

The Ascension

[Announce Text] Please Open your Bibles to Luke 24:50-53. Acts 1:4-11 [Page 885, 909](#)

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship where we exist to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. We are finishing our series through the book of Luke.

[Prayer for illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] Here we are again. In 2024. A Presidential election year. Again. Barring a revival of hearts, we know that half of our country will be unhappy with the results. We know that who our leaders are affects our life. And that either adds or takes away our joy and happiness. But listen to a selection of verses from 1 Kings 4:20-25. This is in the early days of Solomon, when his kingdom was established, and he was walking humbling before the LORD

Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy...For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates from Tiphshah to Gaza, over all the kings west of the Euphrates. And he had peace on all sides around him. And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon.

When you are under the rule and dominion of the right ruler and king, the result is happiness. Joy. Luke has shown us that Jesus is the King. He has brought God's Kingdom in seed form and it is growing now and won't stop until He brings it in fullness. If you are a Christian, no matter who's elected. You can be happy. You can have joy. In fact, that is the norm and expectation.

Let's learn how to

[Proposition] Live joyfully under the Ascended King

By looking at Jesus' ascension, will six ways that we can live joyful lives. I'll announce them as we go and we'll see them in the accounts of the ascension from Luke 24 and Acts 1.

[Way #1] ...by receiving His blessing

v. 50

And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

Here Jesus is speaking words of blessing- that is favor and love- over and onto His people. Jesus' whole existence has been a blessing to this sin distorted and pain filled world. Jesus said hard things. No doubt. But Jesus was always blessing the people around Him. So, it is no surprise that in His last moments on earth He blesses those closest to Him. This is the single biggest key to having a joyful life. You let Jesus serve you. You let Jesus bless you.

The joy that is sucked out of your life is often because we don't receive Jesus' blessing of us. Two ways we refuse Jesus' blessing is that we try to be King ourselves. And we then try to use the power we accumulate through money, connections, accomplishments, or whatever to bless ourselves. Or we try to earn King Jesus' blessing. We are striving so hard that we are trying to perform so that we have pleased Jesus enough.

[Illustration] In Disney's remake of *the Parent Trap*. Two twins, separated by their parents at birth, meet and decide to impersonate one another so that they can meet the parent they've never known. They practice speaking and acting like one another. They cut their hair the same. One of the girls needs to secretly pierce her ears. And there is a scene where the American sister, Hallie, is flying to England to meet her mother. And the scene on the plane is brief, but it breaks my heart. There is this young girl and she sits there talking to herself, maybe to God, and to her mother thousands of miles away. And here's what she says, "I hope she likes me. Please like me. Please."

[Application] Some of you live like that toward God. "I hope God likes me. Please like me. Please." If you feel like that in your relationship with King Jesus, it will be impossible for you to live joyfully under His loving rule. You are in fear and anxiety. Just thinking, "I hope he likes me." Luke's gospel has told us that Jesus loves and moves toward outcasts, sinners, sufferers and loves them before they have done anything to make themselves lovable or likeable. His life, death, burial, and resurrection were all His actions in our place. And if He took our rejection and condemnation, then we must get His acceptance and the record of His

righteousness. We must be substituted for Him. So when Luke tells us that at Jesus' baptism, the Father said to the Son, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." The great blessing that we must be receiving is that, apart from our performance, the Father is well pleased with His adopted children.

If you are a Christian, you need to take a few minutes every day and do nothing. You need to just sit or stand or drive or whatever. And you need to just receive God's blessing. You can talk to God and say, "God, I know my sins are serious. I know that I need to grow. But right now I am not going to perform. I'm going to stay right here and receive your love and blessing. I'm going to just be loved by you." Do that right now. Forget about trying to control the squirmy child. Forget about what the people around you might be thinking about you. Forget about your to-do list for this week. Just receive the Ascended King's blessing. Receive His love. By faith in Christ, you are being blessed. You are being loved. And this will be the biggest way you live joyfully under the ascended King. Every other worldview is about working hard to earn the blessing from others. Maybe you've done enough to please your boss or your lover or your professor. Maybe then, they'll bless you. But we live under the ascended king who blesses and loves and welcomes people separate from their performance.

