

Place: Lurgan Baptist 1:12:2009

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE FAITH

Reading: Luke 24:50-53 Acts 1:1-12

WE BELIEVE THAT

4. CHRIST IS INCOMPARABLE

6. HIS MINISTRY

In his autobiography "*A King's Story*," the Duke of Windsor tells of a strange thing that happened at the funeral of his father, King George V. When the body was being conveyed on a draped gun carriage, through the silent, crowded streets of London an incident took place which he could never forget. The imperial crown heavily crusted with precious stones had been removed from its glass case in the Tower and secured to the lid of the coffin over the folds of the Royal Standard. In spite of the rubber tyred wheels, the jolting of the heavy vehicle caused the Maltese Cross on top of the crown to fall on to the pavement below. One of the sailors marching behind the gun carriage picked it up, took it to the commanding officer, and saluting said, "*this cross, fell off Sir, it must be replaced.*" The officer was a little bewildered by what had happened and he asked, "*Must it be replaced now?*" "*Yes, Sir,*" replied the sailor, "***the crown is never complete without the cross.***"

Theologically, the opposite is also true. ***The Cross is never complete without the Crown.*** The Coronation, inevitably follows the Crucifixion, the Ascension, the Atonement. The Ascension ? For of all the features associated with our Lord's ministry, probably the one feature that is most neglected is His ascension. When asked to list the fundamental doctrines of Scripture many will mention Christ's Virgin Birth, Virtuous Life, Vicarious Death, Victorious Resurrection and Visible Return, but how few would include the Ascension in the list. Yet Christ's return to heaven and His present ministry there are fundamentals of the faith.

The Apostle's Creed states,

He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

The Gospel Mission of South America states,

We believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for sin, bodily rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, now intercedes for believers, and is coming again for His church.

The Constitution of this Church speaks of

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ but sadly does not mention Christ's ascension.

Illustrating the very point we have made that this is a neglected truth. Yet W. H. Griffith Thomas rightly claims

that the ascension is not only a great historical fact of the New Testament, but a great factor in the life of Christ, and Christians, since it is the consummation of His redemptive work. Now we speak of the ascension of Christ we are speaking of His glorious withdrawal as to His bodily presence from the earth and His entrance into heaven itself. The event is recorded for us in (Acts Ch 1) and there Dr. Luke says, “ *This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven.* ” (1:11) In one of the first gospel hymns ever written Paul says, “ *Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.* ” (1 Tim 3:16) You see, there are several crucial events in the life of our Lord.

There is the Incarnation. There is the Crucifixion. There is the Resurrection. There is the Ascension. There is the Exaltation, that act of God by which the risen and ascended Christ is given the place of power at the right hand of God. (Eph 1:20-21) The old writers used to put it this way. *The ascension marks the culmination of His earthly ministry and the initiation of His heavenly session.* The question that really confronts this evening is this, “ **What is our Lord doing ?** ” In trying to answer that question I want us to think along three lines.

(1) THE LORD CARRIED UP

Look if you will at (Lk 24:51-52) He was carried up, yes but how ? For there are those who not only deny His resurrection, but there are those who deny His ascension.

Yet Luke here describes an event in time as solid and concrete as the wood of the cross, or the stone at the tomb. As one old Welsh preacher aptly put it “ ***His disciples actually saw the holes in the soles of His feet and in the palms of His hands as He went up.*** ” Do you recall the nature of the resurrection appearances of our Lord ? I mean those first disciples recognized certain physical characteristics about Him, qualities that could only have belonged to a body. *The scars:* for did He not talk to Thomas about “ *the print of the nails.* ” (Jn 20:25) these were shown by the Living Lord to establish His identity. *The eating:* for “ *they gave him a piece of a broiled fish and of an honeycomb. And He took it, and did eat before them.* ” (Lk 24:42) Is there not something physical about all this ? The flesh and bones: for Christ said, “ *a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have.* ” (24:39) Well, flesh and bones are thoroughly physical. It was this that those disciples saw “ *carried up into heaven.* ” (Lk 24:51) You see, the Lord was carried up. Now

(a) HIS ASCENSION WAS ANTICIPATED:

1. It was Anticipated in the Old Testament:

Foregleams of this truth were granted to the prophets of the Old Testament. David for example, could speak prophetically of the exaltation of Christ at God’s right hand. “ *The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make thine enemies Thy footstool.* ” (Ps 110:1) In (Ps 68) we have a direct prophecy to the ascension of the Messiah. Look if you will at (Ps 68:18)

Now the Messianic passage is (Ps 68:18) Historically the reference is to the day when David “ *brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom unto the city of David.* ” (2 Sam 6:12) The expression “ *ascended on high,* ” originally had in view the Ark of the Covenant being conducted to the summit of Mount Zion. But although the Psalm has its historical roots in the Old Testament, its doctrinal fruits are seen in the New Testament. For Paul in (Eph 4:8) interprets the three statements as follows:

“ *When He ascended up on high,* ” the ascension of the victorious Christ

“ *He led captivity captive,* ” the defeat of the enemy, the annulling of the opposition.

