

REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 89: "THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD JESUS"

LUKE 24:50-53

Ps. Eric Yee

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone! If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

Today, after 89 sermons through the Gospel of Luke together, we are finally finished our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus." Praise the Lord!

Next week, we'll begin a new sermon series called "The Day of the Lord," where we'll go through the Book of Joel together.

But as we finish Luke's Gospel account today, today's sermon is titled: "The Ascension of the Lord Jesus."

Prayer of Invocation

I'll pray for us again before we jump in.

<Prayer>

Sermon Introduction

How do you usually find the words "bless" or "blessed" or "blessing" used in our everyday?

- People say "bless you" to other when they sneeze.
- People write "GBU" in their messages to say, "God Bless You."
- People tag "#blessed" on their social media posts.
- Or for Christians in particular, perhaps they end their emails with "blessings" before signing their name.

But what do all these terms of "blessing" *really* mean?

Admittedly, it's a pretty loaded term even in the Bible, which we'll begin to unpack throughout today's sermon.

But for now, in the most general sense, we need to understand that there's a huge difference in meaning when the Bible says, "God blessed them" (Gen. 1:28) and when God's people say, "I will bless the Lord" (cf. Ps. 145:1-2; Neh. 9:5; Luke 1:64).

When the *Lord* blesses his people, he conveys a gift to them; he gives them something. But when his *people* bless God, they *respond* to God in praise and thanksgiving for the blessing (or gift) they received from him.¹

It's a reciprocal call and response kind of thing going on.² God divinely blesses (or gives) to his people, and his people respond by blessing (or praising and thanking) God for what they have received from him.

The One Thing

The Lord Jesus blesses us in order that we may bless him.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 24:50-53.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

These are the last four verses of Luke's Gospel account.

And throughout his Gospel account, Luke has been showing us again and again *who* Jesus is through his authoritative teaching and his miraculous signs.

And Luke closes his entire Gospel account by definitively revealing *who* the risen Jesus is as he physically ascended into heaven and as his disciples worshiped him as God in temple.

Scripture Reading

So let's read Luke 24:50-53 (ESV)

⁵⁰ And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in two parts.

- I. The Lord Jesus blessed his disciples (vv. 50-51)
- II. His disciples blessed the Lord Jesus (vv. 52-53)

¹ W. J. Cameron and G. W. Knight, III, "Bless, Blessed, Blessing," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 162.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

I. The Lord Jesus blessed his disciples (vv. 50-51)

So far, everything else in Luke 24 has happened on Easter Sunday...

- the women finding the empty tomb and encountering the two angels there,
- the women testifying to the apostles and their disbelief,
- Peter checking out the empty tomb for himself,
- the risen Jesus walking with two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, interpreting all the Scriptures in terms of himself,
- those two disciples returning to Jerusalem to testify to the other disciples that the Lord Jesus has indeed risen and finding other disciples saying the same thing,
- the physical Jesus suddenly appearing in the room with his disciples, talking and eating fish in front of them, and opening their minds to understand the Scriptures in terms of his death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins of all who repent and believe in him—and how they are his witnesses who are to proclaim that good news to all nations, but they are to first wait for the promised Holy Spirit that he will send to empower them.

All of that happens on Easter Sunday.

Now, look at verses 50-51.

[⁵⁰ And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.]

Suddenly, with the word “And” in verse 50, Luke jumps 40 days ahead, and he chooses to end his Gospel account with the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1:3).

<pause>

Jesus leads his disciples out to Bethany, which was a village on the Mount of Olives about 3 kilometers from Jerusalem (Acts 1:12; John 11:1, 18).

The last time we saw Jesus on the Mount of Olives, he was in great *agony* as “his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground” as he prayed through the night and voluntarily *chose* to submit to suffering for the sake of sinners (Luke 22:39-46).

And now, on the other side of his crucifixion and resurrection in the place of sinners, *after* he has *accomplished* salvation for all who repent and believe in him, he is back at the Mount of Olives.

Before, he was enduring the agony of hellish suffering; now he is to ascend to heavenly glory.