That was the biggest, longest, and most important way we live joyfully under the ascended King. But there are other ways. Live joyfully under the ascended King. Way #1 was by receiving His blessing.

[Way #2] ...because His ascension is true

v. 51, Acts 1:9

While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

We read Luke's more detailed account in Acts 1:9

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

There's both a spiritual and physical act happening here. It's easy for us to imagine Jesus with a sort of jetpack or rocket boots which make Him ready for flight and space travel. What is helpful about that is that we can more easily picture Jesus' physical flesh and blood in our time-space dimension. Which we

must. That's been important to all Christians. But there is more than just our physical dimension at play here. There is a meeting of eternal and spiritual in the here and now of Mt. Olives and Bethany. It's probably better to picture the pillar of cloud of God's presence in the Old Testament as arriving and receiving Christ until He disappears from sight above them.

This is not some wishful thinking or escapism imagining a pleasant event. But this truly happened. The disciples saw this. It's mysterious. But it's true. Eyewitnesses. In the first century, and basically until the 20th Century, the best recording technology to preserve and prove the truth of an event was for eyewitness accounts to be written down. And that's what we have. So our joy in the ascended King is grounded in truth. In reality. It's not a myth. Our King who reigns over all others truly is King at the Father's right hand. This is really good news. When we put our faith in Jesus, we've put our faith in the right One. There are no real rivals. Our joy is connected to reality. It's true

Live joyfully under the Ascended King. Way #1 is by receiving His blessing. And Way #2 is because we know He's real and true. Now,

[Way #3] ...by worshipping Him

vv. 52-53

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

Worship, when you move out of your own little world, and into contact with something greater than yourself, is necessary for human existence. That these Jewish men are eager to worship Jesus, is one of several definitive proofs that Jesus was understood to be God Himself. And the worship of the Ascended King has filled these people with great joy. They can't stop.

[Application] Can you have joy without worship? When you find something of overwhelming beauty or skill or experience don't you have to think about it? Don't you have to praise the praiseworthy? Isn't your joy less until you share the experience with others? Come try the greatest restaurant! Come see the most beautiful mountain lake! Let me show you the pictures of the baby! And you want to be with the people who are as excited about those things as you are.

This is one of the purposes of God's people. To share the joy we have that we don't want to ignore. We want to be with people who sing. Who are excited about the One we're excited about. And we've experienced joy that has spread to us from others. You didn't know you could care about football until you met that guy. Now you love it. You didn't know you could care about sushi or British television or gardening or whatever. Some people are bored by it and you have to suppress that part of your personality and you're a bit sad. But then you are with your people! Why not build your world with those people? That's what we're doing as a church. Trying to be a joyful worshipping people. Who help others be joyful worshipping people. Come bless God with us. Come sing with us.

Live joyfully under the Ascended King. Way #1, was be receiving His blessing. Way #2 is by knowing the ascension is true. Way #3 is by worshipping Him. Now

[Way #4] ...by obeying Him

vv. 52-53

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

In v. 49, after being raised from the dead, Jesus told His followers to stay in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit. And we see that the life of joy is the life of obedience.

An old hymn from the 1800s says this in the refrain: "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

When you know that you are blessed in Jesus. That He is always for you and not against you. When you know that He is infinitely good and patient. Then you know that obeying Him will lead only to your good.

[Application] In the last 150 years or so, there was a teaching that rose to prominence in the American church and it has had disastrous effects. That is the belief that you can have Jesus as your Savior, but not your Lord. That you can trust Him to rescue you from Hell, but you need not submit to Him as King and Master here and now. The Bible offers no support for that. What would lead you to believe that you could be trusting Someone if you won't attempt to do what He says? How could that be belief and faith? No. If you want to really be joyful, you

trust and obey. You obey where Jesus tells you to obey. For these men, it was to go and wait in Jerusalem. And you obey with optimism, knowing it will lead to good things in the future.

So you think to yourself, “Boy, it’s hard to obey in this way. I really want to lie on this tax return. I really want to ignore my child right now. I really want to do what I want, not what the recess lady says.” But you are living under the ascended king. So you joyfully obey what He says. If that means serving others, I do it. If that means resting instead of performing, I do it. If that means being generous, I do it.

