The Ascension!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 January 2017

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0:00] So, we come to the book of Acts, and these first eleven verses of Acts are rather explosive, if we read them carefully and thoughtfully. They're volcanic in many ways. We can read them casually, but what is being spoken of here is really big truth. It's not incidental, it's not insignificant. What we have is really big truth being proclaimed here, and it's big truth because it speaks into the philosophy and thinking of an unbelieving world in which we live, which has classified and decided that Jesus is fable. Jesus at best is mixed myth. He is someone who lived a decent enough life and died a specific death, and his followers over time built up this great myth about who he was and what he could do. It's an explosive chapter and verses because it speaks into the philosophy of our day that we rub shoulders with all the time and on a daily basis, which says this is all that there is, just this life, just today, and it radically challenges that thinking. And I hope that also that is very topical for us, because we've heard a lot in these last few days and weeks and months about us entering a post-truth generation, a post-truth time, when really truth is indistinct, something that we can take or leave and make up and use and agree and disagree, and we've seen that politically and we've seen it socially and we've seen it in society in which we live.

A kind of Orwellian news speak where the media and politicians and others in power can simply say what they want and put it across as truth, and we're living in that volatile period of time when it's difficult, even because of the advances of social media and technology, to understand and know exactly what truth is. Where there are no absolutes, where there's nothing solid and nothing fixed, which may play into, as I said earlier, the anger and the frustration that is being birthed from that kind of philosophical standpoint.

So these few verses stand very much in contradiction to that and force us, I think, to think. Force us to consider and remind ourselves as Christians as well of the gospel and of the claims of Jesus Christ and of how we stand and how we live as Christians in the world, which we find ourselves. So can I first set the scene a little bit for the series and for this few verses? Because this is really, this book is about, is also about the life of Jesus.

It's the life of Jesus volume 2, because the writer of the gospel of Luke, as many of you know anyway, but many of you know also because we're studying on a Wednesday night and you did this on Wednesday, this is the second volume of Luke, a doctor Luke who wrote the gospel and then who now writes the second volume here, the sequel as it were. And it's very significant because between his volume 1 and volume 2, we have nearly a quarter of all the New Testament. So it's very important and very significant and interesting angle that we get from Doctor Luke on the life of Jesus Christ. What's the theme of his book here? Acts, Acts, sometimes called Acts of the Apostles. Well, his theme is Jesus, Jesus Christ. In the first book of theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach and this is him going on to speak about what Jesus continued to do through the church, through his people. And it's all about Jesus Christ. We read about that in Luke 24, we're calling read where we were told the significance of his life, of his death, of his resurrection and of his ascension. And here it's really the ongoing significance of that as people's lives are transformed and changed by the message of Jesus Christ and by the mission that he gives them here. And so the Acts of the Apostles is really about the church obeying what Jesus Christ and empowered by Jesus Christ to bring that message of good news and they changed the world and turned it upside down. That's what they did. 12 beleaguered, saddened, confused followers of Jesus at his death who meet him in his resurrection and who then become world beaters and ordinary unschooled men they were as well. And yet them and that community of believers, men and women together transformed the world radically, turned it upside down. So the theme is Christ and the purpose of his two volumes I think is really summed up I think in verse 4 of Luke chapter 1 verse 4 which says, it seemed good to me also to write an account to you most

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-07 08:30:23

excellently theophilus that you may have certainty concerning the things you've been taught. So it's kind of a double letter and it's written to theophilus who very probably was a Roman governor or someone in significance, most excellent he was. And he was either a follower of Jesus or one who was very interested in Jesus and had been listening to the teachings about
[6:31] Jesus. So Luke knew him and Luke wanted to give him an ordinary account of everything that happened with Jesus and his life and death and resurrection and ascension and to explain what was happening so that he might have real certainty. So he wanted theophilus and it becomes God's word. It is God's word that we have here. It's included in scripture and it is what God wants all of us to know about Jesus Christ so that we can believe and have certainty about him and that's very important for us in these very uncertain days in which we live. So Luke is clearly seeking to bring certainty by thorough investigation of the life and work of Jesus Christ. He says that, I've undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us just as those who from the beginning were eyewitness and ministered the word and delivered to. It seemed good to me to write an orderly account. So here is Dr Luke. He's an educated and he's a cultured individual and he has taken maybe 20 or so years after, 25 years after the death of Christ to look at all the facts to meet with and to interview all the eyewitnesses, hundreds of eyewitnesses to these accounts and to bring all these accounts together and to investigate them and to correct them and to corroborate them and once he had written, these guys were all still alive so they would have been able to read what he said and they would say, wait a minute, that's not quite right there. No, I was there. I was there and that didn't happen quite that day. You'll need to change that. So it was an orderly and educated and certain historical factual account and that immediately to us and for us, and for us as we defend our faith in Jesus Christ is a challenge to those who will just shrug their shoulders and say, well,

