. Now in this epistle, the apostle sets

forth for us, about as well as he does anywhere, the position of the believer because of his relationship to Jesus Christ. And in the 1st chapter, in the 19th verse he says: Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 19, page 1250 in the Approved Edition of the King James Version: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, verse 19,

"And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And you."

Now, you know, it's a remarkable thing and you should just eliminate those words "hath he quickened" (you can tell from italics that they don't belong in the text), what Paul is saying is that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead by the Father. He has been set at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion; all things have been put under his feet, and you. In other words, the thing that he has done for Christ, he has done for you. He has raised you. He has set you at the right hand of God, as well.

Now lest you think that I'm trying to make something out of the text that is not here, I wish I had time now to say now let's have Greek exegesis now of the text for the next forty-five minutes so I can prove my point, but I can't do that. I just want you to see that the context supports it. Notice the 5th verse of the 2nd chapter, "Even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ. By grace are you saved and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." In other words, we've been born again. We've been raised from the dead as he was. We have ascended with him. We have been made to sit at God's right hand in heavenly places.

Now you are sitting in Believers Chapel in a very poorly decorated auditorium of a private school for children. That's your sitting place at the moment, in the flesh, but if you have believed in Jesus Christ, you are seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

The other day, I was looking in one of our newspapers and there was a cartoon. Some men were building a skyscraper and the only thing you saw in the cartoon, were the girders had reached up to about the fiftieth story of the building. Nothing was there but just the steel girders and several workmen were sitting down for lunch. And one of the men had his feet hanging over one of these girders and he had opened his lunch box and had a sandwich in his hand. And the other fellow was sitting right by him and he turned to the one next to him and said with a kind of smile on his face, "We're in the executive dining room." [Laughter]

Now that was great imagination, I must say. But that, in his mind was his position, but in actuality, he was sitting on a girder up in the air. Quite a bit different from the executive dining room which ultimately might be at that place, but believers have been raised together with Christ. They have been made to sit together with him in heavenly places. Isn't that a wonderful thing? Isn't it wonderful to know that truth? And this by reason of the ascension of Jesus Christ.

I've often thought when I get into an airplane that here I have an illustration of what it means to be in Christ in a kind of physical way. I sit in this jet and then we start down the runway and when we get a few yards down the runway, the pilot, of course, begins to take that plane off the ground. And soon, we are really soaring high and it's not long before we are thirty-five thousand feet up in the air. And I look down and see what is below me, where I have been carrying on my business up until that time. But if I can just imagine myself at the same time to go on out into space wherever heaven might be, and there seated at the right hand of God, I have a kind of physical illustration of what it means to be in Christ.

Now that is my position and, of course, I should live accordingly. That is my power, too, because if I am with him, angels, authorities, and powers, are subject to him and they are subject to me when I am in his will. This is a tremendous thing. But, you know, I think that Christians today realize this about as little as any truth in the whole of the word of God.

I read of a Bible teacher who was in Australia and who was visiting a zoo and in this zoo in Australia, there were two tremendous golden eagles and they were in captivity. And as he walked up to the cage and looked at the sign, it said, "Two golden eagles, very rare, their wing spread is fourteen feet. They are here in a spacious cage." And he looked at the cage. He said it was about twenty by thirty feet; a spacious cage for golden eagles who are used to flying in the air above toward the sun.

Lots of Christians are just like those golden eagles. They have been equipped with a wing spread that has designed them for living out from the right hand of the throne of God in the power that comes from our relationship in him, but we're like the bird in the cage. We're not using the potentiality that exists for us in the spiritual sphere. I must hasten on.

This, the ascension, secures the gift of the Holy Spirit. Will you look at Acts chapter 2, and let me read again verses 32 through 36. In Peter's sermon he says, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." In other words, by reason of the ascension of our Lord Jesus to the right hand of the Father, he has received the promise of the Spirit, which Jesus had given. That he, when he went to the Father, would ask the Father for the Spirit and the Spirit has been given as a result of the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had said to the disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away."

They didn't understand the point of that text. They puzzled over why he should leave them, but now they knew. The fact that Jesus went away was the means for the

coming of the Holy Spirit to them; before Jesus had been with them, but only with one of them. When one of them was in one place with our Lord, he was not with the others who were in another place. But now, by reason of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is able to be with every single disciple wherever any disciple may be. Oh how expedient it was that Jesus should go away for now by the Holy Spirit I have the Lord Jesus with me, and you have the Lord Jesus with you, and you have the Lord Jesus with you. Wherever you go, you can count upon the omnipresence of our Lord Jesus Christ. "It is expedient for you that I go away" and the fact that the Holy Spirit has come has been the means of assuring me of that relationship that I have to him also.

The great Norwegian explorer, Nansen, explored the North Pole. When he went to the North Pole, he took with him a carrier pigeon. And after he had been in the Arctic for about two years, he wanted to send word to his wife that he was all right. And so, he took the carrier pigeon out. He scribbled a little note, tied it to that pigeon, and in the frozen wastes of the Arctic, he let that bird go. The bird circled the boat once, circled it again, circled again the third time, and then headed off toward Norway and not long after, the bird fell into the lap of the wife of the explorer with the message. She read the message. She knew that all was all right with her husband.