Before, he faced the prospect of the cup of God’s wrath; now, he faces the prospect of the crown of God’s throne.

And not only would the Mount of Olives be the place where Jesus would be carried up into heaven, but around 500 years before the first coming of Christ, the prophet Zechariah prophesied that the Lord would have his feet touch down on the Mount of Olives when he returned in judgment in his second coming (Zech. 14:4).

So the Mount of Olives was a special place for Jesus and his disciples. But they would remember it not only because of Jesus' agony or ascension or fulfillment of Scripture, but they would also personally remember it as the place where Jesus spoke his last words to them.

We know these were Jesus' last words because he spoke them while he was being carried up into heaven. And what were those last words? All Luke tells us here is that they were words of *blessing*.

Jesus lifted up his hands and he blessed them.

Here, Jesus is acting as high priest of his people.

When Aaron was installed as the first high priest of Israel, he "lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them" (Lev. 9:22). And his famous benediction is one **that we read earlier in our service / that many are familiar with**: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace" (Num. 6:24-26).

In the Old Testament, the blessing of the high priest came after the sacrifice of atonement, and it was meant to assure God's people that their sins were indeed forgiven.

So in the same way, when Jesus lifted up his hands to bless his disciples after he had given himself as the once-for-all sacrifice to reconcile sinners to God, it was meant to assure them that their sins were indeed forgiven.

And that helps us to understand one of the key meanings for what it means to be blessed by God. It means to have his *relational* favor.

We were once deserving of nothing but his punishment for our sins against him, but through faith in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf, we have forgiveness of sins and are now reconciled with God. We have his acceptance and approval.

According to the New Testament, to be blessed by God is *not* about enjoying a beautiful vacation or having a loving family, a nice house, a good job, and a comfortable life (#blessed), but it is first and foremost about being in right relationship with God.

Consider these passages:

- "Blessed are the poor in spirit.... Blessed are those who mourn.... Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake... Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:3-4, 10-11).
- "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28)
- "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin" (Rom. 4:7-8; cf. Ps. 32:1-2)"
- "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial" (James 1:12).
- "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.... Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 14:13, 19:9).

In these passages, blessing is *not* connected to a material prosperity or a comfortable life, but blessings are linked with poverty, trials, obedience, forgiveness, character, and ultimately all the spiritual good we have in Christ.

It is primarily *relational* rather than *circumstantial*. It is to know that no matter what, by faith in Christ, we have the acceptance and approval of God.

In our culture, that's probably very odd, but we still have a glimpse of that understanding of "blessing" when it comes to seeking marriage. Oftentimes, before a man is to be engaged with a woman, he first approaches the woman's father and asks for his "blessing" before he proposes to the woman.

He's not asking for the father's money or some other material gift, but he's asking for the father's relational favor. He wants the father's acceptance and approval of him as a worthy husband to his daughter.

And it's not mere *tolerance* that he's asking for either. It wouldn't satisfy the man to hear from the father, "Well, I don't like you, but my daughter does, so I'll tolerate you as a son-in-law." That's not really giving his relational favor or blessing to the marriage. "To tolerate somebody is, by definition, to disapprove of them, albeit in a rather passive way."³

This kind of blessing runs much deeper than any material or temporal comfort or circumstance.

Like Job, all our material comforts can be stripped away in a moment. Your health may fail you. Your family may fall apart. Your friends may leave you. Your company may collapse. Your money may be stolen. Your freedom may be taken.

If blessings are merely about the comfortable life, then they are some of the most *fragile* of blessings. But as Christians, the rock-solid blessing that we have is Christ himself—our God gives us himself. And because he has given us himself in Christ, we now forever have his relational favor by faith in Christ alone, regardless of the circumstances.

- In Christ, we who were once enemies of God are now his friends.
- In Christ, we who were once deserving of God's wrath are now adopted as his children and given an eternal inheritance.
- In Christ, we who were cut off from God by our sin have now been reconciled to him and have access to him as "Our Father."

