

## THE BEAUTIFUL EXCHANGE

### *The Ascension of Christ*

#### Acts 1:1-11 (TLB)

In my first letter I told you about Jesus' life and teachings and how he returned to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions from the Holy Spirit. <sup>3</sup> During the forty days after his crucifixion he appeared to the apostles from time to time, actually alive, and proved to them in many ways that it was really he himself they were seeing. And on these occasions he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

<sup>4</sup> In one of these meetings he told them not to leave Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them in fulfillment of the Father's promise, a matter he had previously discussed with them.

<sup>5</sup> "John baptized you with water," he reminded them, "but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit\* in just a few days."

<sup>6</sup> And another time when he appeared to them, they asked him, "Lord, are you going to free Israel from Rome now and restore us as an independent nation?"

<sup>7</sup> "The Father sets those dates," he replied, "and they are not for you to know. <sup>8</sup> But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power to testify about me with great effect, to the people in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, about my death and resurrection."

<sup>9</sup> It was not long afterwards that he rose into the sky and disappeared into a cloud, leaving them staring after him. <sup>10</sup> As they were straining their eyes for another glimpse, suddenly two white-robed men were standing there among them, <sup>11</sup> and said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has gone away to heaven, and some day, just as he went, he will return!"

#### **Intro: Easter is a Supernatural Event- to the very end!**

Good morning. We're talking about the ascension of Jesus Christ – quick question... has anyone ever witness someone ascend into heaven? Haha! Yes the video seems a bit dramatic ... but friends the Easter Story is dramatic because it's a supernatural, cosmic event! **Easter is where the divine (in Jesus Christ a member of the Triune God) comes to die at the hands of men... cosmic collides with creation.**

- Over the past 5 weeks we've been walking through the Easter story haven't we? The story has revealed that Jesus participates in a very human experience: He is born like the rest of humanity. He experiences **physical hurt** with the scourging, whips, punches, nails and thorns. He experiences **emotional hurt** with His betrayal and rejection. He experiences full humanity and then, like all humankind, He dies.

- However the Easter story reveals that Jesus, while being fully man, is also fully God and experiences the God-powered supernatural experience of raising from the dead! On the cross at Calvary Jesus Christ receives humanities sin and **SIN ABSOLUTE** into His body. Jesus offers forgiveness – something only God can do. Jesus is both God and Man – and Easter is a dramatic collide of both on Earth. On the cross there were earthquakes, the sun turned to black and dead people rose from the grave. Jesus the Man dies for our sin yet God raised Him to life by the power of the Holy Spirit after 3 days and, as we read in the Book of Acts, appears to over 500 people teaching them about the Kingdom of God for 40 days. Then, supernaturally, He is taken into the sky in front of His closest followers and angels come and chat to them about what's going on. **Make no mistake ladies and gentlemen – the Easter story is the cosmic collide of heaven and earth in a beautiful exchange!**

- Today the series comes to a close as we see Jesus supernaturally taken into heaven in Acts 1:1-11 (which Jenn read out earlier). We can see that from this passage we're told about 3 pretty cool things about Jesus' ascension that I've

categorised into 3 parts: UP, HERE and DOWN.

UP: Jesus Christ ascended physically somewhere.

HERE: Jesus Christ instructs us to do something.

DOWN: Jesus Christ, through angels, reveals He'll return sometime.

UP – He went somewhere.

HERE – We're to do something.

DOWN – But He's returning sometime.

## UP: JESUS WENT SOMEWHERE!

*"... He rose into the sky (epairo-taken up) and disappeared into a cloud." Acts 1:9*

That's pretty cool. What we know from the Greek text is *epairo* that Jesus was *taken up* into the clouds until a cloud hid Him from their sight. Didn't become a bird, or a plane... nor did He grow a cape. This was the same resurrection body He bodily rose with that Thomas and Mary touched, that ate fish with the Disciples and yet had a supernatural component to it. He was *taken up* before their eyes until a cloud hid Him from sight... the cloud came and covered Him – not to transport Him or anything but remember the cloud descended and demonstrated the presence of God... this was, clearly, a God moment right here. He didn't have to do this before them... He could of just disappeared and remained so. Yet He was doing this to teach and reveal something to us... that Jesus is going for good this time. Over the previous 40 days Jesus came and went at different times, but this time He wanted His disciples to know He was going for good – but also that He was going SOMEWHERE.

Where was Jesus taken up to? Where was He going? Heaven sure, but where is heaven? The disciples were straining and looking into the clouds so you could think that He was ascending, taken into, the clouds. The technology we have proves that heaven isn't a space we can see into with a telescope. We know there's the clouds and the Earth's atmosphere which thins until we hit outer space. So Jesus didn't just sit in the clouds like the old jokes with St Peter and the pearly gates and clouds.

