

Where Did He Go?

Message by Dr R Bruce Montgomery ~ Grace Church ~ 4/16/17

Introduction

If I asked you to briefly describe what happened on Easter morning, most of you could give a good summary of the events of that day.

I have preached and you have probably heard countless messages about that most important story of Jesus' rising from the dead. The story never loses its excitement, it can be approached from many different angles, and new truths brought out about what actually happened and the relevance of the resurrection on our lives today.

If I asked, "*what happens next?*" you might skip ahead and tell me about the Christian's blessed hope of Jesus' return to planet earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (That was our topic last week, Palm Sunday).

But if I brought you back to the days just after his resurrection, and asked you, "*and then what happened?*" "*Where did he go?*" you might have to pause and think before you could give an answer.

This morning, I want us to go beyond Easter, and think about where Jesus is now and what he is doing as we await his return.

We begin by picking up the story forty days after Jesus' resurrection.

In the first verses of **Acts 1** we read that over a period of forty days Jesus appeared to his disciples numerous times and ***gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.*** During that time he taught them about the kingdom of God, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and their commission to be witnesses ***in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.***

Acts 1:9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

The verb "***taken***" in both verse 9 and verse 11 is in the passive voice, indicating that just like the resurrection, Jesus'

ascension was an act of the Father. ¹ By it he took the crucified and resurrected Messiah from the earth to his own glorious presence.

Jesus' resurrection body, which had passed through closed doors, now passed through earth's atmosphere. Like Jesus' miracles and resurrection, his ascension was not limited by the supposed "laws of nature."

He didn't need the life-support systems ordinary humans need for space travel. He ascended in the powerful, spiritual body that overcame death and corruptibility. He passed through the atmosphere without a space suit and without suffering any ill effects because his glorified body could not be destroyed by less oxygen, radical changes of temperature, or differences of air pressure.

The cloud, I believe, was the same one which had enveloped Jesus and Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, and which throughout the Old Testament was the symbol of Jehovah's glorious presence.²

Jesus could well have simply vanished, and gone to the Father secretly and invisibly. The reason for a public and visible departure was because he wanted them to know that he was going for good.

For forty days he had suddenly come and gone. The apostles had become used to his suddenly vanishing from their midst, and taken comfort each time he had left that he would be back.

A dramatic event was necessary so the disciples wouldn't be waiting around for his next resurrection appearance.³

² The final moments of the apostles view of the Lord they saw Jesus enveloped in Shekinah glory in the same cloud of the divine presence that had led Israel out of Egypt and for forty years in the wilderness, resting above the tent of meeting in the days of Moses and filled the first temple in Jerusalem when Solomon dedicated it.

³ [Instead they were to wait for someone else, the Holy Spirit (**verses 1 and 4**). For he would only come after Jesus had gone, and then they could get on with their mission in the power he would give them].

Luke 24:50,51 adds the detail that Jesus *lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.*

As Jesus rises majestically heavenward their eyes are wide with astonishment, gazing as he rises until far aloft the cloud folds him in.

Not after the ascension, but while it was happening, two men appeared.

Acts 1:10 *They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.*

Luke calls them “men” because that’s how they appeared, but their shining dress and authoritative tone indicate they are indeed angels.

The ministry of angels to Jesus is recorded at several crucial moments in the gospel stories.

They announced the birth of Jesus.

After his temptation by Satan in the wilderness, angels came and attended him.

In the garden at Gethsemane, the night before he was crucified, an angel came and strengthened him.

“Two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning,” later identified as angels, proclaimed his resurrection to the women at the tomb.

So it is not surprising and altogether appropriate for angels to appear to interpret his ascension.

Acts 1:11 *“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*

The implication is that they won’t bring him back by gazing up into the sky. He will return in his own good time. “**This same Jesus**” indicates the his coming will be personal And “**in the same way**” indicates that his coming will also be visible and glorious. ⁴

⁴ We shouldn’t press “in the same way” into meaning that his return will be like a film of the ascension played backward, or that he will return to exactly

The angels are directing their attention to what was next on the agenda for them. They were called to be witnesses, not star gazers!

Their message stands as a good reminder to us. While we are naturally curious about heaven and its occupants, and interested in prophecy and its fulfillment, we must not let speculation about the future and obsession with “times and seasons” become distractions from our God given mission of reaching out with the gospel to a lost world.

While Luke is the only one who tells us how Jesus rose to heaven,⁵ there are many references to where Jesus is now, seated at the Father’s right hand. Behind all these references is **Psalm 110:1**,⁶ the most quoted Old Testament reference in the New Testament.

For example:

Colossians 3:1B *set your minds on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*

I Peter 3:22 *[Jesus Christ] who is gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*

Hebrews 8:1 *We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven*

Hebrews 10:12 *But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God*

the same spot or in the same clothes. There are also some important differences between his going and return. Only the eleven apostles saw him go, but when he comes again “every eye will see him.” Instead of returning alone, millions of holy ones – both humans and angels – will form his retinue. And in place of a localized coming all eyes will see him - it will be like lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other

⁵ Jesus had several times referred to his *ascending* to the Father (John 3:13; 6:62; 20:17) or *going* to the Father (John 7:38; 8:14,21; 13:33; 14:14; 16:5,10,17).