When we have the relational favor, the acceptance and approval, the eternal love of our God by faith in Christ, we no longer have the *need* to find such "blessings" in other material or temporal comforts or circumstances.

In fact, the opposite in Scripture seems to be true. God's blessing toward us is "anything [he] gives that makes us fully satisfied in him."⁴ His blessing is anything that pushes us deeper into finding satisfaction in our *relationship* with him.

In 2011, Laura Story came out with a song called "Blessings" that helps us understand this better. Here are some of the lyrics of the song.

We pray for blessings
 We pray for peace
 Comfort for family, protection while we sleep
 We pray for healing, for prosperity
 We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering
 And all the while, You hear each spoken need

³ Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 143, Kindle.

⁴ Vaneetha Rendall Risner, "What Does It Really Mean to Be #Blessed?" April 28, 2016, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-does-it-really-mean-to-be-blessed>.

Yet love is way too much to give us lesser things

[...]

'Cause what if your blessings come through raindrops?
 What if Your healing comes through tears?
 And what if the thousand sleepless nights
 Are what it takes to know You're near?

What if my greatest disappointments
 Or the aching of this life
 Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy
 And what if trials of this life
 The rain, the storms, the hardest nights
 Are Your mercies in disguise?⁵

Now, this biblical understanding of Jesus *blessing* his disciples as he ascended to heaven was extremely important because they were about to face intense persecution for the rest of their lives, as they lived out and proclaimed the good news of forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith in Christ to all nations.

And so, they needed to know that his blessing is *not* primarily circumstantial but relational.

<pause>

So first, to be blessed by God is his *relational favor*; and second, it also includes his *missional purpose*.

In creation, the very first words that God spoke to mankind were words of blessing, but they were also accompanied with words of commissioning; Genesis 1:28 says, “And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and full the earth and subdue it.”

A few chapters later, after man fell into sin, God chooses Abraham and said to him in Genesis 12, “I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2-3).

And even the Aaronic blessing that we heard earlier is combined with words of commissioning; in Psalm 67, it says, “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations” (Ps. 67:1-2).

And here, in Luke 24, Jesus’ words of blessing are closely connected to his commissioning, “... repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things... stay in the city *until* you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:47-49).

The blessing of God is always related to his missional purpose. In other words, he doesn’t just give us his relational favor so that we can continue living aimlessly or selfishly for ourselves, but his blessing ought to reorient our lives to live for his purpose—his mission.

Jesus blessed his disciples so that they would go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:20; Acts 1:8).

⁵ “Blessings,” track 5 on Laura Story, *Blessings*, INO Records, 2011.

<pause>

Now, I want us to know that the benediction that we give at the end of every Sunday Celebration is not just something we do “just because,” but it is significant because Jesus’ last words to his disciples as he ascended into heaven were words of blessing.

In the benediction, “the minister acts on behalf of God in pronouncing a blessing upon the congregation.”⁶ I or someone else will stand here, lift up our hands and pronounce God’s blessing upon his people, usually the benediction from the end of 2 Corinthians: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14). It is a pronouncement of God’s relational favor for his people.

But that benediction is soon followed with words of commissioning, whether that’s “HMCC, you are now sent out to transform the world” or some other words that commission us out as his disciples to go and make disciples.

Again, we don’t do that “just because,” but because that’s what we see in Scripture. God’s relational favor and his missional purpose always go hand-in-hand.

So as you hear the benediction and commissioning at the end of Sunday Celebration today and in the weeks to come, remember that these are not empty words but this is pronouncing upon us the same blessing and commissioning that Jesus left his disciples with as he ascended into heaven.

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But let me make clear that the benediction is not something that is magical or automatic—that if you someone just open up your hands, you’ll catch blessings from God.

No, just like baptism and the Lord’s Supper are meaningless apart from faith, the benediction does not operate apart from faith. God’s blessing of relational favor—the forgiveness of sins, his acceptance and approval, and the permanent status as his adopted children with an eternal inheritance—is only received through faith in Christ. And his missional purpose to make him known can only be meaningfully lived out by those who know him through Christ.