Three friends all suddenly died and when they arrived to the Pearly Gates they meet St. Peter who welcomes them to heaven and says, "Okay everyone come on in. Here's your harp and wings... but, whatever you do, don't step on the ducks."

Bewildered at the splendour of the heavens, the gates open and the three friends (2 guys and a girl) walk in amazed... BUT there were ducks everywhere, all over the floor, on the tabletops, everywhere.

The first guy walks in and immediately, accidentally, steps on a poor duck. So Saint Peter comes along grabs the guy by the hand and handcuffs him to a woman who wasn't very nice. She was mean, and had facial hair longer than he did, and to the pair of them Saint Peter says, "Now you must stay handcuffed together for all eternity."

The other two friends see this and do their best to avoid the ducks. The second friend, the girl, goes months and months without stepping on any ducks until one morning she wakes up and as she is getting out of bed she steps on two ducks.

Immediately St. Peter comes over and handcuffs her to the most atrocious looking, smelly guy you have ever seen and says, "Now you must stay handcuffed to each other for all eternity."

The last friend hears about this and he goes years and years and doesn't step on any ducks in all that time. Then one day out-of-the-blue, Saint Peter comes along and handcuffs him to the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. She looks like an angel, exuding beauty that no earthly woman could attain. Saint Peter says, "Now you must stay handcuffed to each other for all eternity."

The guy happily says, "Wow! This is great! What have I done to deserve this?!" And the woman says, "I don't know what you did, but I stepped on a duck."

Nailed it. Despite what the real comics and media teach us, there is no heaven hidden up on the clouds. And yet Jesus *epairo'd* bodily somewhere... so what we know is that heaven is a spiritual place with a physical reality to it.

## WHY DID HE GO THERE?

Wherever heaven is spatially, we know that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father. That's what the Apostle Paul taught the Ephesians church:

This power working in us is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup> which he used when he raised Christ from death and seated him at his right side in the heavenly world. <sup>21</sup> Christ rules there above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers, and lords; he has a title superior to all titles of authority in this world and in the next. <sup>22</sup> God put all things under Christ's feet and gave him to the church as supreme Lord over all things. Ephesians 1:19-22

Jesus is exalted – He's given every superior title – equal to God. *Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.* Heb 7:25

- High Priest who is making permanent prayer for you! *Jesus tempted in every way... He knows exactly what you are going through! Hurt of betrayal? Rejection? Jesus knows and is seeking God for you right now. Anxious and stressed about what the future holds? Jesus knows! Be comforted!*

*"It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you."* John 16:7

Holy Spirit is God's plan along to equip not just a small group of people in a certain locale in Palestine in a certain era 2000 years ago, but to fill the Earth with His presence. Ephesians 4:8-14

→ Acts of the Spirit series starting May 21 AM and PM!

## HERE: JESUS WANTS US TO DO SOMETHING!

*"But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power to testify about me with great effect, to the people in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, about my death and resurrection."* Acts 1:8

The Holy Spirit means *power... (dynamis)*.

Power to perform miracles.

Power to be healed.

Power to be set free from sin.

Power to have our deepest needs and concerns met.

## IDENTITY SHIFT

The power isn't a feeling. In Acts 8 a sorcerer named Simon Magus attempted to buy this power from Peter, and was met with a big Biblical back-hand by Peter! You cannot buy the Holy Spirit power. You cannot fake the Holy Spirit power. He's more than just a spiritual force... which by the way is what the Jehovah Witnesses teach. They don't believe in the person of the HS and they interpret the NT accounts of the person of the HS as a force, the unseen life and essence of something. This, my friends, is why JW's and cults that deny the person of the HS have no power!

- The HS personally comes and lives in us as believers of Jesus Christ, and is kind of like a deposit guaranteeing your

place in heaven with the Father. The HS shows us what life with God is like! He changes us; Pastor Dylan talked about this a couple of weeks ago using the big religious word SANCTIFICATION. The HS lives in us and over time we become more and more like Jesus our role model.

- Go from greedy to generous. Lustful to content. Lying, stealing and cheating to honesty, giving and integrity. It's the same power living in me that rose Jesus from the dead!

There is an identity shift in the believers when they receive this Holy Spirit empowerment.

Story: I love seeing people who place their faith in Jesus Christ, become part of the family here, and then over time continue to be transformed into Christlikeness.

- I met with a person this week and we talked about a whole heap of things but he shared with me about his overcoming of pornography (I asked him if it was ok to share this) that he was deeply addicted to. We talked about how before he was a believer in Jesus he couldn't stop watching pornography. He tried but couldn't. As a non-Christian he knew how destructive and evil it is, and couldn't stop. Fast forward and he gets saved and baptised (hallelujah!) and things begin falling off him one-by-one. His former life he grew a distaste for – including pornography.