Jesus is just a legend. It's just kind of myth. It's just symbolic stories about a good man and we can just follow and try and live like he lived. Wishful thinking on the behalf of poor and intellectually weakened individuals who need this crutch. Luke makes clear that that's not what he has done, that he has compiled an eyewitness historically voracious account of the life of Jesus Christ and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, either he was entirely delusional or he was a wicked liar and if he's a wicked liar, then we need to ask the question to what ends would he have done that and we need to consider what he is claiming here to have produced for us. Whatever else we do, whatever else we must do, we must recognize that historically his account given here has been accepted by historians throughout the centuries and is an accurate account with eyewitnesses of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. That's a challenge. If you're not a believer today, it's a challenge and I would ask you to consider the teaching and the claims, not just of Jesus but of the Gospel writer here in this account. So, that's very briefly setting the scene. Why he's speaking of here and I think that's very important for us to remember and remind ourselves of is transcendent reality. What do I mean by that? When we have this first eleven verses, transcendent simply means surpassing the range of normal human experience. So, that's what we have in the first eleven verses. We don't often hear in our normal human experience of resurrection and certainly not of ascension and definitely not of angels. So, what we have here in these first eleven verses is transcendent reality. It is molded in historical reality and there are clear eleven historical verses but they are speaking of transcendent reality. Now, as believers, we accept the transcendence. We accept that reality and I hope that there's at least twitches of transcendence in our worship when we gather together. There's a sense of what is surpassing the range of normal human experience but just because it surpasses the range doesn't immediately negate its significance and value and these passages, these verses speak of transcendent reality and it speaks particularly of three transcendent realities that we believe in as Christians and that are the foundation of our faith and that are a challenge to share with those who don't believe because it's all connected with the good news in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The first is the resurrection. In verse three we're told Jesus, he met with his disciples and he presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And also chapter 24 speaks about the fact that Jesus Christ taught that he would die and then on the third day rise again for repentance and forgiveness of sin. Sin's it that should be proclaimed. Now that's a stunning transcendent reality. It's that Jesus Christ claimed to be
God who claimed to be the Messiah and to whom all the Old Testament scriptures pointed towards came with the specific purpose of dying and then on the third day being raised from the dead. He