So, if you’ve grown up in the church, do not mistake yourself as someone who is automatically included in God’s blessing just because your parents are believers, or because you’re here each week, or for any other reason apart from personal faith in Christ as your Lord and Savior.

For those who are here today who are not believers in Jesus Christ, we long for you to be *included* into the family of God, and so we want you to know that God’s blessing of relational favor and his missional purpose is only for those who trust in Jesus as their substitute sacrifice, their risen King, and their one and only God whom they love and live for.

I pray that you would repent of your sins and trust in the Lord Jesus today.

<pause>

So first, the Lord Jesus blessed his disciples in his ascension to heaven; and second...

⁶ E. F. Harrison, “Benediction,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 133

II. His disciples blessed the Lord Jesus (vv. 52-53)

Look at verses 52-53.

[⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.]

So after Jesus blessed his disciples and ascending into heaven, his disciples **worshiped** him, they were filled with **great joy**, and they were continually in the temple **blessing** God.

Now, these three concepts of worship, great joy, and blessing God are all related.

“**Worship** is our *response* to what we value most.”⁷

And when we **bless** God, we *respond* to God in praise and thanksgiving for the blessing (or gift) we’ve received from him.⁸

And here, **great joy** is that response of praise and thanksgiving to God for the blessing we’ve received from him.

So all three of these concepts of worship, great joy, and blessing God are closely related.

<pause>

Still, the circumstance is that Jesus has “*parted* from them,” so it’s actually very *odd* that Jesus’ disciples would respond with “great joy” after the departing of their beloved Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Imagine that a loved one was leaving you—a spouse, a parent, a sibling, a close friend—and you knew that you would never again see them in your lifetime. Would you not respond with great sadness? Or at the very least, you would *not* respond with “great joy.”

And in fact, when Jesus previously told his disciples that he was leaving them, their hearts were indeed filled with *sorrow* (John 16:5-6; cf. 14:28).

But now, after 40 days with the risen Jesus (Acts 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:5-8), after having their minds opened to understand all the Scriptures in light of Jesus (Luke 24:27, 45), the disciples now recognize who Jesus truly is—that he is God himself.

And the disciples “worshiped” him.

This is the first time Luke speaks of anyone worshiping Jesus. Luke rarely uses the language of “worship,” and when he does, it is worship of God alone (Luke 4:8). People had earlier fallen at Jesus’ feet at different points (Luke 5:8, 12; 8:28, 41, 47; 17:16), but this is the first time in Luke’s Gospel account where *Jesus* is the object of worship—where *Jesus* received the worship that *God* alone is worthy of.⁹

⁷ Louie Giglio, *The Air I Breathe: Worship as a Way of Life* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Multnomah, 2003), 2.

⁸ W. J. Cameron and G. W. Knight, III, “Bless, Blessed, Blessing,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 162.

⁹ James R Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP, 2015).

So when Jesus said, “I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away” (John 16:6), they truly believe that it is *better* for them that Jesus physically departs from them. They believe that Jesus’ ascension is actually for their *benefit*.

Now, how could that really be the case?

How many of us would rather have the physical Jesus right before our eyes?

But if you think about that, that could never be the case for everyone everywhere, for Jesus was not only fully God but also fully man. And therefore, he could only ever be at one place at time. He could not be physically before us and at every other local church each Sunday.

But by physically ascending into heaven, Jesus promised that he would send the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; John 16:7). And *by* the Holy Spirit, Jesus could say to his disciples, “And behold, *I* am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20), for “where one of the persons of the blessed Trinity is, the other two are there in him.”¹⁰ And it is *by* the Holy Spirit that we can say, “It is no longer I who live, but *Christ* who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

Jesus would no longer be physically present to walk with his disciples and suddenly appear physically in the room with them as he had been doing in the last 40 days, but as the disciples saw their Lord and Savior physically ascend into heaven, they could now have an even more intimate relationship with him *by* the Holy Spirit who would indwell each of them (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19).

No other relationship can get more intimate than *Christ*, *by* the Holy Spirit, living *within* you.