You see, we talked about how wrong sinful behaviour is usually formed by some ungodly belief that is built upon a deep fear. For him his ungodly behaviour (engaging in porn), was formed by an ungodly belief (that he wasn't cool/good enough), which was built on a deep fear (fear of being rejected and alone). In his story I could see that Jesus comes in and redeems the behaviour by healing the hurts and fears, forming new right beliefs. This guy saw that he was deeply loved by the One who counts... that the HS meets our deepest human needs for love, affirmation and acceptance... and He led this young guy, empowered in his convictions, that he didn't need porn! How good is this right – imagine walking your dog and your dog does his doo-doo. See porn is like that doo-doo... it's disgusting waste and flies love it... but it disguises itself as being this desirable thing! Now as a believer this young man could see straight through that disguise and see porn for what it is... a great big stinking pile of poo and no-one would want to go and engage in that.

That's what HS does... He transforms us all! In Acts He transforms a bumbling cowardly uneducated fisherman into a confident unstoppable witnessing machine. That's Peter's story! So fearful of what others think. Gets the opportunity to do what he promised Jesus to His face that he would die for Christ, but instead 3 times denies Him. It's not that Peter was evil... just powerless to change. *Peter before the empowerment of the HS wanted sooo desperate to be a follower of Jesus but was missing the transformative power of the Holy Spirit who indwelled Jesus.*

## **GIFTS FROM ON HIGH TO HIS PEOPLE**

Ephesians 4:8-14 says, "When he went up to the very heights, he took many captives with him; he gave gifts to people."<sup>9</sup> Now, what does "he went up" mean? It means that first he came down to the lowest depths of the earth. <sup>10</sup> So the one who came down is the same one who went up, above and beyond the heavens, to fill the whole universe with his presence. <sup>11</sup> It was he who "gave gifts to people"; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. <sup>12</sup> He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ. <sup>13</sup> And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature. <sup>14</sup> Then we shall no longer be children..."

- The empowerment of the HS means a new identity, and as Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father He sends

gifts to His people – us. *These gifts are to help us be His witnesses!*

- Salvation doesn't mean you have a free ticket to eternal bliss... it means that you are here as a witness and for most of us, we don't need to travel to the ends of the Earth but to be a witness where it's hardest – not in China, or Africa, but where you're known. Family, friends, workmates, school friends need you as a witness. You are God's plan to reveal God!

This is what Jesus prays in John 17- not that we leave the world, but protected in it as we live for God. Jesus teaches us to pray *Our Father in Heaven – blessing and honour is Your name. Your Kingdom Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.*

- Folks the real thing that Jesus was saying was that the rule, reign, peace, life and joy of heaven that we belong to begins today. Here. That's the last instructions/commission from Jesus before He ascends... BE HERE EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT TO WITNESS ABOUT JESUS.

### **DOWN: JESUS RETURNS SOMETIME!**

The last part of this Acts passage, and we're finishing with this one, is DOWN. We know from this passage that Jesus goes UP, desires us to be HERE empowered by His Spirit to be His witnesses, but promises us that one day, He's coming DOWN.

- So much is speculated about the return of Christ! To be true to the text here it's possible that the angels are saying that Jesus will return on the clouds to give the disciples hope that Jesus will restore Israel to the Jews from the oppressive Roman regime. However there's undeniable eschatological inference here! Undeniable... Jesus will return!

How? On a cloud. When? No-one knows. But Peter uses this information in a few days time preaching to a crowd of people. He tells them to *Therefore repent and return to the Lord, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; 20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, 21 whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.* Acts 3:19-21

- Code for: Folks... be reassured that Jesus will return to restore all things and set all right. But get right with Him now before that day.

Revelation talks about Jesus riding a horse, tattooed and ready for war. No meek and mild Saviour here but a victorious war-King defeating Satan and delivering victory to us!

*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

- We don't know how and what was written was inform us of the assurity of His return, not how and when! Be encouraged with these words!

Essentially the angels were offering a sort of rebuke to the disciples – *boys! Why are you looking up there still? Get about the mission that He left you!*

## RESPONSE

Cam and the team come up to sing a song to align our hearts to Jesus' words to our hearts this morning...

Because Jesus was taken up, we have been given His HS.

His HS empowers us with gifts and a new powerful eternal identity that transforms us from the inside out.

One day Jesus will return – but don't get too caught up with that. Instead be motivated by the assurance of this to be His witnesses now.

LIVE THE "UP" LIFE "HERE: YOU'RE CALLED TO AS CITIZENS OF HEAVEN TO WITNESS ABOUT JESUS UNTIL HE COMES "DOWN" AGAIN.

1. There are people in your life this week that you are called to be a witness too. Who are they?

- *Betty and Maurice cyclists... wonderful.*

- *People in ministry and programs... opportunity.*

2. Can you see them?

- *Turn to the person next to you and pray for them. Pray for readiness in yourself to be a witness ... in word, attitude, in your actions.*

3. Pray for opportunity to be a witness.

- *Holy Spirit come and empower your people.*