

Acts 1:1-11

1:1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning

1:2 until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

1:3 After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

1:4 While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me;

1:5 for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

1:6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

1:7 He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.

1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

1:9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

1:10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

1:11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Luke 24:44-53

24:44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you--that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."

24:45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,

24:46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,

24:47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

24:48 You are witnesses of these things.

24:49 And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

24:50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them.

24:51 While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.

24:52 And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy;

24:53 and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Strangely these readings are in the wrong order! The book of Acts was written by Luke - so when I read "In my former book, Theophilus" Luke was referring to the gospel of Luke.

Never mind - Luke ends his gospel on the cliffhanger of Christ promising the helper from his father, and then ascending. And he starts his sequel replaying the same scene.

Jesus, giving them final instructions and reassurances - wait in the city, you will be clothed with power from on high...

And of course this ascending in their sight resembles the great prophet Elijah going up in a chariot. And his cloak that fell from on high, was his mantle, a symbol of his power, and Elisha picked it up. There is a deliberate echo of that here. Elisha goes on to do greater works than Elijah, just as we, the disciples of the disciples, are told by Jesus that we will do even greater works than he has done. - which is something to get your head around, but not for today!

Today we focus on the fact that heaven changed, and what that means for us.

Heaven - where God dwells - God the father, son and holy spirit. All 3, living together since eternity began. Remember John's words - in the beginning was the word - his code name for Jesus - and the word/ Jesus - was with god, and the word / Jesus was God. So Jesus did not appear out of nothing at Christmas. When the holy spirit made Mary pregnant that was not Jesus being created.

Or as Colossians has it - he is the firstborn of all creation - through whom all things were created.

So heaven changed on that day too - the day Jesus left.

But then Jesus became human - that miracle of incarnation - God became like us, and dwelt among us. Truly, fully God, and truly, fully human. He took on our mortal frame and suffered and lived and died like one of us.

And his resurrection - was not simply a resuscitation - a coming back to life - he came back different - able to eat and drink and be touched and hug - but also able to appear and disappear. This resurrection body is what we look forward to after we die - for if we are baptised into him, then what happens to him, shall happen to us. We are united.

And this resurrection body - Jesus ascends - and goes into heaven. For the first time humanity is able to get into heaven. Before then we were not good enough, we could not fit, we were too big with ego and pride to fit through the door - we were simply the wrong shape!

The Jewish had no concept of the afterlife for most of their history - that's why it was important to take Moses bones into the promised land, or that you had children to be your legacy, your future. And when they did develop ideas of life after death, around 200 BC, it was that people would come back to life on earth - to a new paradise - which doesn't sound too bad.

But Jesus said something different - to the thief he said - today you will be with me in paradise. To his disciples he said - I prepare a place and I will take you to be where I am.

So Jesus promises to take us into heaven. And so he breaks back into heaven and makes a human shaped doorway - and says come be with me. Look, I've made a way - follow me...

And heaven - a place which has no need of lamps or lights, for all is lit by the light of God!

A place where there is constant healing - from the leaves of the trees by the river of life

A place where all tears are wiped away.

A place where there are no poor or hungry - for all are rich beyond compare - for they have Christ

And there are no homeless there - everyone who is there has a home.

This is what to follow Christ means. On this ascension day, things fall into place - we see what Christ died for, and why we should follow. Through dark days, or days of doubt and trial - even through those many little deaths of getting older - a new life awaits us, our hope is certain. For it live in Christ means we are headed upward, like him, and our final home is in heaven.