And so, the disciples were beginning to grasp what Jesus’ ascension meant.

<pause>

Now Jesus didn’t just ascend into heaven like the prophet Elijah did (2 Kings 2:1-12), but he ascended into heaven *as God* to sit at the right hand of the Father.

Regarding his ascension, Jesus prayed, “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (John 17:5; cf. John 16:10, 28; 20:17). Yet, we know that God does not share his glory with anyone else but himself (Isa. 42:8).

So here, as Jesus is exalted to the right hand of the Father, we see again that he shares in the same glory and he exercises the same authority and dominion over heaven and earth with God the Father *as God the Son* himself.

And this is exactly what Jesus said would happen earlier during his trial: “But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God” (Luke 22:49).

And this was in fulfillment to Scripture in Psalm 110:1, which says, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’”

¹⁰ Douglas F. Kelly, “The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper” (Lecture, Ecclesiology & Sacraments from Reformed Theological Seminary), <https://subsplash.com/reformtheosem/lb/mi/+0b1e767> (accessed September 20, 2018). This concept is known as perichoresis, circumincession, mutual indwelling, or co-inherence. See also John 5:17; 14:18, 23; 17:21.

And this passage of Psalm 110:1, which talks about the ascension of the Lord Jesus is *the most* quoted or alluded to Old Testament passage in the New Testament.¹¹ That means that the disciples *treasured* his ascension and continued to come back to it again and again for great comfort and great joy and great motivation as they continued to make disciples of all nations.

When faced with opposition, the disciples declared, “We must obey God rather than men” because “The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. *God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior*, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:29-31).

Christ is not idly sitting in heaven as his disciples labor on mission, but he is actively their Leader ruling in the midst of his enemies,¹² and his disciples are ultimately accountable to him more than any other earthly authority.

From the right hand of the Father, Christ sent the promised Holy Spirit not only for the experience of relational intimacy but also to empower his people to proclaim the gospel to all nations (Luke 24:45-51; Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4, 33).

From the right hand of the Father, Christ always lives to make intercession for his people to save us to the uttermost—to persevere in faith and making him known until the very end (Heb. 7:25).

Christ will one day return to destroy every opposing authority and power, having all his enemies put under his feet, including death itself, but until then, he reigns from his ascended heavenly position (1 Cor. 15:23-27; Heb. 10:13).

With Christ now being seated at the right hand of God, his disciples are also to live with anticipation of his imminent return, coming on the clouds of heaven in final judgment (Matt. 26:63-64; Mark 14:61-62).

And if his people endure to the end by his grace, Christ says, “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. 3:21).

<pause>

Now, going back, we can see why the disciples responded with “great joy” at Jesus’ ascension.

They’re beginning to grasp what Jesus’ ascension means for them.

In the ascension of the Lord Jesus to heaven...

- Christ is now sovereignly reigning over the entire cosmos.
- His disciples can experience the greatest relational intimacy with Christ by the Holy Spirit, who also empowers them to live out their mission to make disciples of all nations.

¹¹ Martin C. Albl (“*And Scripture Cannot Be Broken*”: *The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections*, NovTSup 96 [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 217-218) and George H. Guthrie (“Hebrews,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 943) both note twenty-two quotations or allusions to Psalm 110:1 in the NT; Alex Stuart and Alex Costea (“Psalm 110:1: A Neglected Theological Foundation for Mission in the New Testament,” *Jurnal Teologic* 18, no. 1 [2019]: 36) note at least twenty-four; James Montgomery Boice (*Psalms 107–150: An Expository Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005], 892) notes at least twenty-seven; David M. Hay (*Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, SBLMS 18 [Nashville: Abingdon, 1973], 163-166) notes thirty-three.

¹² Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 619, Kindle) writes: “The fact that Jesus now sits at the right hand of God in heaven does not mean that he is perpetually ‘fixed’ there or that he is inactive. He is also seen as standing at God’s right hand (Acts 7:56) and as walking among the seven golden lampstands in heaven (Rev. 2:1). Just as a human king sits on his royal throne at his ascension to the kingship, but then engages in many other activities throughout each day, so Christ sat at the right hand of God as a dramatic evidence of the completion of his redemptive work and his reception of authority over the universe, but he is certainly engaged in other activities in heaven as well.”

