The Ascension of Jesus Part 1

Why he left, where he went, how they knew – and the King who rules in the midst of his enemies

SPEAKER	Steve Hawthorne
DATE	Sunday, May 9, 2021
PASSAGES	Psalm 110:1-4; Acts 1:3-14; Luke 24:25-53; Daniel 7:13-14; Acts 2:33-35; Mark 16:19-20; Hebrews 3:1; Matthew 22:41-46; Matthew 26:63-64
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:55:04 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus did not go up to heaven to enjoy the luxuries or to spend two thousand years building mansions. He was presented before the Ancient of Days and entrusted with dominion over every people. Enthroned, he is more present than if he had stayed on earth – ruling in the midst of his enemies, drawing a willing people to himself, and leading them as their apostle and priest.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- We know Jesus died and rose for us, but we rarely think about where he went or what he is doing now. A world tour would have made him more absent, not less.
- "The Lord worked with them" everywhere they preached. The ascension is how he is with us: enthroned, and entrusted with ruling authority.
- What gives us the right to proclaim the gospel is not our certainty but God's authorizing of Jesus to gain followers – the point is not only that people get saved, but that he gets served.
- After the ascension the disciples worshiped and then prayed together for days with one passion, informed by Scriptures Jesus had opened to them.

- Psalm 110 is the Old Testament passage the New Testament quotes most. With Daniel 7 it told the apostles where Jesus went: a human being presented before God and given an everlasting kingdom.
- He rules "in the midst of your enemies" rather than destroying them – which is why history is taking so long, and why you and I have a chance.
- His people offer themselves freely, like dew that no one ordered. As apostle he sends us with him; as priest he brings us together to God.

▶ 0:55:04

On Mother's Day, with every pew handed a copy of the prayer guide, Steve thanked the people who had noticed on Palm Sunday that he was moving slowly and pressed him toward a medical checkup. It turned out to be temporary, and he counted it answered prayer. He pointed to the "ten days of praise" he wrote for the global March for Jesus, beginning that Thursday on page 50 of the booklet and free online at waymakers.org.

Why the ascension matters

▶ 0:58:49

Three points, "because this is a sermon and that's what you're supposed to do": why the ascension is important; where he went and how they knew; and Jesus exalted as apostle and priest.

▶ 0:59:57

Ask most of us where Jesus went and we say heaven, up there. We understand his death and resurrection because we need forgiveness and we have death coming. But what is he doing now? Kicking back on a throne with the luxuries of heaven? Or keeping busy as a carpenter building mansions – "and it's taking him two thousand years." We would agree he is king, but kingship sounds like fairy tales or a ceremonial monarch: "Morocco has a king. Did you know that? Probably not, but you don't care."

▶ 1:01:36

And why did he leave? Raised and indestructible, he could have toured the world – Delhi, Tokyo, Poland, Kinshasa, throngs of millions. But you might get one glimpse in a lifetime from half a mile away. "He would be more absent than ever." God always had in mind something better than one miracle man: to exalt one man, give him all authority, and through him empower and collaborate with men, women and children all over the earth to the end of the age.

▶ 1:04:02

> *"Christ's ascension to heaven actually means that he is more present than if he'd remained on earth."*

An absent Jesus is easily reduced to an example. He is our model and teacher, but more than that, and spirituality is far more than imitating him.

▶ 1:04:40

> "So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them."
>
> MARK 16:19–20 ↗ (NASB)

▶ 1:05:19

How is he working with them while seated on a throne? "That's the very point." He did not just go to heaven; he was enthroned with the living God and entrusted with ruling authority to extend his life and governing love to all peoples. He does not need our help to evangelize the world; as Matt had noted, the Great Commission begins, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

▶ 1:07:16

Evangelism also bothers us. Walking up to a stranger – "hey, can I just preach at you for a while?" – feels pushy. "I hope I never have to go to Walmart with Matt." None of us wants to be a religious supremacist.

▶ 1:07:46

So what gives us the right? "God Almighty himself has given this Jesus authority" – not just to declare truth but to gain followers for himself. "Getting saved is cool, but the real point is not us getting saved. It's him getting served."

