

## The Ascension of Jesus

Acts 1:1-11

June 1 & 2, 2025

The day was January 27, 1997. It was a cold day in Green Bay Wisconsin. The Packers had won the Super Bowl just the day before. Myself, my dad and brothers decided to go to Green Bay and join 60,000 of our closest friends to celebrate the "Return to Titledown." It was a cold day. (It may have even been sub-zero.) Snow had begun to fly and the Packers got delayed in their travels back to Green Bay. But we were determined to stay even after a four-hour delay. But, we were there when they returned to Lambeau Field. The crowd went crazy when they stepped on to the stage in Lambeau Field that day. It was exciting to be there that day. (Even though it was my wife's birthday that day.)

I wonder what it must have looked like when Jesus returned to heaven that first Ascension Day. It must have been a celebration that even heaven had not seen before. Jesus returned to be crowned the King of Kings. He arose through ranks of angels to take his place on the throne in heaven. John gives us a glimpse of what that must have looked like in our Second Lesson from today. <sup>12</sup> **His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.** <sup>13</sup> **He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.** <sup>14</sup> **The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.** <sup>15</sup> **Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter."** There were the faithful who had died were wearing white, clean robes. Jesus' robe was dipped in blood, his blood. Ranks of angels and ranks of the faithful souls were welcoming the King of kings and Lord of lords victoriously back to heaven. Their robes made white from the blood of the King of Heaven.

Can you imagine the celebration in heaven that day when Jesus returned? They had seen that King be willing to join the sinful people of this world. He was willing to jump right into the mess of sin. He took on that load of sin on his back. He put himself under every single law that God had demanded be kept. He shed his blood for the sins of the world. His work on earth was done. It was time to go home.

**"He left them and was taken up into heaven."** What kind of a reaction would you expect out of Jesus' disciples? If you were one of those disciples standing on the hillside with Jesus, and you saw him begin to ascend into heaven, how would you feel? This was their Jesus. You saw the miracles that he had performed. You walked with him. You shared meals with him. You heard him teach in ways that totally made sense. He always seemed to have the perfect words to say at the perfect time. He always forgave you even if you didn't always forgive others. You never had to worry about your next meal, well because he is Jesus. He provided for you. Now he is going away.

We would understand if the disciples asked the question: *Why did he have to go?* It would make more sense for Jesus to stay. What more could he have done to prove to the Israelites that he was who he said he was? Even after all they did to him, after all the opposition he faced; here he was, raised from the dead. He was standing right there in front of them. Wouldn't it have made more sense to stay around for a little while longer and jump-start the church? At that moment in time, the church wasn't even that big, only a 120. *Why did he have to leave at this moment in time?*

Do these kinds of emotions run through your head? Do you ever feel as if God has left you? Did something happen in your life that maybe you feel like you watched God walk right out of your life? Do you feel like God has abandoned you, left you like an orphan? Although we would totally understand if this is what the disciples were feeling, that's not what happened.

Luke does not record in our text any tears being shed on that Ascension Day. Instead, we are told that after Jesus left them by ascending into heaven, they were filled with joy. Luke tells us in his Gospel: **"While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."** (Luke 24:50) Their joy came from that fact that Jesus did what he came to do. Luke tells us in the Gospel Lesson today: <sup>44</sup> **"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."** <sup>45</sup> **Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."**

Even though the disciples didn't fully understand how all the pieces of God's plan fit together, they still longed for their risen Jesus. They hoped their Resurrected King would establish a kingdom here on earth. As Scripture says, **"Then they gathered around him and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'"** In many ways, we're just like those disciples on that first Ascension Day. We don't want a Jesus who feels distant or uninvolved in our daily struggles. We want a Savior who is present and active in our lives right now. Yet, if he has already secured our eternal salvation, we can trust that he will also be with us in the day-to-day challenges we face.

You see, when Jesus ascended back into heaven, he wasn't going back to lean back on his reclining throne in heaven and see how things were going to play out with his Church. His work on earth was done. His work in heaven had just begun. He would still help us to defeat the temptations of Satan. He would rule over the church for its benefit. As Paul says to the Ephesians: **"<sup>19</sup> That power is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup> he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."** (Eph. 1:19-23) That's what our King is doing for us. What a celebration there will be in heaven when all of his followers will join him in the heavenly realms forever. May God grant it. Amen.