

In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.³ After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

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

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.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.” (NIV84)

Theme: What’s the big deal about Ascension?

1. It has to do with Christ’s life.
2. It has to do with our life.

Have you ever seen or done something and when it’s over you say to yourself, “That’s it? What’s the big deal?” It’s happening more and more to me lately—maybe it’s a sign that I’m getting old. Perhaps it was a song that everyone was raving about, or the hottest tv show, viral video, or the new summer blockbuster. Whatever it is, there was much hype about it and when you actually saw or did it or listened to it

you weren’t that impressed. And you come away asking yourself, “What’s the big deal?”

Perhaps some people say that about Christ’s ascension—that’s it’s not that big of a deal. But today we see that Christ’s ascension is a big deal. For it has to do with Christ’s life and it has to do with our life.

But it doesn’t seem like it’s a big deal to many. Most people, perhaps even many Christians have no idea that today is the day of ascension. Many of those that do know often don’t celebrate it. Most churches don’t even have a special service—not enough people show up so they celebrate the following Sunday. It just goes to show you that for many people Ascension isn’t that big of a deal. Perhaps you may even fall into the same thinking. Sure, you’re here today—but perhaps it’s simply because you come to every worshiped serve. You know it’s important, after-all we do mention it in the creeds. But is it really that important? And you may think to yourself, “What’s the big deal?” It was a big deal to Luke.

Not only does he mention it at the end of his gospel, he also talks about it again in the book of Acts. It was clearly something that was front and center in his mind. And on God’s as well. There is a reason why the Holy Spirit led Luke to write twice about this event. It is a big deal and he wants us to treasure it.

If there is one reason why Christ’s ascension should be a big deal it’s this: its part of Christ’s life. And an important one at that. When Luke mentions the ascension in his second book, he does so while going through a sort of summary of Christ’s life. In verse two he talks about how Christ taught the disciples. Then in passing he mentioned Christ’s suffering—a reference to his death on the cross which paid for our sins. Three days after his death he rose from the dead. And he made many convincing proof of his new life to his followers. Soon Jesus would leave his disciples, so he promised to send them the Holy Spirit. This would be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Then finally after 40 days, Christ ascended into heaven. He is gone—for now. But he won’t be gone forever. Angels appeared and said to the disciples, **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.** Jesus

will return to this earth to take all believers to live with him forever. Jesus' ascension is a big deal because it's part of his life. It is just as important as his death, resurrection, and return. Therefore it is a big deal.

Christ did all of these things that we just mentioned for us. He came down to this earth for our sake. It was for our sins that he suffered and died on the cross. It was so that we could have eternal life that he rose from the dead. He did them not because he had to, not because he had to save himself. But so that he could save us, for we can't do anything ourselves. And he also ascended for us. It was so that he could send his Holy Spirit. So that we may believe through the gospel. And through that gospel, our faith could be strengthened. It was so that he could rule over his creation. So that he could watch over us. He ascended into heaven to prove to us that he is God. Not only does the act of ascension—rising up to heaven, prove that he is God. After all, none of us can simply rise into the air until we are covered by a cloud. It must have been an amazing sight to see—something only God can do. But he also proves he is God by what he does know in heaven. Paul explains in Ephesians one. **(God) exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.** From his throne in heaven Jesus rules over all his creation. A creation that's his, because as God, he created the world.

So Christ's ascension is a big deal because it's a major part of Christ's life and Christ is a big deal. Through his ascension he proved that he is God and takes his spot at the throne of God ruling over all of his creation. But there is another reason why Christ's ascension is a big deal—it has to do with our life too.

At times in our lives we may feel as if we are all alone in this world. That no one is with us. We may feel as if we have to go through hardship by ourselves. Or that no one is on our side. Perhaps loved

ones have let us down or left us. Maybe it's financial problems or health issues. You are going through a hard stretch in your life. And you may wonder "where is God?" Why doesn't he watch over me and protect me? Where is he when I need him most?

Then we remember Christ's ascension and what he is doing up in heaven. He was watching over his creation. And that includes us—his Church. Nothing happens which he doesn't know and allow. He watches over us and protects us. He guards us against all our enemies. Christ, as God, has power over all things. So we don't have to worry. There is nothing to make us afraid. Jesus sees all and is able to protect us from all. Especially from attacks of the devil.

But we don't always notice that care and protection. We often have our doubt about it. And not just about the care and protection, but about Christ in general. What if what we believe is false? What if it's all made up—one big elaborate fable? We doubt, we wonder, we second guess. After all Jesus isn't here—how convenient, the devil tells us. He tries to convince that that he is not here because he never really existed.

Jesus knew that he would leave the disciples alone. He knew they would have their doubts. So he promised them the Holy Spirit. Jesus told them in verse 8, **you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.** This is the promise from the Father which Jesus mentioned in verse 4—it was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit brings us to faith and keeps us in the one true faith. Through the gospel he leads us to believe and not doubt God's Word. Through the Holy Spirit we are convinced in God's care and protection. We know that his Word is true. And so we know that we will live with him in heaven forever.

The Holy Spirit works only through the gospel. So in order for people to not doubt but believe, they need the gospel. That is where we come in. Jesus told his disciples that after he sends them the Holy Spirit, **you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.** They were to go throughout the world spread the gospel. Each gospel and here in the book of Acts we have a commission by Jesus to his disciples. He told them to spread to make disciples by spreading the gospel. Through the teaching of their words of the gospel and administering the sacrament

of Holy Baptism they made believers in Christ. They Holy Spirit worked faith into people's hearts. And they believed and didn't doubt his promises.

We can do the same thing—spread the Word of God. Like Luke we can summarize Christ's work and life. The forgiveness of sins and eternal life that he won for us. And don't forget Christ's ascension. And important part of Christ's life and ours. It is a big deal. For it assures us that he is God and our Savior. It reminds us of his care and protection. It leads us to look up to the sky and wait for his coming again. Amen.