There are all sorts of joys in obedience. A clean conscience. A relationship that remains at peace and not in tension. A knowledge that you are living in harmony with the way the world is meant to function.

Live joyfully under the Ascended King. Way #1, was be receiving His blessing. Way #2 is by knowing the ascension is true. Way #3 is by worshipping Him. Way #4 is by obeying Him, Now

[Way #5] ...because the Spirit empowers you

v. 49, Acts 1:4-8

“And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

“And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

You church history buffs know that One of the key reasons there is a division between Eastern Orthodox churches and Western church has to do with the Nicen Creed. All Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father. But Western Christians, including Protestants like us, believe that the Son sends the

Spirit along with the Father. Luke 24:49 and Acts 1 together make it clear that Jesus sends the promise of the Father, and that that promise is nothing less than the eternal, all-powerful, Holy Spirit of God. And we see this happening at Pentecost in Acts 2. And the Spirit has been indwelling and filling every Christian since.

But how does the Holy Spirit bring us joy? Well, first, the Holy Spirit has been eternally happy in His relationship with God the Son and God the Father. He's always happy. And He lives in you, so you must be happy. But have you ever noticed this:

That often the things that steal your joy and give you fear and anxiety rest in the fact that you are bad at stuff. You are incapable of doing things. You know that you aren't good with people, so you get nervous calling them or talking to them. You're afraid of not living up to your parents or your boss or your pastor. But here we're told by our ascending King that He's going to give us the All-Powerful Spirit. We are empowered for our task by him. And He's a He and a Him, not an "it." He's a person. And He's here with us.

Thanks to Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit, filling us with His joy. And empowering us for the mission of extending God's Kingdom. We can stop relying on ourselves. Which only promotes pride or fear or failure. We can receive the Holy Spirit. And here's the remarkable thing about the Holy Spirit. His work is so sure, that even while the world around sees you as weak, you wake up one day and find that you are strong. You can face rejection without being crushed like an empty can. You can experience success without it going to your head like some self-absorbed celebrity. You can patiently love people when everyone else finds it impossible.

Live joyfully under the Ascended King. Way #1, was be receiving His blessing. Way #2 is by knowing the ascension is true. Way #3 is by worshipping Him. Way #4 is by obeying Him. Way #5 is because His Spirit empowers you. And now,

[Way #6] ...because He will return

Acts 1:9-11

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee,

why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Most psychology is built on some unhelpful presuppositions. And psychology often offers unhelpful solutions. But it is often helpful in naming certain things. One named thing is called Anticipatory joy. Studies have shown that people derive just as much joy in looking forward to something wonderful in the future as actually accomplishing or experiencing that future event or situation. You know something good is going to happen and it fills you with joy to the point that you can overcome many of the immediate stresses. You can make it through the week because you have vacation coming. You can make it through the test because you have a date tonight.

[Application] Your struggles and trials are temporary. The ascended King is coming back again. He will return. The little scuffles you have with the people in church over how singing or preaching or fellowship can look like will be resolved. Your disease will be healed. Your loneliness will end. The logic the angels seem to have is this: if Jesus has ascended like this. He will come again like this. In a very real sense, it's the angels shouting: What goes up, must come down! When Jesus comes back, He will make everything right.

Picture it! No anxieties. No fears. That tension in your shoulders finally released. The PTSD nightmares that wake you up in a cold sweat. Or which keep tempting you to medicate it in some unhealthy way. Those times when you want to just go to sleep and not wake up. Gone. Just smiles. Just peace.

[Conclusion] Harvard's 80-year long study of wellness and happiness was published in the last several years. Questioning students and following them up for decades, as well as their children showed remarkable trends. The Harvard Gazette summarized things like this: "Close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives, the study revealed. Those ties protect people from life's discontents, help to delay mental and physical decline, and are better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes. That finding proved true across the board among both Harvard men and inner-city participants." One of the psychiatrists examining the data says this, "Loneliness kills. It's as powerful as smoking or alcoholism."

The key to happiness is relationships. So who do you know? If you are in Christ, you are free from trying to build a kingdom with money or power or politics or popularity or whatever- and those don't make you happy. You can foster your relationship with Jesus the ascended King. You know the ruler of creation. I am telling you what the Bible tells us, that knowing God will lead to fullness of joy.