“ *And gave gifts unto me,* ” the allocation of gifts to the church. (Ps 68:18 Acts 2:33) 1.

2. It was Anticipated in the New Testament:

Christ often predicted that He would ascend back to heaven. As our Lord traveled through this world with a cross in His heart, He was homesick for home. It is the gospel of John that gives to us His own statements regarding the truth of the ascension. He said to his murmuring disciples, “ *What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before ?* ” (Jn 6:62) Soon would the Son of God return to that sphere of unmixed blessedness from where He came, but He would return there as “ *the Son of Man.* ” *I mean when Christ came to earth He not cease to be God, when Christ went back to heaven He did not cease to be man.* He came down to

earth as the Son of God. He went back to heaven as the Son of God and the Son of Man. Alexander Whyte puts it this way, “ *Our Lord carried back to the Father’s house a human heart, a human character and it was and it is and ever shall be a new wonder in heaven.* ” My do you realize there is a man, a perfect man at the right hand of the Father for you and me ? Christ anticipated His ascension. In (John Ch 17) he prayed, “ *Now O Father, glorify Thou Me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.* ” (17:5) But Christ not only predicted His ascension he visualized it. At the beginning of His ministry He was baptized by John. (Matt 3:16) He was lowered into the water and then He was raised out of the water. Lowered into the water, picturing, death and burial. Raised out of the water picturing resurrection and ascension. (a)

(b) HIS ASCENSION WAS AUTHENICATED:

You see, the ascension of Christ was actual, literal, and visible. Our Lord not only had to leave the planet He had to *be seen* to leave it. No one saw Him rise from the dead but the eleven disciples witnessed His ascent into the clouds. They saw Him go. *They had to see Him go.* The secession was not secret. They were eye-witnesses. Look at (Acts Ch 1) and notice some truths about His Ascension. Notice:

1. The Period: the date is intimated. It was forty days after the resurrection. (1:3)

2. *The Place:* it was from the Mount of Olives that the Lord Jesus made His exit from this earth. (1:12) The Mount of Olives, how suggestive. What memories walk around on that old mountain. From the boughs of that mountain, branches were torn and strewn at the feet of Christ as He descended, weeping over Jerusalem as He went. At the bottom of that mountain the Lord spoke words of mystery and went up to Calvary. At the top of that mountain the Lord spoke words of majesty and went up to glory.

3. *The Picture:* for Luke's record is full of spiritual suggestion. *As the Shepherd:* " *He led them as far as to Bethany,*" (Lk 24:50) *As the Priest:* " *He lifted up His hands and blessed them.*" (Lk 24:50) suggesting to them the service that He was soon to take up from His place on high.

4. *The Procedure:* " *And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*" (1:9) As they stood there the law of gravitation was broken. The law that holds the earth, the planets, the sun, the moon and the stars in place was broken. In that moment, miraculously, supernaturally, by the power of God, the Lord Jesus was literally and visibly raised before them and ascended back toward heaven. No space ship conveyed him. Luke says that " *a cloud received Him out of their sight.*" (1:9) Was this not the Shekinah ? The glory cloud of God, conveying the Son of God back to where He had come from.

The glorious work is done, no need for Him to stay here any longer. He had made the sacrifice reconciling a rebellious earth and an outraged heaven. He had put His resurrection foot on death. For thirty three years He's been exiled from home. It's time for the Lord Jesus to go back to heaven. Notice again,

5. *The Place:* for the angelic messengers say, " *This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven.*" (1:11) The cloud veiled from the sight of the disciples the passage of the Lord Jesus as He ascended, but the writer to the Hebrews permits us to follow His journey, " *We have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens.*" (Heb 4:14) Do you see that word " *into,*" it really means " *through.*" There are three heavens, the atmospheric heavens, the starry or celestial heavens and " *the third heaven.*" (2 Cor 12:2) And just as Aaron in a former day, passed through the outer court of the tabernacle, then through the holy place and, once a year, into the holiest of all for the people, so Christ, has passed through the atmospheric heavens and the celestial heavens. You see, not only did Christ ascend but He passed through the heavens, beyond the limits of space.

