

# The Ascension of Christ

by Todd Atkinson

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*Todd Atkinson's sermon emphasizes the significance of the Ascension of Christ as a pivotal event in Christian faith that transitions believers from the earthly ministry of Jesus to His heavenly reign.*

**Duration:** 1:01:52

**Scripture:** Luke 24:50-53, Acts 1:1-2, Acts 1:6, Acts 1:8-11, Acts 2:1-4, Acts 2:42-47

**Topics:** "Ascension"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by leading the congregation in reciting the Apostles' Creed, affirming their belief in God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The speaker then shares a personal experience of feeling lost and disconnected, and seeking God's guidance to regain lost parts of themselves. The sermon also promotes an upcoming conference called 'Living Free' and encourages the congregation to attend. The speaker concludes by discussing the significance of Jesus being taken up into heaven, emphasizing the role of the Heavenly Father in bringing His son back to Himself.

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## Transcript

We just want to announce again our Living Free Conference is coming up next weekend. This is a really key part of our DNA, and so we'd love you all to be a part of that. In your bulletin is just a little informational slip of paper, and on it is the schedule for the weekend.

Okay, so in order for you to plan to be there, you will need this. Okay, so take that out, lick it, and stick it to your forehead. Okay? So we just want to make that available to you, and just to take a minute to explain why this is important to us, we've just asked a couple people to come and share their testimony on that.

So first we'd like to invite Kaylee Harris. Is she here? There you are. Thanks, Kaylee.

When I was asked to share about my personal healing journey, I felt like, as I started thinking about it, I was like, oh, that's kind of a personal thing, because not only is it your personal healing journey, but it also infers that you've been wounded along the way. So there's kind of that admittance of, yeah, injury almost in some sort. And so as I was reflecting on it, I was kind of thinking about, you know, how did I come to know Jesus as somebody who would heal me? And I grew up in a church only on Easter and Christmas with my mom and my sister and my grandma, and my mom was more of a nominal Christian.

She was always grateful to God for keeping us alive, as a single mom would, but she had kind of fallen away from the path. And my dad and his four other siblings were all proclaiming atheists. So it was a house of tension, you could say.

And on my 15th birthday, my nana sent me to Haiti to work with my uncle who had built a school there. And it was at that time that I actually met Jesus for myself. And it wasn't until three years later when I was in India doing a discipleship course where I actually heard a teaching on a personal healing relationship with God with kind of a one-on-one counselor type situation.

And she was teaching about the plumb line of God. And I think that was my first encounter with Jesus as somebody who could heal. And he gave me a picture, and it was more than any word could say or any piece of material or any book could have done, the picture that he gave me.

And since then, it had been quite a long gap before I started coming to River of Life and attending the healing conferences. But it was funny how Jesus wanted to come and meet me in that same way, through pictures usually. And in coming back to that, I felt like maybe healing was a one-time thing where I had been healed, and that was my wounds from my childhood.

All of that chapter was kind of closed in my life. But I think it was just more of a failure to admit that perhaps I needed healing. And it kind of reflected my faith in the fact that I felt like I wasn't doing enough or kind of a workspace thinking.

But since then, I've really had a redefinition of the Father and a redefinition of myself because of that. And I'm starting to see brokenness as a way to open my heart for kind of an embrace and an encounter of the person of Jesus. And I'm starting to see 2 Corinthians 12, 9-10, which I memorized in India, in a new light where it says, My grace is sufficient, and therefore I will boast all the more gladly in my weakness, for then Christ's power can rest on me.

And really learning a lot in Corpus Christi that I need Jesus, and I need healing not so that I don't need him anymore, but so that my heart can reflect even more of the gospel. And so I'm starting to see brokenness as a place of unity for us as the body of Christ, too, because we all live in this broken world, and we're broken people with broken relationships. And we're in desperate need of an encounter with the person of Christ.

And he says to us, Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn. He actually came for the broken people, for the ragamuffins. The down, the wounded, the dirty, the discouraged, the disappointed, the numb.

Yeah, you limping along. Be blessed, for you have a reason to need me. Come and I will encounter you there.