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-07 08:30:23

came because he taught and spoke of and declared and explained death in a spiritual way, saying it was a spiritual sentence that it was a spiritual judgment against humanity and against our rebellion of God. And he says that it's because we've fallen short of the glory of God and we sin against God and rebel against God, we are left with this death sentence which we can't pay. We can't make ourselves right with God, we can't reach up to God, we can't make ourselves spiritually alive and relate to God. And so he says he comes to take our sentence and to pay the price by the author of life dying on the cross, offering us in his resurrection that seal of victory that he's defeated the power of death and paid the price for us, offering us forgiveness and eternal life.
And a healed relationship with God by his great gift and vertically, vertically, not very good at maths, vertically with God and horizontally beginning to put right relationships with one another as we love God and love one another. And the physical resurrection is a real seal of that and it's really important, you know, many people will say, well it doesn't really matter, it's just kind of symbolic, symbolic resurrection. Not so. The physical resurrection of Jesus which reminds us that as the author of life death couldn't hold him and that the work he had done was successful and victorious and accepted by God, the physical resurrection is our hope of physical resurrection and our hope that death is not the end. And you see what Luke says here, he says it very consistently and significantly that he appeared himself to them many times offering what many proofs that he was alive, that he had risen from the dead and to give them confidence and certainty. And that was really important for the founders of the New Testament church. It transformed their lives so that their Savior was no longer a dead and buried and gone Savior who from whom all hope was drained from them when he died but rather on the third day he rose and met with them. Now you could spend the rest of life speaking about the resurrection, all I want to say is to remind us that death doesn't have the final word. It's not simply a spoke in the cycle of life, it's not simply the end of life for us in a naturalistic way but death for us doesn't have the final word.
[15:54] Death in Christ's measure and understanding for us is a judicial sentence so it has a spiritual dimension, speaks of our rebellion but that he has come to pay the price for us because we can't and to offer us life and hope. So the judge as it were becomes the judged because of his great love for us. He moves from the throne room into the box where he is pronounced guilty on our behalf. So Christ is the answer to death. So the resurrection is a transcendental truth that's hugely significant here but also so is the ascension. I actually don't talk about the ascension very much even in church and verses 9 to 11 speak about that. In fact so does Luke 24 so it's repeated, Luke repeats it in Luke 24 but also he ends one volume with it and then he begins the next volume with the ascension and he speaks about it in verses 9 to 11 he says we're told that when he said these things they were looking he was lifted up a cloud took him out of their sight and whether we're gazing into heaven behold two men stood by them white robes and men of Galilee why do you stand here looking into heaven as Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you see him go. So we have this very transcendent account of a physical human being as God who is God physically ascending from them into heaven. The significant events of Jesus life his birth his death his resurrection and his ascension are all accompanied by angelic presence. They're there at these significant times in his life and he moves into a different phase as it were of his being of his lordship and he moves from his earthly work having finished to sitting at the right hand of the father where he reigns over life and over death in his spiritual kingdom and power. And that's a hard truth for us to take and it's a hard truth for us to understand we accept it by faith and it's absolutely transcendent but the reality for us and this is all I want to say at this point is that there's more than just the material world isn't there? We know that death doesn't have the final word. We also know that there's more than just the material world more than just what we can measure and see. We know there's a spiritual reality and a spiritual realm we know there's there's heaven and I think deep down we all know that even if we don't accept or believe Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior we all know there's something more and we recognize that. I think many people are simply winging it in the hope that when they die they'll get to heaven in the hope that God will just be gracious to them and be kind and we'll accept them. Many people winging it and living as if all there is is the material world but somewhere deep down hanging on and winging it and hoping that when they die they'll go to that great place called heaven. That's a great gamble to take when Jesus Christ has revealed that he is the way the truth in the life no man comes to the Father but through him and that it's in his ascension and in believing in all that lies behind his ascension and all his claims about our need for a Savior and need for salvation that we can know that he breaks the path for us, he opens the door and as we follow him we also know eternal life.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-07 08:30:23

So it's a great transcendent truth that sometimes we're uncomfortable with and sometimes we'd rather just submerge and many of us and also as Christians sometimes we live our lives as if there's nothing else. We live our lives as if today's all that matters, that our ambition and our career and our family and our future is in this life is all that matters and yet Luke reminds us and God reminds us that we live in the light of eternity and we live in the light of this life being actually incredibly short and consider this resurrected physical ascended Savior who is in heaven wherever and whatever that is and looks like and that he will return because that is what the angels say here. He will return to usher in a new heavens and a new earth, no time to speak about that today. And then lastly and briefly we also have the third transcendent truth here. So you've got resurrection, you've got ascension but you've also got the divine presence. In verse 8 Jesus is speaking to them and said you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of all the earth. So we have this third transcendent truth which is the presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit. For every believer we know that to be the case. We know that when God speaks and teaches and
God's purpose and pattern was that he returned, you know the end of John's gospel speaks all about that, that he knew what was happening and he said he would return to the Father but he would not leave his orphans, he would send his Holy Spirit so that better than having Jesus sit beside you physically which sometimes we would long for, he says I'm actually going to send my Spirit to live inside you, to dwell with you, to bring you spiritual life.
So physically he left but spiritually he promises more, he promises the divine presence in our lives for all who put our faith and trust in Jesus. Who will come in and dwell with us we're told, the Emanuel principle. We sing about the birth of Jesus, that Jesus comes in and he dwells with us, he lives in our lives by his Spirit. God breathes spiritual life into us so that each of us as believers are moved or as the Bible terminologies we were born again, we start afresh and where we were rebels against God we become one people who have a heart to love God and to love one another and the way we were created to do. He breathes that spiritual life into us so that we love him and worship him and we can't worship him here today without his Spirit and that's why it's so significant to know and to remember that. Yes it's transcendent, undoubtedly transcendent but yes we were also created for that. We were created to be in relationship with God and to have his Spirit in our lives in this remarkable way, forgiveness of our sins. Now he gives a sign of that. He gives a sign of this baptism in the Holy Spirit and it's the water baptism that we will be doing today.
That is a symbol, it's a sign of what God does in our lives. The water being poured out is a sign of the Spirit being poured out. It's a sign of the cleansing from our sins that we receive. It's a sign of his great work in our lives, the symbol of that and his command is that this sacrament is obeyed by all who come to Christ, all who believe in Christ are baptized. It's a badge of belonging to Jesus Christ. It's a sign for every believer and in the purpose and pattern of God and his covenant keeping model and structure it is the sign of the promise that is given not only to believers but to their children. It's a symbol of this covenant keeping God who says I will work in families, I will work in communities, I will keep my promises that as we seek to educate and teach and pray for and lead and guide and be an example to our children that this great promise of my work will be fulfilled in their lives. A reminder that he works in covenant, he works in family, he works in community, the sign given to families and the faith of parents for their children and the promises that they hold on to God will do for them and in them and through them.
[24:55] The symbol, the sign of baptism for children is not spooky, it's not mysterious in the level of being sacramental and bringing salvation to that child. It is not salvivic at that point at that level. It is a symbol of the promises and the covenant and the work of God who spreads his gospel through the generations, the God of community where truth is generationally passed down. It's a great challenge, it's a great responsibility, it's a great hope that we have for our children and John and Kim, parents who believe in Christ and who have that great privilege and great responsibility and we are all part of that, we are all involved in that today. So as we reflect and as we come towards the baptism, there are just two things