Indeed He is " *made higher than the heavens,*" (Heb 7:26) which means that *He is exalted above the heavens.*" For Paul says, " *He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things.*" (Eph 4:10) Can you comprehend that ? I think we can only bow and worship. You see, (a) (b)

(c) HIS ASCENSION WAS ASSOCIATED:

It was closely linked to His life, His death, and His resurrection.

1. His Unique Personality Demanded an Ascension:

The holy life of our Lord Jesus demanded an exit from this world as remarkable as His entrance into this world. My if a miraculous exit was granted to sinful men such as Enoch and Elijah, how much more to the sinless Son of God ?

2. His Redemptive Work Required an Ascension:

Without it, it would have remained incomplete, for it rests on four pillars, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. This was the final demonstration that Christ's finished work had forever solved the problem of the sin of man.

3. His Glorious Resurrection Necessitated an Ascension:

You see, our Lord's resurrection body could not be permanently at home on earth. He must depart and so "*He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.*" (Lk 24:51) (1)

(2) THE WORK CARRIED ON

When Christ cried in a loud voice from the cross "*Finished,*" (Jn 19:30) His sacrificial propitiatory work was fully and finally completed. It was not merely that the vinegar was finished, or that the suffering was finished, or

that the life was finished though all that was true, but that His atoning work on account of sin was finished. Nothing need be added, nothing can be added. It was done to perfection, it was done to completion, "*once for all.*" (Heb 10:10) But we must not suppose that the Lord Jesus has no further work to do. I mean what is Christ doing now ? Well, let's think about His work,

(a) UPON HIS EXIT:

You see, the very last the Lord did on earth was to commission His disciples to carry on the work. "*And He said unto them go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" (Mk 16:16) The words of that commission have been withdrawn, and therefore they are just as binding on us as they were when the Saviour first presented them. But how slow, we the people of God have been to obey the Lord's charge. Indeed, souls have lived and died without ever hearing the gospel, because we have failed to take the gospel to them. You see, the vision we need is a vision of all the world, and of our responsibility to bring the gospel to the millions for our Lord did die. *Will you please notice that our primary task is to preach the gospel.* Social betterment, medical treatment, agricultural programmes, educational aids are not to substitute the message of the cross. So the ascended Lord deigns to carry on His work through the agency of such weak and unworthy persons as we. Are you enthusiastically enrolled among those who are, not only workers for Him, but "*workers together with Him, ?*" (2 Cor 6:1) Can you say with the poet,

**Mine are the hands to do the work
My feet shall run for Thee
My lips shall sound the glorious news
Lord, here am I, send me.**

(b) UPON HIS ENTRANCE:

Can you imagine the welcome Christ received when he returned to glory ? Can you hear the singing ? “ *Lift up your heads ye gates and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory ? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.* ” (Ps 24:7-8) You think, it’s great when they sing the “ **King is Coming**, ” down here, how do you think it was when they sang it up there ? Thousands and thousands of angels line Glory Road as Jesus comes walking back into heaven. When Christ went walking through glory with bloodstains from dark Calvary, I wonder if angels sang “ **Holy**, ” and bowed down and wept at His knee ? Can you imagine when our precious Saviour when walking through glory ? Now it seems to me, that there are certain things that the Lord Jesus, more or less immediately accomplished. To start with,

1. THE BLOOD:

For “ *By His own blood, He entered in once into the holy place having obtained eternal redemption for us.* ” (Heb 9:12) Just as, annually, the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, entered into the Holy of Holies, with the blood of the victim, sacrificed upon the altar of burnt offering without, so our wonderful Lord, both High Priest

and Victim, in one, entered in once, that is, once for all, into heaven with His own precious blood. You see, the very first thing He does upon arrival, there, is to take in His blood, and to present it in the Father’s presence as the price of our eternal redemption and the ground of our full and free forgiveness. There is no call for it to be re-presented or for the sacrifice to be re-offered. So when Rome says “ ***that in the Mass is offered to God a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice,*** ” we say blasphemy. For something happened at Calvary that never needs to be, that never can be, and thank God, that never will be repeated again. Time and again in this Hebrew epistle the word “ **once**, ” thunders out, announcing the finality of an accomplished redemption. So here was the first that Christ did on reaching the Holy Place. But what about,

2. THE GIFTS:

For “ *When He ascended up on high He gave gifts unto men.* ” (Eph 4:8) In (Ps 68:18) it says, “ *Thou hast received gifts for men.* ” But there is no contradiction for both are right. He received them for men, in order that He might give them to men. Because the Son went up, and the Spirit came down, the saints can go out. Paul says, “ *He gave gifts unto men And He gave some apostles and prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers.* ” (Eph 4:11) Although apostles and prophets were foundation gifts for the church, evangelists and pastor-teachers are still with us today. You see, God has given to His church the gift of gifted men teaching the Word and preaching the gospel. In fact in each of the four passages in the New Testament where the subject of

spiritual gifts is considered there is brought before us the fact that each believer has received a gift. Can I ask, are you fulfilling the ministry that God has entrusted to you ?