That's good, Kaylee. Thank you. Nobody wants to be a part of a self-righteous church.

But at the same time, the only way you have a church that isn't that way is when you have a church that, like she said, is unified around our need for Christ, our weakness, and being willing to go to those places. And so that's kind of what this weekend's really about in a lot of ways. I'm going to invite Jana Block.

This is the best half of the blocks, just to come share. My hands are very sweaty, so I apologize if I drop the mic. Okay.

The healing conferences have been an integral part, I would say, of our healing, both Chad and I as a couple and as well just me personally. There's never been like a great big loud God moment that's happened in those times. Not that I'm ruling that out, but just it hasn't.

But it's just been God kind of slowly working in me, as he does, I guess, just in general. So two years ago, before we moved here, we've been to the last two conferences, so this will be our third. And in one of my sessions prior to the conference two years ago, God just really brought to the forefront this feeling of me not having a voice, and not being heard.

And so, oh, I thought I'd get through without crying this time. Shoot. Okay.

Just even in conversation with people, if there was people around, anytime I would speak, I just felt like it was never heard, that I was never listened to, and that people could just talk over top of me, and nobody would even really notice. And God was just so gentle and gracious with me at that time, to just speak to my heart and heal those things, but as well to just let me know that when I needed to be heard, that I would be heard. And if there was things that he wanted me to say, and that he needed to be heard, that that would happen, and that I didn't need to try and make myself heard all the time.

And then just in this last year, God's been speaking to me about just sharing my healing with people, because it's always been very personal for me. It's always been me and God, and we do a really good job together, the two of us, and I'm usually okay to just leave it there. But he's just been so clear that I need people to be involved in this with me, that I need community around me in this healing journey, and that it is something that's so personal and close to my heart, but that there is a community that needs to be involved in that.

And so I think just the fact that I am up here today and sharing is a testament to both of those things, that I'm being heard when I need to be heard, and that hopefully God is speaking something to you even in this moment, and that as well, it's about us. It's not just about me and God. It's about us.

And so just even as an encouragement as far as a community, that the conference, it's not about whether you're going to come and have this amazing experience with God. It's about him continually working in you and working in us as a community. And so that has been that for me even before we were a part of this community, and I know that it will continue to be that as life goes.

Thanks, Jenna. So you can see it's just a really big part of what we are and who we are. And a lot of the guys that you see who are really walking in their callings and really on adventure with the Lord behind the scenes are actively pursuing healing in their own hearts.

And so we just want to invite you to be a part of that with us, okay? So all the information is here for you, and we hope to see you next weekend. I'm going to invite the bishop. Those testimonies are absolutely beautiful.

We structure these weekends, conference, with two goals in mind. One is so that for people who have been on a healing journey, have signed up to that in their heart, that there's always the next place to go. And so we construct them with that in mind.

But we also construct them for those who would like to sign up. Because for all of us, for me, this is only the last three, three and a half years. I wouldn't even have understood what that language meant three and a half years ago.

I just felt like I was up against things I couldn't move. And I was actually out in the mountains praying. And I felt like I had lost bits of me through my journey.

Remember the story of Hansel and Gretel? They put out breadcrumbs. My journey, I had received enough tough things that somehow parts of me got left behind. Parts of my passions and desires and dreams.

And so I used to go to the mountains to pray. And I'd say, God, where did that stuff go, and how do I get it back again? And I couldn't figure it out. And it was in the mountains one day that the Lord spoke to me, and he said, what you are describing is what the Bible calls brokenheartedness.

Jesus said, I've come for the brokenhearted. He says, you preach about brokenheartedness, but you think it's a category you don't belong to. And how many times have I preached Isaiah 61? He came for the brokenhearted and never thought that meant me.

Thought it was wonderful news for someone else. And that day the Lord said, no, you're the brokenhearted. The things that have happened to you have put enough pressure on your heart, it's fractured it.

You only handle so much. And it affects things like your faith, how much you can believe for, whether you can believe for anything, because the Bible says, where the heart man believeth. So the blows that my heart had received meant my believer was broken.

