

Ascension Sunday

Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:1-11

1 In my first book^[a] I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. ³ During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

⁴ Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. ⁵ John baptized with^[b] water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

The Ascension of Jesus

⁶ So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

⁷ He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. ¹⁰ As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

Introduction

We know the rhythm of the church year, Christmas, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Ascension Day, Pentecost Sunday. Easter is the Christian Passover when we celebrate the Passover from death to life that Jesus has made possible for us. Paralleled by the Jewish Passover. Pentecost was also a Jewish festival. Celebrated the ingathering of the first fruits of the harvest, fifty days after the Passover. Pentecost is the Christian celebration of the ingathering of the first fruits of the spiritual harvest.

The time between Easter and Pentecost was a time of waiting. Not a passive inactive waiting but nevertheless a waiting. Forty days after Easter and ten before Pentecost was Ascension Day.

We know that from Pentecost the message of Jesus began to expand and spread throughout the world. What happened during the time between Easter and Pentecost for the witness of those early believers to be so effective? This time of waiting.

- 1. Clear about the Truth.** They were grounded in *experiential truth*. The truth that Jesus had risen from the dead. There was no debate amongst those early believers about whether it happened or not. They had spoken and interacted with the risen Jesus over 40 days. This is what Paul later wrote (1 Cor 15:3f).

"I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. ⁵ He was seen by Peter^(e) and then by the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers^(e) at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him."

Jesus had died and had risen from the dead. He was God. In the time of waiting their conviction about Jesus was bed rocked. If we want to be effective in our ministry as a church, we need to be challenged to grow in our experience of the risen Jesus.

Not just risen but also ascended. Many have related the Ascension of Jesus to his coronation. A well know hymn picks this up: *"Crown him with many crowns the lamb open the throne."* The Letter to the Philippians 2 powerfully portrays this:

*"Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Jesus is back in the throne-room of power. The Oval Office, The Situation room, The Beehive, the command centre. We need to grow in our confidence that we have a high-priest in heaven. Hebrews 4:14:

*"So then, since we have a great **High Priest** who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe."*

*Hebrews 8:1" Here is the main point: We have a **High Priest** who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven.*

2. Clear about their resources

- a. **Power.** In preparing his disciples for the future Jesus speaks about receiving power from the Holy Spirit. *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."* Power is something that kingdoms exercise. But power in God's kingdom is going to be different to human kingdoms. The Holy Spirit defines the nature of that power.

We have the resurrection of Jesus, the ascension of Jesus and pointing beyond that to the giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit. I physically did not see the resurrected Jesus, nor was I present at his Ascension but have experienced the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. This helps me to look to the events, resurrection and ascension, with greater confidence and certainty.

Power is given for a purpose. Acts 1:⁸ *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

To witness to who Jesus is. The witness of our words, the witness of our lives. In us should be seen a love, joy, peace and hope that is infectious.

- a. **Prayer.** Acts 1:14 *“They all met together and were constantly united in prayer,”* Their prayer was united and persistent. This is why many churches put a greater emphasis on prayer during this time from Ascension to Pentecost. Why “Thy Kingdom Come” is happening. Who are you praying for to come to faith?

3. **Clear about their task.** Jesus also taught them about the KoG. What was this kingdom going to be like? Acts 1:6 exposes all their wrong ideas about it. They expected a political and territorial kingdom (restore), they expected a national kingdom (Israel), they expected it now (at this time).

The kingdom of God is his rule set up in the lives of people by the Holy Spirit. God’s kingdom was going to be international (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the ends of the earth); it was going to be spiritual and gradual in its expansion.

We become part of God’s kingdom when we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, when we allow the HS to empower our lives not least with a conviction of this, when we realize we are under God’s rule.

The disciples also ran into the danger of over-spiritualising the kingdom. V11 (Why do you stand here looking into the sky?). Preoccupied with the heavenly Jesus. The danger of being too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. This spiritual kingdom has got to be worked out in the kingdoms of this world.

When we are clear that our task is not to build a spiritual club but to build the kingdom of God. When we do this the church has life, love and unity.

Conclusion

The consequences of a church that is:

- Clear about the truth
- Clear about their resources
- Clear about their task

Will be the living presence of God’s Kingdom in Eastbourne and the bays.