3. THE SPIRIT:

On the night in which He was betrayed the Lord Jesus said, to His disciples “ *It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come to you, but if I depart I will send Him unto you.* ” (Jn 16:7) Indeed the descent of the Spirit was evidence of Christ’s ascension and exaltation. As Peter was preaching in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost he said, “ *Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.* ” (Acts 2:33) My who can measure what the coming of the Holy Spirit in all His fullness of power has meant to His church and still means ? You see, the reason the church can have power today, is because God’s Holy Spirit is in our midst. Now can you see the Saviour’s work upon His arrival in glory ? Let’s go a step further and think not only of His work (a) (b) but consider His work,

(c) UPON HIS ENHRONEMENT:

Did you know that Christ went back to heaven for your benefit ? He says “ *He that believeth on me the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do because I go to my Father.* ” (Jn 14:12) Christ did not mean greater works in **power but in extent**. They

would become witnesses to all the world through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But what is Christ doing now ?

1. SITTING:

The Bible says, “ *After He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever He sat down on the right hand of God.* ” (Heb 10:12) That posture, is the token that the work is fully accomplished that He came here to do. He came, He did it, He returned, He sat down. Only on one other occasion do we find it different when Stephen said, “ *Behold I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.* ” (Acts 7:56) He had arisen to assist His needy servant who was about to suffer and die for His sake. My Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a place of authority and power where He exercises His divine prerogatives. (Gen 48:13-19 Ps 110: 5) Theodosus was a Roman Emperor who favoured Arianism. Arius and his followers denied the Deity of Jesus Christ. ***When his son was 16 years of age he made him co-regent, joint ruler.*** All the important people came to honour the Emperor and his son. A godly Bishop gave a speech honoring the Emperor but then turned to leave ignoring hi son.

The Emperor shouted, “ *How dare you not honour my son. Do you not know I have made him share my throne ? Do you now know I have made him of equal dignity as myself ?* ” The Bishop replied, “ *Why do you resent my neglect of your son because I do not give him equal place with yourself ? Then what must the eternal God think of*

you who has given permission to have His co-eternal, co-equal Son degraded in your empire ? ” (a)

(b) TRIUMPHING:

“ We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour, ”
(Heb 2:9) Do you ever look into heaven and see the Lord engaged in receiving the adoration that is His due ?
(Rev 5:12) I wonder if people looked into our hearts, would they see Christ crowned with glory and honour there ? Is He receiving any such triumph in and through us ? What is Christ doing ? (a) (b)

(c) INTERCEDING:

Is this not a tremendous source of comfort for us ? Paul rejoiced in Christ “ *who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.* ” (Rom 8:34) Christ no longer sacrifices but intercedes. Berkhof says,

He is ever making intercession for those that are His, pleading for their acceptance on the basis of His completed sacrifice, and for their safe-keeping in the world, and making their prayers and services acceptable to God.

Our Saviour was always a man of prayer. He prayed in the fields, He prayed on the hills, He prayed in a garden, He prayed in the streets, He prayed in houses and now He prays at the right hand of God. That means there’s somebody right now in heaven who is praying for you. His work on earth was historical and concluded. His work

in heaven is eternal and continuing. S. D. Gordon has some weighty words on the subject, he says, “ *The Lord Jesus is still praying. Thirty years of living, three years of serving, one tremendous act of dying, two thousand years of praying. What an emphasis on prayer. “ He ever liveth to make intercession,* ” says the writer to the Hebrews. (7:25) Prayer is the very pulse of His heavenly life.

**Before the throne of God above
I have a strong, a perfect plea
A great High Priest whose name is Love
Who ever lives and pleads for me**

Robert Murray McCheyne said, “ *If I could hear Jesus pleading for me in the next room, I should not fear a host of enemies. But distance makes no difference. He is pleading for me.* ” My I don’t know what kind of storm you are in today, what kind of winds are blowing against your vessel, what kind of billows are rolling over you, but there is someone on the mountains of glory and He is praying for you. Indeed our great High Priest can be touched with the “ *feeling of our infirmities.* ” (Heb 4:15)

**Is there anyone can help us
One who understands our hearts
When the thorns of life have pierced them till they bleed
One who sympathizes with us
Who in wondrous love imparts
Just the very, very blessing that we need**