I wanted to believe for great things, but my believer got injured. My heart. And so I said to the Lord, this is really new for me.

But I say yes. Whatever this looks like, I just say yes. And that's actually that one yes.

And then numbers of yeses in our congregation is what started us on this journey. So we construct these weekends for people who said yes some time ago, and for people that just want to say yes, maybe for the first time now. Lord, I could use some of that.

So it's for you. And so if you come out, we will try to be as respectful with your story as we know how to be, and delicate with your heart. We try to be very guard people.

Because the last thing you want to do is go to some spot where your tough stories are going to come out, and people are going to be incautious. And so we try to be very careful with one another. Respectful with one another.

So please, I sometimes loathe to call it a conference. There's lots of conferences going around. I kind of loathe to call it that.

It's actually something a lot bigger and more to us. And we only run two of these things a year. I hope you'd make it a priority and come join us.

I really want to say how happy I am to see so many new faces today. If I knew it could be this Sunday, it could be in the last three or four, or even the last three or four months. It's really, really nice to have you.

If you just keep saying yes to God in a year, you'll be up the one giving the great stories. In fact, both ladies that gave a testimony today, I would say are between one and a half to three years in our church, or relating to our church. And so a year from now, you'll be up doing much the same.

So if you're new, I really want to welcome you. We're really happy to have you. We are a growing community, and we understand that it takes special efforts to grow.

It takes special efforts to make new people feel welcome, to make it feel like your presence here is significant to us, that you're not just there in the crowd lost somewhere. And we want to make those efforts. I also want to thank many, many new people who have been moving up.

Please keep that happening, so that when new people come to the church, they're not the ones that have got to walk past 500 people. And so please, thank you for... I've noticed many of you relocated, and I want to thank you for doing that. Well, let's turn our attention to the Scriptures.

A few weeks ago, we launched a series in the book of Acts. And today, God willing, I want to look at the one truth that makes this entire book make sense. In many ways, it's like a key that opens this book, opens the mystery of the book to us.

And without this key, the book would be largely closed and veiled to us. And so the key that opens the book of Acts is a key called the Ascension. The Ascension, in the history of the church, the Ascension was treated as one of the greatest points in the Christian calendar.

So the moment where Jesus was taken up into heaven, and maybe that's all you understand by that word, but throughout the ages of the church, it was treated as something that was as great as Christmas. It was celebrated. There were feasts around Ascension.

There were all-night prayer vigils that took place. It was considered as great as Christmas, as Easter, and as great as Pentecost. And yet, in the modern church, we hear almost nothing about the Ascension.

So how many of you feel like you've ever heard a sermon, a full sermon on the Ascension? You've probably heard a few on the crucifixion. A few on the resurrection. You've probably heard a lot on Pentecost.

And I'm glad to see a few hands go up, but certainly much less, and in some cases, almost nothing about the Ascension. And so we're going to do a couple things before we read Scripture. First of all, I want us to look at the Apostles' Creed together.

Acts 2, verse 42 says the early church was devoted to the Apostles' teaching. So for hundreds of years, people have said, what was the Apostles' teaching? What was their central, most cherished beliefs? And it was put into the Apostles' Creed. The reason I want to look at it this morning is I want you to look for the reference to the Ascension.

And some of the language around the Ascension. And ask yourself, did I hold that as central to my faith as the other things that are mentioned in the Apostles' Creed? And maybe as we look through, there might be a few other things that you thought, I never really thought of that as really central to my faith. Like, absolutely central.

And so maybe there's a few other points you'd pick out as we read it. So we are going to read it out loud together. It starts with the words, I believe, which means we have to read it like we believe it.

These are the things that are most cherished and important to Christians. So when we read it, don't read it like you're reading a telephone book. Don't drone.

Read it like you're making a confession. A public confession. So let's lift our voices and read it together.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended to the dead. The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit.

I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen. You read it like you believed it.

I'd like to take a couple readings from Scripture. First from the Gospel of Luke and then from the Book of Acts. First we're going to read from Luke 24.