I want to finish with here. First, to remind ourselves that the Bible, the gospel, these 11 verses are a huge challenge to the secular philosophical underpinning thoughts of the society in which we live, which says this is all that there is. Now we might shrug it and say well that's what society believes, we don't care, but we should care. We should care for them and we should care for ourselves and our thinking because we can easily drift into that philosophical mindset just living for today and

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-07 08:30:23

forgetting the transcendence that belongs to the gospel. Just because it's transcendent doesn't mean it can be rubbished. This is the mixture of factual, historical, voracious accounts that are given by Luke that speak of transcendent reality of death, resurrection, ascension and divine presence. I think we all need to look deep into our souls and recognise our souls and recognise who we are and in whose image we are made and the claims of Christ and the absolute nature of Him as truth against the thinking of our day in society where it says all truth is relative, it just happens to be whatever truth you want to believe. Jesus stands above that and says, oh I'm God and I came into the world once but I came for everyone because I am truth and I am life and therefore I would ask if you're not a believer today at least please don't dismiss the gospel lightly. Don't just throw it away like a sweetie wrapper or the day's newspaper, please consider the gospel and the challenges of the transcendent truths are spoken of here. And also as Christians we recognise that transcendent truth and that's very important because what Jesus taught here and I think you spoke about that on Wednesday night very much that He taught them, Luke 24 tells us all that He taught

His disciples foundationally but He also said you need the spirit, you need the Holy Spirit. So He made this amazing balance didn't He which He also spoke to the Samaritan women about and which I think Coriel will be preaching on tonight is that spirit and truth must dovetail together in our Christianity and in our worship and in our lives. He taught that, He said yes you need to know the facts and the truths of that are very significant but you also need the Holy Spirit to interpret and to use and to bring life to us and therefore that ongoing pattern in our Christian lives is prayer and the word. We need the word, we need the truth but we need the prayer, we need to ask God for the spirit to enliven us and to teach us and to enable us to worship so we're not just eggheads, far from it, we can't just be eggheads, if I can't be, we shouldn't be eggheads at all. We should be people who are humbly come under the truth and that is revealed and we require and need humbly the Holy Spirit of God to bring it to us and we testify, we have a work to do.

This is the ongoing work of Jesus through His people was to tell the world about Him, to witness to Him, to recognise that this is our mission as a church and we're going to look through acts with that perspective, our mission, our work, that we are a people, God works through us, we're a gathered community, that we are planting churches, that we are seeking to reach out with the gospel and what we do has huge transcendent significance which is great. So we don't want to be affinitiated, don't want to be spiritual geeks, okay? Verse 11 speaks about them at the end in the chapter of the disciples gawking up towards heaven as Jesus disappears and the angels kind of gently rebuke them saying well what are you standing there looking into heaven as Jesus who's gone up will return the same way as you've gone and remind the angels, remind them of the teaching. So don't misunderstand, don't be standing gawking up towards heaven as Christians in some kind of sermon tasting way or in some kind of seminar, being a seminar hound and always just wanting to know and never coming to an understanding of the truth. Don't be theology gawkers which is just swilling about in truth but never allowing that truth to radicalise and change the way we think and the way we live and to humbly live in love and in humility and in grace and in service of others because Christ is coming back. Amen, let's pray. Father God, help us to understand your truth. May your spirit take it in the darkness often of our understanding and bring us light and help us today we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-07 08:30:23