Yes, there's One, only One
The blessed, blessed Jesus, He's the One
When afflictions press the soul
When waves of trouble roll
And you need a friend to help you
He's the One

Though the restless foe accuses
Sins recounting like a flood
Every charge our God refuses
Christ has answered with His blood

(e) PREPARING:

"I go," He said *"to prepare a place for you."* (Jn 14:2) It is touching to reflect that He who had no place to lay His head (Matt 8:20) has gone to prepare a place for all His own. (Jn 14:2) What a place that must be. Indeed, *"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."* (1 Cor 2:9) For what a prospect is ours to be *"in the house of the Lord for ever."* (Ps 23:6) (1) (2)

(3) THE TRUTH CARRIED FURTHER

What is the truth that is to be carried a stage further ? Just this. It is not only that Christ has ascended but that we also may live ascended lives. Look if you will at (Col 3:1-2) Paul is here describing the Christian's relationship with Christ. Look at what he says. He says, we, **Died with Christ:** (2:20) **Buried with Christ:** (2:12) **Quickened with Christ:** (2:13) **Raised with Christ:** (3:1) **Hid with Christ:** (3:3) **Appear with Christ:** (3:4)

What an indissoluble union we enjoy with our Lord ? Did Christ die ? Then so did we by our identification with Him. You see, because of their union with Christ believers spiritually entered His death and resurrection at the

(d) REPRESENTING:

For *"Christ is entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."* (Heb 9:24) Though we have an **adversary**, thank God we have an **Advocate**, for John says, *"And if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous."* (1 Jn 2:1) The word *"advocate,"* is parakletos which means *"one called alongside to plead our case."* Let me give you a mental picture of what is being described here. You see, the book of Revelation describes Satan as *"the Accuser of the brethren,"* (Rev 12:10 Job 1:6-12) and how he accuses us before God day and night. I can imagine that when we sin Satan rushes into the presence of God and says, *"Look what he or she did. You call them you child. Just look at what they have done."* Then the Lord Jesus says, *"Yes, Father but look at Me. On the basis of my shed blood I plead for the remission of that sin."* You see, the **Accuser** is met by the **Advocate** and all Christ has to do is raise His pierced hands and Satan is silenced. That is, how effective Christ's finished work is. Christ represents us before God's throne. Thank God, for the *"finished work of Christ,"* but today He has an unfinished work in glory as He represents us before the throne of God. For,

moment of their conversion. (Gal 2:20) Now says Paul flowing from that should be a heavenly mind set. In other words we are to,

(a) SEEK:

“ Seek those things which are above,” (3:1) On 1st September 1985, Robert Ballard discovered the hull of the great “ **Titanic**,” 350 miles off the coast of Newfoundland and lying at a depth of two miles on the ocean floor. This is what he said about his quest for the sunken ship. *“ My first direct view of the Titanic lasted for less than two minutes, but the stark sight of her immense black hull towering above the ocean floor will remain forever ingrained in my memory. My life long dream was to find the great ship and during the past 13 years the quest for her has dominated my life.”* My Robert Ballard lived day and night for something that was hidden in the depths, but God asks us to live for that which is above, *“ where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.”* We are to be engaged with Him and those things His ascension and exaltation have initiated. My is it not heart occupation with Christ that motivates us as believers ?

(b) SET:

“ Set your affection or mind on things above,” (3:2) Not only **seek** heaven, but **think** heaven. What we set our minds on determines what we seek in life. When Israel came to the border of the Promised Land, they refused to enter, Because of their unbelief they had to wander in the wilderness for forty years. (Num 13-14) That whole

generation starting with the twenty year olds died in the wilderness, except for Caleb and Joshua, the only two spies who believed God. How were Caleb and Joshua able *“ to get the victory,”* during those forty difficult years in the wilderness ? Their minds and hearts were in Canaan. They knew that they had an inheritance coming, and they lived in that light of that inheritance. My did it ever strike you that not only there was *an Ascension in the life of Christ, but there is to be an ascension in the life of every believer?* *“ We shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”* (1 Thes 4:17) One of these days we are going to an *“ inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away reserved in heaven for you.”* (1 Pet 1:4)

Now in light of that let me ask you, which world are you living for ? Are you among those *“ who mind earthly things,”* (Phil 3:19) are have you set your *“ affection on things above,”* ? (Col 3:1) (1) (2) (3) My as we have contemplated His Glorious Person, His Great Work, and His Gracious Ministry, do we not have to say, *“ Hallelujah what a Saviour,”* ? Do we have not to fall in worship at His feet like Thomas and say, *“ My Lord, and My God.”* (Jn 20:28)