These are the last three verses in Luke's Gospel. It says, Then Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands, He blessed them. While He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

And they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they were continually in the temple, blessing God. Now I'd like us to read the Book of Acts chapter 1. In the first book, that's Luke's Gospel that we just finished reading.

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, that's the ascension, taken up after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. Skip down to verse 6. So when they had come together, they asked Him, Lord, will it You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons, that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up. And a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.

May God add His blessing to this public reading of the Scriptures. If we could put the one from Luke up, and maybe keep that one up for a few minutes. I'd like you to recall that Luke was a doctor who traveled with the early apostles, and because of his scholarly background, he was asked to write a two-volume history of Christianity.

So the first volume being the Gospel according to Luke, the second volume being the Acts of the Apostles. And it's not insignificant how volume one ends. Luke's Gospel.

The last few words. And it's not insignificant how volume two, the Book of Acts, begins. Volume one ends, and volume two begins at the exact same place, talking about the Ascension.

So the Gospel of Luke ends talking about the Ascension. Last couple words. Acts of the Apostles, first couple words, talking about the Ascension.

Because the Ascension is the hinge upon which this entire story hangs. The Ascension separates the earthly ministry of Jesus from the heavenly ministry of Jesus. The Ascension separates how that Jesus, the time where He was directly ministering, the direct earthly ministry of Jesus, means doing it Himself, from the time where He would delegate that earthly ministry.

The earthly ministry of Jesus didn't stop, but it was delegated, and the Apostles after, and the early apostolic church, continued what He had begun. It's the hinge of history. It separates the time where we had Jesus in the flesh to the time where we know Him by the Spirit.

The Ascension is the hinge where He comes as the suffering servant, that's in the Gospels, to the time where we have a reigning king. It's the Ascension that separates those two great realities. By the incarnation, when Jesus came incarnate, God is taken into man.

But by the Ascension, man is taken up into God. Would love to get a chance to expound each one of those at a later date. So the Ascension is a type of continental divide.

So in North America, there's a series of mountain ridges that go through our whole continent, and you're aware of this. Everything on one side flows to the west, and all the water on the other side, all the rivers flow to the east. And so the Ascension is a kind of continental divide.

And so Luke understands that and puts it rightly between Luke and Acts. And so I want to take a closer look at the Ascension of Jesus in the hope that we might understand that and enjoy its profoundness. So let's take a look at Luke 24 first.

What an amazing picture. Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

So if you're into Christian art and the history of Christian art, there's all kinds of paintings about the Ascension. And I've asked to see if we could maybe get one of them up today. Is that big enough for you to see? But there's probably hundreds of Ascension paintings through the Middle Ages and around the time of the Reformation.

So I like this for several reasons. Number one, Jesus looks kind of buff. That's got to count for something.

Could someone get me a glass of water, please? Yeah, I mean, obviously he's just worked out for our salvation and he's looking kind of good there. But the other thing is, I've looked at these kind of Renaissance paintings for many years and thought, why is Jesus waving to us? Kind of like, see you later. It's been nice knowing you.

But because a lot of the paintings have kind of one hand in the air, kind of like that. And as you're studying the Ascension, he's not actually waving. Do you know what he's doing? He's blessing.

Okay, so this picture has kind of one hand aloft and he's kind of got the side angle blessing there. Thanks, Jen. Okay, and then some of the other paintings, he's got both hands held aloft.

So they depict it in different ways, but it's still magnificent because they've actually captured the essence of Luke 24. As he's lifting, he's blessing. And there's just something about that picture in the Gospel of Luke.

There's more than one word in the New Testament, more than one Greek word for blessing. But the word for blessing that's used here is the word eulogin, from which we would get eulogy, something that's done at a funeral. And the word means to say something commendatory, to commend people.

It means to speak well of, to extol, to bless. It means to provide with benefits. And so here, as he's being lifted up into heaven, this is the last time that they will see Jesus in the flesh until eternity.

And he's blessing them. He's speaking words of commendation. He's telling them how much they mean to his heart.

He's lifting them as the Father is lifting him. He's lifting them and just saying these wonderful things. We help a lot of people through types of bereavement, and one of the questions that often comes up is, were you able to see your loved one before they passed? One of the other questions that comes up is, were there any last final words that were said? And relationships can always, you know, family relationships can be in numbers of conditions, and so sometimes people are so angry they don't talk.