⁶ **Psalm 110:1** *The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”*

Hebrews 12:2b *For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Ephesians 1:20-21 . . . *he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given – not only in this age, but in the age to come.*

By now you have the answer to the question figured out. Where is Jesus? Jesus is seated in the position of ultimate honor at God's right hand.

From there his authority is extended over all things, including all the forces that could conceivably challenge Jesus. Those enemies aren't simply earthly authorities, but supernatural forces. These aren't mythological, but real entities. Once again Paul stacks up the words to make his point. Jesus' ascension and exaltation carried him far above anything else that can be conceived, not only in this but beyond this universe.

Vs. 21 – Five categories of powers are mentioned – rule, authority, power, dominion and title. While most of the terms are used in the Bible of both human and spiritual beings, Paul's emphasis appears to be on spiritual beings. The titles likely reflect the various degrees of spirit beings in the Jewish hierarchy of angels.

His intent is clear: whatever powers exist, human or nonhuman, they are all subject to Christ. Christ's victory is total and his authority unmatched. The powers are not in control. He is. Angels and spirits don't control your destiny – God does. Nb. He doesn't say Jesus is slightly above them – he is "far above" all of them.⁷

⁷ Jesus had humbled himself during his time on earth by taking on human flesh. He faithfully completed the Father's plan for salvation, **Philippians 2:9-11** *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* What the Son did not take advantage of in coming to earth, he now receives back. He no longer limits the use of all his divine attributes as he did during the state of humbling

Paul sums it up by saying **Ephesians 1:22** *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.*

"Under his feet" is a metaphor for victory over enemies. It is used of the winner of a duel, who places his foot on the neck of his enemy who has been thrown to the ground. It means everything is under Jesus' control. Doesn't stop there. Why did he do it? For whom did he do it?

. . . and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,

Jesus is not just taking a well deserved rest in heaven while they struggle here below, but is actively at work exercising his mighty, all-transcending power and authority.

I have no idea of everything the Son is doing in his exalted position as far as it relates to the universe, but I do know two things he is doing that relates to his followers, his church, which is his body..

1. Jesus is interceding for us.

Hebrews 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

I like the word "always." Our need is constant. Issues and problems of life, trials and temptations and troubles constantly bombard us from all directions. We need someone to stand in the gap for us.

Contrast my intercession for family and flock – flawed. Because of physical and mental and spiritual weakness it is intermittent intercession. My mind wanders, I grow weary, I become distracted, I am tempted, I disobey the Spirit's call to pray, I fall asleep.

Not so Jesus! Jesus' contact with the Father is ongoing, continual, unbroken. Day by day, hour by hour, year by year, century by century, and millennium by millennium – Jesus

himself. He now assumes again the full authority, and power and glory that he left.

continually intercedes for us! His support is available at every critical moment of your life.

Don't imagine that he is having to intercede before a hostile judge. No. The Father is not ill-disposed towards us. He is not reluctant to pardon us. The Father "*so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him might not perish, but have everlasting life*" **John 3:16**. The Son is the expression of the Father's love for us! He intercedes on our behalf at the Father's good pleasure. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in nature, in will, and in love.

Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26, 34) are the best and only intercessors we need.

Romans 8:33,34 *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

Romans 8:26 *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express*

To rely on angels or saints or any other intermediaries is not only futile, it betrays a lack of confidence in the adequacy of Christ as our intercessor.

2. Jesus is preparing our eternal home.

John 14:2 *In my Father's house are many rooms;⁸ if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.*

The disciples are confused and sad. Jesus has just told them that he's leaving, and they can't go with him this time.

Jesus assures him that his going is connected with his preparing a place for them; they aren't to think for a minute that he will forget them.

Don't you imagine that the "**dwelling places**" Jesus is preparing for us will be far beyond anything the best architects can dream of!

Focus with me for a minute on the words "**for you.**" Think what that means! He's fixing up your dwelling place with you in mind, particularly for you! These aren't mass produced, sterile, identical apartments he's putting together.

Have you ever decorated a room for someone special? If it's for your daughter you make it pretty - light pink paint on the walls, white furniture - maybe a four poster bed, frilly curtains, Disney princess bedspread, pretty pictures on the wall.

If it's for a boy you paint it blue, make a place to line up his cars and star wars figures, hang model airplanes from the ceiling and have a table for his trains. His bedspread is footballs or baseballs or spiderman.

If you're fixing up a room for Grandma you might include a place for her favorite books, her favorite chair - and maybe have it as far from the children's bedrooms as possible!

Do you think Jesus is going to take any less care for those whom he loves, and knows intimately, and will be spending eternity with him?

From filling them in on where he's going and what he'll be doing, Jesus proceeds to the certainty of his return.

John 14:3 *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

He **will** come back to take them to be with him. The Greek construction emphasizes purpose. He's not talking about some aimless sequence of events that somehow in the end will work out all right. He's speaking about a firm divine purpose.