Where he went: the story

▶ 1:09:05

Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs" (Acts 1:3–8) – proofs his own followers needed. They had seen him dead. He walked to Emmaus unrecognised; called "Children, have you any fish?" from the shore; appeared in locked rooms as if "Scotty beamed" him. They feared he was a ghost, so he said touch me, let me eat with you. Then he told them to stay in Jerusalem, and they asked whether now he would restore the kingdom to Israel.

▶ 1:12:21

"You know what the most important thing about the kingdom of God is? The king." There is a lot of "kingless kingdom" talk, programs and projects called the kingdom. They hoped for a liberated Davidic nation where "our side wins." Jesus set that aside and spoke of witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth – courtroom language.

▶ 1:13:27

They never got to ask more. With hands raised in blessing, he lifted a foot off the ground, then kept going – "he could fall, he could get hurt" – until a cloud received him out of their sight. If you had been there, "you'd be gawking."

▶ 1:15:20

> "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."
>
> ACTS 1:9–11 ↗ (NASB)

▶ 1:15:59

Luke adds that he parted from them at Bethany while blessing them, and they worshiped him (Luke 24:50–53) – face to the ground, "a fearful kind of joy. Heaven had never seemed as close and vast." Then: let's go pray for what the Father promised.

▶ 1:17:54

"These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14). Steve's favorite Greek word, *homothumadon* – same zeal, the root of our "enthusiasm." "There was electric life in this thing, but they all were sharing it." And, it being Mother's Day, he noted Mary, "one of the most awesome mothers in history," and that Luke made a point of the other women too.

How they knew: an opened mind

▶ 1:20:04

What was informing their zeal? Go back forty days. They had been hiding, sure they were goners. On Sunday two followers walked the seven miles to Emmaus, grieving, when a stranger walked "too close" and asked what they were talking about. "We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel."

▶ 1:22:30

"Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:25–27). Christ is a title, not Jesus' last name – the Messiah, the anointed King. Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures.

▶ 1:23:49

"Were not our hearts burning within us?" (Luke 24:32). Not heartburn – "they hadn't eaten anything yet" – but the flame of hope: it is better than we thought. They walked seven miles back in the dark, found the others, and Jesus appeared in the room.

▶ 1:25:42

> "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.
>
> LUKE 24:44–45 ↗ (NASB)

He tells them again – "I'm slow, so he tells me again. That's the generous, marvelous beauty of your Lord Jesus." And we need our minds opened as much as they did, with all our presumptions and the way "we always centralize ourselves in this story."

▶ 1:27:57

Here Steve finally prayed, one hand on his heart and one on his head: "Open our minds to see new and wonderful things about you… renew and restore the blaze of hope in our hearts."

▶ 1:29:25

Before they watched him float away, Jesus had pounded one idea into their freshly opened minds: the Scriptures promised great things about a messianic King, and they must be fulfilled. At Pentecost they came out quoting Joel and the Psalms, and Peter's crescendo was not "be saved" but this:

> "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."'"
>
> ACTS 2:33–35 ↗ (NASB)

Psalm 110 and Daniel 7

▶ 1:31:36

Psalm 110 is "far and away" the Old Testament passage most quoted in the New, and it was front and center because Jesus had quoted it twice in his last days. Testing the leaders, he asked whose son the Messiah is, and how David could call his son "Lord" (Matthew 22:41–46). "There's just no answer for that."

▶ 1:34:15

Days later, on trial at perhaps three in the morning, every accusation "flopping on the ground," the high priest put him under oath: are you the Messiah? "You have said so" – and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds (Matthew 26:63–64). A blend of Psalm 110 and Daniel 7.

▶ 1:35:35

In Daniel 7 heaven is not mainly paradise and golden streets. "The main event is the throne of God and the governance of all the universe," attended by myriads of bright angelic minds. And among them, a human – not sauntering in, but carried on the clouds and formally presented.