There is no last words. Very sad. Sometimes they're gruff last words.

Imagine that, the person that you love, the last thing a mother or father, you know, said to you was something unkind and gruff. But there's also wonderful situations where the last words have been words of blessing. And, you know, there's been a lifetime of words.

But those last words, when they are words of blessing, just seem to do something almost as much as all the other words put together. And the people will remember those words. They will ring in their ears for a long time.

So here's Jesus. His last words, the last time they will see a physical sight of him, and he just wanted to know, I bless you, I love you, you mean the world to me. And it fixed something in their heart and mind that they would never have forgotten.

It also talks about Jesus being carried up into heaven. Acts chapter 4 says several times, four times in one chapter, he was taken up into heaven. So what's the difference between leaving and being taken? What's the significance of being taken? Four times in one chapter, he was taken up into heaven.

And maybe it's the fact that if you're taken, it presupposes a taker. If you came home and said something was taken, by that you mean someone has snuck into your house on your way and someone took it. So there's a significant word, he was taken up into heaven, presupposes that someone took him.

And so here's this picture of the heavenly Father who has had to depart from his son, and now he's taking him back into himself. The heavenly Father taking his son back. And that's why Acts chapter 1 says there was a cloud there and it hid him from his eyes.

This isn't just a cumulus cloud. He's actually between heaven and earth. But this is the manifest presence of the Father.

In the Old Testament, the time where the tabernacle was created, they created the tabernacle, and then they come in and prayed for it and blessed it, and the presence of God appeared visibly as a cloud. In other words, so there was no doubt in anybody's mind that God had taken up residency there, that God himself was there in the tabernacle. Same thing many hundreds of years later when the temple was

created.

The priests came in and they blessed the tabernacle and God's presence once again visibly took up residence in the shape of a cloud. So there was no doubt in any mind. Did that work? Didn't that work? Did God come here or didn't he come here? There was no doubt in anybody's mind that God himself was there that day and he took up residence.

And on this day, God the Father didn't want anybody being in doubt. There was only one person taking the Son, and it was the Father taking the Son back into himself. The Father taking the Son in preparation for the coming of the Spirit.

See the picture of the Trinity in Acts chapter 1? It's the Father coming in a manifest way to take the Son back into himself so that the Spirit could be given to the church. Beautiful picture of the Holy Trinity. And the Father wasn't just elevating him physically.

There's a lot more happening in the ascension than that. It was a picture of God not just taking him or elevating him, but exalting him. So sometimes we may talk about someone being elevated at work.

Does that mean that someone put them on a lift? A hydraulic lift? If you said someone was elevated at work? Being elevated has two senses to it, doesn't it? It means that physically you're going to go from here to here, but we mean a lot more to it than that. So we also use it in a metaphorical sense when we talk about someone being elevated. We talk about people exalting themselves.

Again, we don't mean just they lifted themselves physically, but they were trying to lift themselves in other ways. And so here at the ascension, Christ has gained through his death and resurrection everything that he intended to. So now the Father is lifting him physically, but it's a picture that says a thousand words.

He's lifting him in every other way. He's exalting his Son. And the church saw the connection.

Because what's the next phrase in the book of Acts? And they worshipped him. So they joined in with this exaltation. And I just have this kind of core feeling.

I don't know why the ascension, so little is made of it in the modern church, but I feel like it's key to our worship. As Jesus was being ascended in their sight, they realized he's no longer the suffering servant. He is now going to be exalted to the right hand of God the Father.

He's now not just the suffering servant. He's now going to be the reigning king. And they understood this, and they couldn't stop worshipping him.

And as God is moving in our midst in the area of worship, and we anticipate that this is barely the beginning of what he's going to do in our midst in the area of worship, having an elevated view of him and joining with the Father in exalting the Son is critical to where we are going in worship. When they saw the Father exalt the Son, they wanted to do the same. This age, sometimes they call it the church age, between the first advent and the second advent of Jesus.