It is God's plan that Jesus will come back in due time - why? "**So you also may be where I am.**"

Jesus doesn't give a description here about what it will be like in heaven, except to say that his followers will be where he is. Over the years Christians have made a big deal about harps, angels singing around the throne, crowns and rewards, and so forth. Those things may indeed be true, but the really important thing is that we will be with the Lord. Whatever else heaven may hold, the most wonderful part of it will be the fact that we will be with the Lord forever.

A question I am often asked by someone who is either close to death themselves, or has just lost someone close to them is: “*will we recognize each other in heaven?*” Short answer: “*Yes! The Word of God is explicit about our mutual recognition.*” But overshadowing that is the fact that we will see Jesus and enjoy him! Our reunion in heaven is first of all a spiritual and godly reunion, not just a huge family get-together! The topic of conversation with our loved ones won’t be centered on things like “*how have you been since I last saw you? What have you been up to? Hasn’t Susie grown?*” but will be about Jesus! What he’s done for us! What a joy it is to know him! How much we each love him!

To know I’m going to heaven, and that I’ll not see just my own family but the saints of all the ages is a wonderful thing, but more wonderful is the fact that I will see Jesus and be able to express to him the praise he deserves for having left this wonderful place called heaven to come to earth to make it possible for me to be there with him forever by dying in my place on the cross.

*“And we shall behold him, we shall behold him,
Face to face in all of his glory!
O we shall behold him, we shall behold him
Face to face, our Savior and Lord!”*

Jesus switches his attention from his destination to the path the disciples must take to get there.

John 14:4 *You know the way to the place where I am going.*

Through many stories and conversations, both public and private, Jesus had talked about the one way to get to heaven. He’s not announcing some new or different path now that the time has come for him to depart. It’s something they have heard about on many occasions, in many settings, with many analogies and words.⁹

⁹ E.g.: **John 3:3** - “*No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*” **John 3:16** “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*” **John 6** - after feeding loaves and fish to 5,000, **6:51** “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.*”

But Thomas is puzzled. Jesus has just said twice that they couldn’t come, and Thomas had an insurmountable mental block. If they didn’t know where he was going, how could they know how to get there?

John 14:5 *Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*

We should be grateful that he asked the question, because the answer that Jesus gave is clear and to the point. It blows away any fog of confusion we might be struggling with in our own minds about how to find God.

John 14:6 *Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

First he says he is “*the way.*”

Jesus isn’t just saying he teaches people the way, or points them in the right direction, but that he himself *is* the way. He was about to die on the cross to take away the guilt and punishment of our sins forever, making it possible for people to come to God.

All roads do not lead to God. This week during my private time with the Lord was reading **Matthew 7:13,14** “*Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*”

Scripture is clear that it’s not through our own efforts, our being “nice,” our acts of service, our good works, that we can be saved. Rather we are saved by God’s grace, because of what he’s done for us on the cross, dying in our place. We are “*born again*” or “*born anew*” or “*born from above*” when we confess our sins and believe in our hearts and confess with our lips that he is our Lord, our God, our Savior.

In **John 10** he talked about being the Good Shepherd and the door. **John 10:9** “*I am the gate [door], whoever enters through me will be saved.*” **John 10:27** “*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, no one can snatch them out of my hand.*”

Back on screen: Bruce won't read: John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

To his statement that he is the way he adds that he is the **"truth and life."**

Today there are many conflicting philosophies vying for our adherence and allegiance, competing for our money, our time, our minds, our very souls.

There are many voices crying, *"this is the way!" "This is the source of fulfillment!" "This will path will lead to happiness!" "This is truth."*

Max Lucado, in his book ***In the Grip of Grace*** (p. 31) tells about a man who lost his keys one night. He was looking all over them under the streetlight near his home. A friend happened by, asked what he was doing, and stopped to help him. After several minutes of fruitless searching the friend asked, *"now where exactly did you drop your keys?"*

"In the garage," replied the man.

The friend was incredulous. *"Then why in the world are you looking for them out here?"*

"Because the light is better out here," was the answer.

In our search for truth, it's important to be looking in the right place.

How can we make sure we're not following what is false, deceitful, in error, or a lie?

He doesn't say that he is just one truth among many realities, but that he is the ultimate and consummate reality, the root of what is and what was and what is yet to come. He is the point of origin for all that we can see, all that we can know, all that we can comprehend. All meaning comes from him.

The third thing Jesus says is that is **"the life."** He has said this before, telling Martha as she mourned her dead brother Lazarus that he was **"the resurrection and the life" John 11:25.**

As the one who is life, he has the ability to give life to others. **John 5:26 "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.**

The life that he gives - *"eternal life"* - is not available anywhere else.

How do you get it? By believing in Jesus. **John 11: 26 "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."**

Final question: Where are you going?

You're all nice people here today. I like you. If it was up to me, you'd all be in heaven with me some day. And if it was up to God, who *doesn't want anyone to perish* you'd be there.

But it's not up to me. It's not up to God. He's done his part. Now it's up to you. Have you decided whether or not to go there?

Is your reservation made, confirmed for your heavenly home? If so, you are able to face whatever happens in this life, singing in your heart, *"Because he lives, I can face tomorrow!"*