

**Acts 1:1-11** The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, <sup>3</sup> to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," *He said*, "you have heard from Me; <sup>5</sup> "for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." <sup>6</sup> Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. <sup>8</sup> "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." <sup>9</sup> Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, <sup>11</sup> who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Why did he leave us? That His kingdom might come!  
- an earthly kingdom  
- His rule in our hearts  
- That we might be witnesses

A son once asked his mother while she was tucking him in "why did daddy have to leave?" The mother softly answered that daddy had to leave for his job so they could have money for food and clothes and a home to stay in. The boy, not understanding really about money or bills, asked why they couldn't just live here at their home and go to the store for food and clothes. The mother trying to figure out how to explain to him that money doesn't just

grow on trees finally sighed gave up on that explanation and gave a different deeper reason "daddy has to leave because he loves us." The child didn't understand how leaving was a good thing for him, but he was reassured knowing that His father loved him and what he was doing was done in love.

We are often like that young boy. Jesus told the disciples and us that we should be glad that he went away, that we should be glad he ascended into heaven? In times of trouble and loneliness and confusion, we, with that little boy, ask why. Why should we be glad that Jesus is not bodily present with us? Some might say, "we should be glad that he ascended into heaven because there He sits at God right hand ruling all things for the good of his people".

While that is correct, it never satisfied me. Couldn't Jesus have done that from earth? Couldn't he, as God, take up all power and authority and rule for the good of His church while remaining bodily present with us, so that he could teach us in person as He did his disciples? So that he could show us, as he did the disciples, the holes in hands and in his side? Yes and no. As true God, He

can do all things, He knows all things and is present everywhere so He could certainly have remained bodily present on this earth while he ruled the universe for the good of those he called out of darkness into his marvelous light. But no, he couldn't do that because Jesus loves you and that means he does what is best for you. So when we, like the boy who didn't understand how money worked, couldn't understand why his father had to leave, when we don't understand why Jesus had to leave, we must recognize it is because we don't understand everything. However, we can be comforted by this knowledge - Why did Jesus leave? Because he loves you.

The angels testify to this fact. Tell me, when did the angels appear to men to give bring messages about Jesus? They appeared to Zechariah to bring him the good tidings that he would have a son and that son would be the forerunner to the Savior. They appeared to Mary to tell her she would give birth to a son who would be Christ the Lord and that she should name him Jesus for he would save his people from their sins. They appeared to the

Shepherds to announce to them that "this day in the city of David was born to them a Savior who is Christ the Lord." "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace goodwill toward men." They appeared on Easter morning to proclaim "he is not here for he is risen". In short, the angels appeared to bring "good tiding of great joy which will be to all people". And they appear here at Jesus' ascension connecting ascension with Easter and Christmas as a time of great joy and indeed, Jesus said we should be glad that he went away and Luke records how the disciples left the mount of ascension with great joy. Why were they glad? How was and is this a joyous thing that Jesus was parted from their sight and ours?

Well our text shows us why this day of Ascension is one to celebrate up there with Christmas and Easter. Why did Jesus have to leave us? That His kingdom might come! A kingdom not of this earth, but His rule in our hearts, and so we can be witnesses of that kingdom.

Why did Jesus have to leave us? Jesus didn't leave us. He, as He promised, is with you always, even to the ends of the world.

Why did Jesus have to leave bodily? Because we are stuuuuuu-pid!

Notice that during those forty days, Jesus taught his disciples about the Kingdom of God. In fact, throughout all his time with them, Jesus had taught them about the kingdom of God. And yet the disciples still aren't getting it, they come to him and ask "Lord are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?" They are so hung up with this world and nationalist pride, that they don't get that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world.

One of the great teachings of the New Testament is that of the kingdom of God and yet it is often misunderstood by those infatuated with this world. Look at the disciples wanting Jesus to establish a Jewish empire. Look at the people of Galilee wanting to take Jesus by force and making him their earthly King. Why did Jesus leave? That we might understand his kingdom is not of this world. While he can, He doesn't promise to make us wealthy and healthy on this earth. While he can, he doesn't promise that the foes of his kingdom will be punished and defeated while this world remains. Jesus left that we might grow up and know that His

kingdom is not of this world.

What then is His Kingdom? It is Christ's rule of grace and power and glory in men's hearts. The appearance of the angels marks Jesus' ascension as one of the great saving acts. And indeed it is. The disciples rightly called Jesus Lord, but falsely assumed an earthly empire. Jesus ascended into heaven to remove that temptation and to teach us to say Lord correctly. Not to call him Lord and God hoping he will punish those who have hurt and wronged us. Not to call him Lord and God because we want our businesses to succeed. Not to call on Him as Lord and God because we are sick and don't want to die. Not to call on Him as Lord and God because we want some earthly thing from him. Jesus ascended into heaven and set out the Holy Spirit in with and under the Words of the Gospel that we might call Him Lord of Grace and Lord of Redemption.

His kingdom and his rule in our hearts isn't to make us all rich and famous but give joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. Joy and peace that your sins that would otherwise condemn you to the heat

of hell forever, have been forgiven by Jesus the Lord of grace, the Lord of your salvation and redemption so that we shall come into the happiness of heaven. He ascended because he had earned the name Lord Jesus. He had earned it by saving you from each of your sins by him being punished for each of your sins. That act of atonement on the cross made the Kingdom of God possible. A nation of people among all the peoples of this world who would have a future in Christ beyond the grave, who have life waiting for them beyond and without death, beyond and without sin, beyond and without pain and tears. So yes, the easy yet true answer is, Jesus ascended into heaven because He loves you and wants his kingdom to come to you. His rule in your heart will not make you an emperor in this world but will save you out this world to make us kings in the new heaven and earth which is to come.

This is why the disciples could leave the ascension mount joyful and why we can, but there is another. The kingdom of God and the ascension are all about witnesses. Jesus appeared to them many times over forty days so that they might have infallible proof

about him being alive. Why? So they could be witnesses of that. Let me ask you, why did Jesus slowly ascend into the sky? Why not instantly ascend into heaven? And for that matter, why not sink into the ground? Heaven, where the Father dwells, is no more up than it is down. In fact, our down is up for people on the other side of the world. So why did he slowly ascend? So they could be witnesses of that too! So the disciples could witness to the world that Jesus ascended, not into outer space, but into heaven. The kingdom of God is all about witnessing! Why did He leave us? That the kingdom of God might come.

How does the Kingdom of God come? When Jesus appears and shows himself alive? When Jesus is bodily present to do great miracles like raising people from the dead? No! Tell me, did the Jews flood to become members of the Kingdom of God when Jesus was present doing miracles? No they did not. That is part of what Ephesians two means when it says we were dead in trespasses and sin. That even if the risen Savior came up and bit someone on the nose and turned a tornado into a turnip they would not believe, or

as Romans 8 puts it “the carnal natural mind is enmity against God”.

There is only one thing that overcomes the deadness of our souls - the unbelief and enmity against God we are born with, and that is not the risen Christ bodily present but the witness of Christ that he died for our sins and is alive for our justification. **1**

**Corinthians 1:21** *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. Or Romans 10* “*faith comes by hearing the Word of God.*”

Jesus having established the kingdom by His death and resurrection, ascended into heaven to bring people into that kingdom by sending out the Holy Spirit and the Gospel and witnesses with the Gospel and the Holy Spirit.

Why did Jesus bodily leave us? We might not understand all the reasons or we may forget them, but this we know, Jesus ascended into heaven because he loves us. He ascended into heaven that his Kingdom might come. That it might come to you.

That you might one day go where he has gone. He has prepared a place for you. Amen.

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

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