But I think it could be called other things. The age of the Son's exaltation. That's one of the great purposes of this age.

Worship. So there was a preparatory age. There was an age where people anticipated the Son.

They prepared their hearts for the Son. The Son was foreshadowed in the Old Testament. Now we're in the age of the Son's exaltation.

And that's why worship is just so important to God. And if we could get maybe Luke 28 back, they worshipped him and they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. Why? Wouldn't you just feel like you lost your Savior? You returned with great joy.

Didn't you just say goodbye? But if you understand the ascension rightly, then you will understand they didn't say goodbye. Remember, it's just a hinge. It's just flowing into a way of knowing him now in altogether new ways, which is why they go to prayer.

Because in the book of Acts, now we know him. We don't know him in the flesh. We know him by the power of spirit.

When they go to prayer and when they go to worship, they met with Jesus in ways that were never possible when they knew him in the flesh. And they were continually in the temple, which is the place they would have associated with prayer. And what were they doing there? Blessing God.

Do you know the word blessing? That's the exact same word as earlier. There's a connection Luke is trying to make here, is that Jesus blessed them. Now what do they find themselves doing? Blessing him.

And that's a lot about the healing conference. That's why we do this, is we put ourselves in a spot where we let God love us. Guess what the response is? It does something in our love for him.

We put ourselves in a spot where the Father blesses us. And maybe even that's why healing is required, because we have such a limited understanding of just how much he wants to bless us. And so you can have all the blessing in the world that is on offer, but our ability to say yes, to receive it, to indulge in it, to accept it, is so limited.

And healing frees us up to see the breadth of God's blessing and to say yes to it. And when he has blessed you, and you, when I leave a good healing time, I tell you what, I just feel like the happiest guy in the world. I had a little bit of holidays left at the end of the summer, and it didn't work out for me, but I said, Lord, if I could take a week and do anything in the whole world, I would take somewhere and go somewhere for my healing.

Like somewhere where I don't have to minister, and I can just get ministered to. It didn't work out for me to do that, but I'm glad that was in my heart. Sometimes it's just good that you have things in your heart.

They don't always materialize. Because nothing makes me feel like that. When I get a time where I can just say, Lord, this is a time where you want to bless me.

This is a time where you want to love me. You want to put something into me. You feel Jesus wants to bless you? Might even be a good thing.

You ever sat around in worship, and noticed some person, how they seem to get something that I don't? You watch them entering in. Beautiful. And maybe part of what's happening there is, they've understood something about worship that I'm still growing to understand.

They've allowed Jesus to bless them. And now they just feel an irresistible desire to bless him in return. Acts chapter 1. He's lifted.

Maybe we can get the text put up here. Acts chapter 1. He led them up. Sorry, that's a little further down.

Verses 7 and 8, I think. You ever wonder about these two guys that show up on the Day of Ascension? A couple verses down. You ever wonder about those two guys? Where are they here? While they were gazing into heaven.

So they're looking. Now, he's already gone now. And yet they're still looking.

Behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why are you standing looking up into heaven? So it doesn't actually say they're angels. But there's something up with these two guys and their classy wardrobe. White robes.

And the fact they just seem to kind of appear and disappear. Very likely they're probably the same two guys that were on the disciples on the Emmaus Road. Remember two guys just kind of, you know, and one thing or another.

What is up with these two guys? And more importantly, this question. Why are you looking up into heaven? He's already gone. And of course, what's the answer? Because that's the last place we saw him.

And how many of us are looking for Jesus in the last place we saw him? We're always looking back to some sweet time. I spend so much of my Christian life in a state of personal mourning because it doesn't seem to be like it used to be. That's a confession.

That's a whopper. And I'm no different than them. I keep looking for the last place I saw him.

And the reason these two chaps, maybe angels, ask the question is the key to Christianity was where's the next place you're going to see him? And I have spent much of my Christianity wishing I could get myself back to some spot where Jesus met me. And I'm still looking there and he's not there anymore. And I don't know where to find him.

And I need to heed this message. I loved those times and they were wonderful. And they just did something in my life that no other place would meet me.