- They are sustained to the end by Christ's intercession for them.
- And they eagerly await Christ's return to execute final judgment and bring about the consummation of all things where they will reign with him in the new heavens and new earth.

For the disciples, it wasn't just what Jesus *did* for them in his death and resurrection, but it was what Jesus was *continuing* to do for them as he currently reigns in heaven that gave them such confidence and joy.

And so, they "were *continually* in the temple blessing God" because Jesus was *continually* blessing them through his ongoing ministry from his ascended heavenly position at the right hand of the Father.

I know that's a lot to take in, but I want us to know that the early disciples never forgot the ascension of the Lord Jesus, but they found it to be a source of great confidence and joy, especially amidst hardships, as they continued to make disciples of all nations.

<pause>

So what about us? Let me suggest just three implications.

First, we are not alone.

[Three implications:

1. We are not alone.]

We all desire relational intimacy. In just the second chapter of Genesis, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). So we know that it's not good to be alone, and I think we only become more and more aware of that as we get older.

- As a child, you see your parents leave the room—and you feel alone.
- As a teenager, you see your friends move or change—and you feel alone.
- As an adult, you see your friends get married—and you feel alone.
- As a parent, you see your kids grow up and leave the house—and you feel alone.
- As an elderly person, you see your friends begin to pass away—and you feel alone.

And to prevent ourselves from feeling alone, some of us are tempted to do all kinds things.

- Perhaps you do whatever it takes to gain the acceptance or approval of your parents, friends, bosses, or spouses—because you're afraid that you'll be left alone if you don't perform to their liking.
- Perhaps you so long to be married that you begin to compromise what God's Word says about believers only marrying believers (1 Cor. 7:39; cf. 2 Cor. 6:14), and you enter into a relationship with someone you're not confident understands and believes the gospel.

But for the latter, listen to the words of one woman who was married to a nice man who did *not* share her faith: "If you think you are lonely before you get married, it's nothing compared to how lonely you can be **AFTER** you are married!"¹³

Still, if you're a believer and you're currently married to an unbeliever, that does *not* mean that you are consigned to a life of loneliness.

¹³ Quoted in Kathy Keller, "Don't Take It from Me: Reasons You Should Not Marry an Unbeliever," January 22, 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/dont-take-it-from-me-reasons-you-should-not-marry-an-unbeliever>.

But because of the ascension of the Lord Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit, if we have faith in Christ alone for life and salvation, then we know that we are never truly alone.

And even more, because of their common faith in Christ, the disciples were continually *together* in the temple blessing God. If Christ has ascended, then he is always with us, and we will always have his church with us—and not only in this life, but our relationship with Christ and his Church carries over into eternity.

We have the greatest intimacy with Christ and in the family of God that ought to only widen and deepen as we get older and enter into our eternal home.

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Second, we are not without purpose.

[Three implications:

1. We are not alone.
2. We are not without purpose.]

We all desire a purpose in life. We want to know that our lives are not meaningless and purposeless—that we accomplished something and contributed to something greater than ourselves, that we made an impact that will not be soon forgotten.

And so, some of us are involved in many different pursuits, whether work or personal, constantly searching for a sense of satisfying purpose.

Or perhaps you're all-in in a certain pursuit, but the book of Ecclesiastes already tells us that, in the end, you'll find it meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Some of us feel stuck in a path that we know won't satisfy us, but we don't know any alternative. Some of us feel aimless and don't even know where to start.

But remember, Jesus' blessing is always closely related to his missional purpose. In Jesus' ascension, he didn't just give the Holy Spirit for the greatest relational intimacy we could have, but he also gave us his Spirit to empower us to live out the greatest missional purpose we could have.

The disciples gave their lives to make disciples of all nations. And if you're a Christian, there is no greater mission we could expend our lives on.