The fact that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father and has given the Holy Spirit to us is the evidence that everything has been proceeding according to the plan of God. That Jesus Christ is there and by the presence of the Holy Spirit, now the apostles are empowered out of the knowledge of the fact that he is still alive to labor and work with him as he works through them. So this is the means for the securing of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Fifthly, and very hastily, the ascension results not only in the gift of the Holy Spirit, but in the bestowal of spiritual gifts as well. The very fact that I stand before you this morning and teach the word of God is an evidence of the ascension of Jesus Christ for spiritual gifts for service flow out of the ascension of our Lord Jesus. The fact that we

have teachers, the fact that we have evangelists, the fact that we have pastor teachers as spiritual gifts, these gifts and the many other gifts, which are not utterance gifts, all of these are the products of the ascended Christ who has received the Holy Spirit for us and also has, in the power of the Spirit, given spiritual gifts to men.

And sixthly, this is the inauguration of the high priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus. He could never engage in his high priestly ministry until he has reached the right hand of the Father and there sits as THE High Priest. Next Sunday, Lord willing, I want to develop this and so, I just simply point it out that he is there now as our great High Priest.

Finally, in the Book of Acts now, we read of the new expectation, verse 10, "And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel." These two men, who are they? Are they Moses and Elijah or are they angels? That is not really important for us here. I think it's important for us to realize that while the disciples lose one man, two men appear. They know that Jesus is gone, but they also know that they are not forgotten, "Behold two men stood beside them in white apparel." And they said to the apostles, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

In other words, seventhly, the ascension of Jesus Christ illustrates the manner of his Second Advent and let me just point out one or two things, which are probably obvious to you, that coming is to be personal. As he personally left, we can expect him personally to come back to the earth. As he left corporally in bodily form, we can expect him to come back in bodily form, glorified bodily form, but in bodily form. As he left visibly, we can expect him to come back visibly. And we read in the Bible that Israel shall look on him whom they've pierced, all the tribes of the earth shall mourn when they see him. The men shall see Jesus as they saw him leave. And finally, he shall come back to a definite place. He shall come back locally. He left from the Mount of Olives, the Old

Testament says that he shall one day plant his feet again upon the Mount of Olives. And so, then the apostles are left with a promise of the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus.

Have you ever realized how important that is in the Bible? The first promise in the word of God after the fall of men includes the Second Advent of Jesus Christ for when the statement is made, "That the seed of the woman shall crush the serpent's head" that was not fulfilled at the cross of Christ. There the foundation of it was laid, but Paul says in Romans chapter 16, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." That had not completely happened in Paul's day. It shall come when our Lord Jesus comes again and completes the program of God among men. The last promise of the Old Testament is a promise of the Second Advent. The Lord's first message after his ascension is a promise of the Second Advent. The last promise of the Lord and the last promise of the word is also a promise of the Second Advent, "Behold I come quickly, even so come Lord Jesus." How important the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus really is.

Harry Rimmer was a Bible teacher who just went to be with the Lord a few years ago. In one of his books, he tells of an interesting incident that he had with a woman who doubted the Second Advent. She came up to him after a message in which he had referred to it and said to him, "Mr. Rimmer, you seem to understand a whole lot about the Bible and I'm just completely surprised to hear you talk about the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. Why, don't you know that it's not referred to anywhere in the New Testament?" And Mr. Rimmer looked at her and he said, at first, he was so surprised that the only thing he could say was, "Where did you get that fantastic idea? Why, the New Testament is full of promises of his return." And he said the young lady, with a superior smile, said, "Oh, no, only last week my pastor showed us that there is no such promise. He read a verse in the Bible that says, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' and showed us there is none."

Mr. Rimmer said he was utterly astounded, but he managed to gather enough breath to say, "But did you pastor read the whole context?" And she said, "There isn't any

more to it." So instead of replying, he turned to 2 Peter chapter 3 and he read the passage, "In the last days scoffers shall come walking after their own lusts and saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming?'" He said the dear young lady was mad enough to pull his hair. She said, "Don't you dare call my pastor a scoffer!" He said, "Honey, I didn't call your pastor a scoffer, Peter did." [Laughter] and then he added, "I was pretty sure Peter wouldn't mind." [Laughter] The Second Advent of the Lord Jesus is extremely important and the ascension illustrates the manner of his coming.

Well, in the light of the ascension of Jesus Christ then, I think I can understand better our Lord's words, "It is expedient for you that I should go away." The man has vanished from sight, but the Messiah is still with the twelve and with all believers. As a matter of fact, he concludes this Gospel of Matthew by saying, "Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age." I love that expression in the Greek text, too, because it means not only that I'm with you sometime every day, but it really means, I'm with you throughout all the days, all the days throughout. In other words, every moment of every day, I'm with you, all of the day, all kinds of days. Days of sunshine, days of shadow, days of strength, days of weakness, days of conflict, days of victory by the ascension of our Lord Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit, contact has been made and he is with us forevermore.

What a wonderful truth it is to realize that Jesus Christ is at the right hand of the throne of God by means of death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. May God help us to live in the light of our position and in the light of the power that flows from that risen and ascended Christ. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who sits on the right hand of the majesty on high, the presence of the Holy Spirit who has been sent by the Son and by the Father, to take up his residence forever in our hearts, may the love of God the Father, who has originated it all, keep all who have believed in him. And, O Father,

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throughout the days of this week, may we live as those who are seated with him in
heavenly places. May Thy blessing go with us as we part through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.