But I cannot keep looking back over my shoulder to the place where Jesus was. I need to now begin to fix my attention to the place where he will be, to the new place he wants to meet me. And for them, guess where it was? It was in an upper room in Jerusalem.

They'd never had an experience like that. But he told them, go to an upper room, spend time in prayer there, wait till my Holy Spirit comes. They had never experienced Jesus like that.

But they did it! They could have stayed right there on that mountain in Bethany long after these two angels had spoke to them. But they didn't, they got the message and they went in and they began praying and they began looking to meet Jesus in new ways. And so the whole book of Acts is a story about this church who met Jesus in ways they've never met him before.

And Jesus wants to meet you this year in all kinds of ways, in times and places that you have never met him before. And so part of it, we just need to do a little letting go, thanks for those wonderful experiences. But it's a little bit like the Old Testament, picking up manna, you know, in the desert.

How many days can you store that stuff to realize there's new manna? New manna coming. New provision. New miraculous intervention.

And so the book of Acts is full, replete with stories of how they began to experience Jesus in all kinds of ways that you'd never see in the Gospels. You ready for some of that? Wouldn't you like some of that? Are you putting yourself in the path of that? They went right to prayer. Why? Because prayer is the place where you say yes to that stuff.

They went right to the upper room. Right to the next place he'd promised. And it takes a lot of trust.

I mean, let go of this, and he's like, go to prayer. Wait in Jerusalem. Part of you would be like, is anything going to happen? And if it does, how could it possibly ever be better than what we just had? But they trusted.

And there was no doubt in anyone's mind as glad we didn't stay at Bethany, looking up into the sky. Glad we went and found him in new ways. So allow yourself to dream a little bit.

This year, how would you like to meet him? How would you like to encounter Jesus? And what happens if you didn't use the past as a reference point? Because really then you're still saying, I want to do it like I just did it exactly in 2004. I can't, honestly, I do it so much of the time. How about if I said what happened in 2004 was wonderful for 2004.

I'm no longer trying to get it back. And the mourning and the sense of loss that is associated with that. Whereas the new things, there's not mourning, there's joy associated with Jesus leading you to new things.

But sometimes to gain new things, sometimes you've got to do new things to gain new things. What is that? The definition of idiocy, isn't it? Doing the same things you've always done and expecting to get different results. In other words, you want to see him do some new things, it probably will require some new things, some new expressions of faith.

For some people, they'd never do anything like a vigil. I love when Kelly gave a testimony some weeks ago. So what happens if he just said, I've never met Jesus in a vigil? It wasn't completely new for him.

He went, exercised his faith, did a new thing, Jesus made him in new ways. Let's spend a moment in prayer. What happens if you gave thanks for everywhere Jesus has ever met you? Everywhere God has ever encountered you? What happens if you gave thanks and then just said, but I can no longer keep looking back over my shoulder.

I mean, you can do it for the sake of thanksgiving. That's different. What happens if you said, Lord, thank you, but that was never meant to be food to sustain me for a decade.

I need new encounters. I need new touches with your love. I need new times, times in the presence of the Lord where my soul is refreshed.

I need new times of prayer. I need to see new miracles. I need to see God move in new ways.

It's an Old Testament prophecy. Behold, I do a new thing amongst you. Does that mean there was anything wrong with the old things? No, but it was great for the old days.

It's not food for your soul today. So we've got so much to give thanks for. But the purpose of yesterday's miracle is to build faith for tomorrow's miracle.

Not so that we'd camp in yesterday. Because the miracle that you received yesterday was new to you at the time. It's not even new anymore.

It actually took faith. Now it doesn't. So let's be a thankful people.

But let's move on. And let us encounter the Ascended Jesus. You've experienced Him.

We've spent four years gazing at His earthly ministry. Now we're going to gaze at His heavenly ministry. We've spent wonderful time.

We'll never forget. We've been gazing into the eyes of the suffering servant. But we're also going to now gaze into the eyes of a heavenly king.

He's not one or the other. He's both. That's why in Revelation, it's a lamb on the throne.