▶ 1:37:01

> "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away."
>
> DANIEL 7:13–14 ↗ (NASB)

"The heart and soul, the essence of the ascension is that there's a transaction. Something is entrusted to this one." No term limits. And this is not a man becoming God, like the "ascended masters" of the New Age. The eternal God took on full humanity in Jesus, "so there's a human running the universe, governing it all. Astounding."

Exalted as apostle and priest

▶ 1:39:39

Psalm 110 is organised around three decrees. The first – "Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet" – is not intra-Trinitarian sentiment, as if the Father missed the Son. It says more about the Messiah's relationship to his enemies.

▶ 1:41:35

Who are they? In a day of noise and politicised conflict, evil is real but complicated: every human being has been subverted to some extent. "We have met the enemy and he is us." Only one person is not compromised, and only he can overcome evil.

▶ 1:42:49

The second decree: "Rule in the midst of Your enemies." Ancient conquerors enslaved, exiled or killed their enemies. This King governs right in the middle of hostility. "I love that – you know why? Because that means you and I have a chance." Why is it taking so long? "Because you and I don't come quick, and he's yearning and longing to be followed and loved by some in every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

▶ 1:44:16

Where are we in it? "Your people will volunteer freely" – in Hebrew, your people are freewill offerings. Most temple offerings were not sin offerings but honor offerings: "I love you, I'm loyal to you." A whole people gives itself with no coercion and no quid pro quo, "like dew in the morning" – the grass is wet, but it didn't rain; no one made it. His scepter extends – the same Hebrew root as sending – so that men, women and children love and serve him.

▶ 1:48:22

The third decree: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Biblical priests are less go-betweens than those who bring God's people as near to God as they can get. And this King-Priest is not absent: he leads us into the great sending of God's rule – "angels could do a whole lot better evangelizing than you ever could… but it's always just klutzy people like us that are honored to co-work with the world evangelizer."

> "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.' The Lord will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, 'Rule in the midst of Your enemies.' Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power… The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'"
>
> PSALM 110:1–4 ↗ (NASB)

▶ 1:50:32

"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession" (Hebrews 3:1). As apostle – the sent one – he extends his scepter to the ends of the earth, so we are not "authorizing ourselves to dominate other people with our beliefs." As priest he helps us serve God willingly, making our whole lives a love gift. So we go with him – across the street, across the office – and we come together to God.

▶ 1:53:08

Steve closed by having the room stand and pray the three blocks of praise on page 53: exalt him as ascended King, praise him as overcoming Lord, follow him as the only global priest. "Lead on, O King eternal... bring them to you – not to us, not to our church, to you – and then bring us together to the living God. Lead on, O King Messiah."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Mark 16:19–20 (NASB)
- Matthew 28:18–20
- Acts 1:3–8 (NASB)
- Acts 1:9–11 (NASB)
- Luke 24:50–53 (NASB)
- Acts 1:14 (NASB)
- Luke 24:25–27 (NASB)
- Luke 24:32 (NASB)
- Luke 24:44–45 (NASB)
- Acts 2:33–35 (NASB)
- Matthew 22:41–46
- Matthew 26:63–64
- Daniel 7:13–14 (NASB)
- Psalm 110:1–4 (NASB)
- Hebrews 3:1 (NASB)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Before this message, what did you picture Jesus doing right now? How does “enthroned and entrusted with authority” change that picture?
2. Steve said the ascension makes Jesus more present, not less. Where have you experienced “the Lord working with” you since you believed?
3. How does it change your hesitation about evangelism to hear that the point is not you being right, but Jesus being served?
4. What would it look like for you to have your mind opened to see Jesus in “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” – and your heart burning with hope again?
5. Psalm 110 pictures a people who offer themselves freely, like dew. Where is God inviting you this week to give yourself to him willingly, and to go with him across the street or the office?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Steve Hawthorne was invited to teach Hope Chapel on the ascension of Jesus over two Sundays, having last spoken on Palm Sunday. He wrote the “ten days of praise” in the church’s Seek God for the City booklet for the global March for Jesus, offered free through waymakers.org. He thanked the congregation for urging him toward a medical checkup, and described himself, with a smile, as an old man.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHvwsPjiWvg&t=3304s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.