There's a famous poem written by C. T. Studd that captures this well. The whole poem is worth reading but here's one stanza.

Give me Father, a purpose deep,
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;
Faithful and true what e'er the strife,
Pleasing Thee in my daily life;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.¹⁴

¹⁴ Charles Thomas Studd, quoted in Garrett Kell, "Only What Is Done For Christ Will Last – C.T. Studd," January 17, 2015, <http://garrettcell.com/only-what-is-done-for-christ-will-last-c-t-studd>.

Whatever you're living for right now, whatever you're expending your life on right now, will it last into eternity?

Jesus did not give us the Great Commission to be a burden, but to be part of his blessing—to not live life aimlessly, pursuing things that will not satisfy nor last, but to give our lives to his missional purpose to make disciples of all nations, for only what is done for Christ will last.

<pause>

Third, we bless God best together.

[Three implications:

1. We are not alone.
2. We are not without purpose.
3. We bless God best together.]

In Jesus' ascension, we don't see just individuals returning to Jerusalem to bless God on their own.

And in Jesus sending his Spirit in Acts 2, we don't see just individuals receiving the Holy Spirit to enjoy privately in their own way.

No, we see a group of disciples here, and in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit comes, we see the birth of the church in Jerusalem. And day by day, this newborn church continued to gather together in the temple and in their homes, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The communal witness of the church praising God is more beautiful and more powerful than the individual witness of just one Christian here and there.

Still, if you've been in any church long enough, you'll realize how hard this can be because when you're living closely with people who are so different than you, and conflicts and hurts begin to spring up, it's tempting to think that we bless God best by ourselves.

But remember, this group of disciples here were made up of men and women, tax collectors and zealots, fishermen, and probably prostitutes (cf. Luke 7:39) and religious leaders (cf. Luke 23:50).

And if that were not diverse enough, they were soon to include not only Jews but people from all nations. Just through their sheer differences of personality, preferences, experiences, and cultures—not to mention their own sinful desires (James 4:1-3)—there were endless opportunities for conflict, dissension, and *not* blessing God together.

Yet, what unified them was their common faith in Christ and their common worship of him with great joy. What tarnishes that unity and joy are not differences per se, but our sinful responses to those differences and making our desire to please ourselves more important than wanting to please Christ in those moments.

Just think what difference it would make in your conflicts if your utmost desire was, "I want to please Christ. I want to bless God."

We need to remember that “every relationship that you have in the church is ultimately about the reputation of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ How you respond to pain and conflict with one another either exalts Christ and beautifully displays the gospel in his church, or it diminishes Christ and damages the beauty of the gospel in his church.

As Christians, we are not ruled by our preferences or even our pain. Rather, by the power of the Holy Spirit given to us in Christ’s ascension, we can love widely and deeply with those who are so different than us, we can forgive and reconcile with those who have hurt us, and we can bless our God best together as his church.

Conclusion

Now as we close, I want us to notice how Luke closes some loops that he opened at the beginning of his Gospel account.

[⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.]

At the beginning, Zechariah is in the temple *disbelieving* God’s Word and being struck *mute* (Luke 1:5-22), but now, at the end, we see a group of disciples *believing* that all of God’s Word is about Jesus and they can’t stop opening their mouths to worship him and bless him.

At the beginning, we see angels appear before shepherds to announce, “[B]ehold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). And now, at the end, having encountered the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, the disciples are experiencing that good news of great joy, and they are getting ready to announce that good news to all nations.

And so, even as Luke’s Gospel account ends, it’s begging for a sequel, which we thankfully have in the book of Acts, which Luke later writes.

There, we see Luke continue where he left off here—with the ascension of the Lord Jesus. And there, he continues to show us what the “blessed” life really looks like. It is a life secured in the relational favor and missional purpose of our Lord, and it is a life lived in response to him with worship and great joy as we continue to make disciples of all nations together as his church.

The One Thing

The Lord Jesus blesses us in order that we may bless him.

Let’s pray.

¹⁵ Daniel P. Miller, *What If I’ve Been Hurt by My Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024), 13.