Suffering and reigning both. That's why if you look at Jesus' hands right now in heaven, He's still got marks on His hands. But He's sitting on a throne.

He's got a scepter in those hands. Because His suffering qualified Himself, qualified Him for reigning. There's prayers that only you can pray right now.

Not even prayers I can pray for you. May the Holy Spirit do some stirring in us in the air of dreams. Time to dream again.

Time to lift up your eyes again. Time to believe again that your best days are not behind you. That by God's power, they are out before you.

You are not spent and used up. You just feel that way. One day in the presence of God, and you would feel like a new person.

You'd have the heart of a 17-year-old again. We want to be ascended with you, Jesus. We're crucified with Christ.

We're raised together with Him. We also want to be ascended with Him, lifted. And seated in Him and with Him.

Heavenly Father, thank you for every wonderful thing you've done. I couldn't begin to count. 10,000 by 10,000.

And yet my heart and soul is made to see new things. It's part of our hearts. We're craving it.

Part of it we say, we don't understand. How could we have this incredibly illustrious spiritual journey and yet our souls feel like they're hurting. Like part of us inside feels like it's aching.

Even mourning, sad. Sad. Because you're trying to lead us onward.

So Father, we thank you for every good thing you've ever done. But we realize that your storehouse is infinite. Everything we've received, we didn't even make a dent in it.

It's far from empty. You've got so much more. And now you're in your heavenly ministry.

On your throne and you have your keys to that storehouse. So get to learn the heavenly ministry of Jesus. The keys in His hands.

So Jesus, we ask you, unlock some doors. The place that we long to get access to and we feel locked out of. Open those places to us.

And pour out your Spirit upon us. In a ways that would make us think He really does save the best wine to last. That would make us believe that our life in Jesus goes from glory to glory.

So when Jesus took His seat at the right hand of the Father, what was His first act as King? Acts 2.33, He sent the Holy Spirit. The first sign, proof and evidence of the ascension. He sent the Holy Spirit.

The Father gave Him the right to do it. The keys. Jesus, you are the key to heaven.

You don't just have keys, you are the key. And you have went before us to open heaven's storehouse. Pour out your Spirit upon us.

Just continue, just wait for a minute. Just wait on Him. You may think waiting on God is a new thing to you.

Yep, it probably is. But how else are you going to gain new things? Maybe you'd even thank Him in advance. There's some real faith in that.

Maybe you'd even thank Him in advance. In a minute I'm going to ask Joe to lead us in worship. Worship just like the early church did.

Can I get Corrie to come, Corrie Hunt? If there's someone here today that says, My, I can't even look at the past. I don't even have anything to look back to. I don't know if I'm even a Christian.

You might use that name, but I don't feel like you've even begun your journey with Jesus. Can I get you to come? While we're worshiping, I want you to go to the front to Corrie and just say, I'd like to actually begin this. How do I walk with Jesus? How do I come to Him? How do I begin a journey? I'm not baptized.

I wouldn't say I am really a Christian. But I'd really like to know Jesus and I'd like to follow Him. I know that in some situations you think, that's embarrassing.

You want me to get up out of my seat and go speak to that guy? But in our church, while the rest of us stand and worship, it's just not the kind of a spot where people would watch what you're doing. They're actually kind of more focused on Jesus. And so actually, it's not as embarrassing as you might think.

And whatever little embarrassment it has, we've actually thought, Jesus is worth it. Gaining Him, going to speak to someone that's minor, what I gain is so much bigger than a little bit of discomfort and embarrassment. And every week, I'd like to see people come into faith in our church.

Beginning the walk of Jesus. Not just people developing and deepening a walk, but people starting a walk. And so that might be you.

I pray right now that if that's you, that God by His Spirit would be all over you. And He would have His way right now. He would be telling you, that's you.

That's you. Maybe one of these angels from Acts 1 would be tapping you on the shoulder right now, saying, it's you. Come on.

This is your day. Jesus has got great things for you. But you've got to say yes.

You've got to let Him in. So congregation, would you stand with me? Let's worship Him together. And if you'd like to begin a walk with Jesus, then just come to Corey here.

I'll show you how to do that. Amen.

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