Advent 2023

The Ascension

Luke 24:46-53

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We are in a series where we are working through each of the big ideas in the Bible. We are using this season of Advent to identify with those who waited in the Old Testament for the coming Messiah. What does it mean to wait well?

“Dear Pastor Mike,

Why are you a pastor?”

That's a question I'm eager to answer.

Like many, I've always sought meaning and purpose in life.

Growing up in the 90s, my school played episodes of Carl Sagan's 80s TV show "Cosmos" on PBS, which presented an implicitly atheistic worldview. Sagan taught us that the universe was without sentient origin or meaningful destiny, it just... was. The science was great fun, but even back then I knew something important was missing.

I yearned for deep, objective meaning and purpose. Sagan's explanations made it clear that science couldn't satisfy my existential hunger and PBS's answers to life's big questions just left me more metaphysically hungry.

Over the years I explored various pursuits – fitness, family, wealth, pleasures – but found they all had an inevitable expiration date and couldn't fulfill my quest for a lasting, heart-fulfilling purpose. They were momentarily enjoyable but insufficient for life's deeper appetites. Deep inside I began to realize I needed to bring purpose to them, not find purpose from them.

My search for beauty in external things led me to ponder their origin, including the enjoyment they bring. Every instance of acknowledging something as "good" seemed like a clue on a treasure map.

Where does all the beauty come from?

Even in literature, themes of self-sacrifice, compassion, and humble beginnings leading to benevolent power resonated with me. I realized that charitable love is a fountain of meaningful beauty. When I stripped away all extra parts of every great story, there stood Jesus. The story of Jesus is the perfect embodiment of love. Every great story attunes to this truer one.

God is the origin of all beauty.

I became a pastor because I discovered the source of all the beauty, and I wish to guide others to see it too. See, it's not just about the beautiful moments, but about the creator of those moments. I am in ministry because I found the maker of all the beautiful moments – Jesus. I want you to find Him too.

However.

There is this one moment in the story of Jesus where part of me thinks, “Wait, what just happened?!”

It’s the ascension. Part of me is like, just take us with you! Why do we have to stay here?!

Let’s imagine that moment.

What did Jesus do between the resurrection and the ascension? For 40 Days after the resurrection…

Jesus appeared to his disciples and many others: Jesus appeared to His disciples and others in various locations and settings, affirming His physical resurrection. These appearances are recorded in all four Gospels (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20-21) and in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7.

Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God: Acts 1:3 mentions that Jesus, during these forty days, spoke about the kingdom of God. This involved providing instructions and insights to His disciples about the nature and implications of God's kingdom.

Jesus commissioned the disciples: Jesus gave the Great Commission to His disciples, instructing them to spread the gospel to all nations, baptizing and teaching them. This is found in Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15-18.

Jesus reinforced faith and understanding: Jesus helped His disciples understand the scriptures concerning Himself, as seen in Luke 24:27, 44-45, where He explains how the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms spoke about Him.

Jesus established church leadership: Jesus' interactions with His disciples during this time were crucial in establishing their roles as leaders of the early church. This included reinstating Peter (John 21:15-17) and giving special revelations to key figures like Peter and James (1 Corinthians 15:5,7).

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit: He promised the coming of the Holy Spirit, which was fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 1:4-5, 8; Luke 24:49).

Right before he left, his disciples asked him an important question. One I would ask too.

Acts 1:6–8 (ESV)

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.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

Jesus basically says, “The Kingdom has come through me and will continue through you until I come back.”

What does this all mean?

If your heart beats, God believes you still have a purpose here.

There is no such thing as a living passive Christian. You are either called to participate in the game or called to go home.

As best as I can tell all Christians should participate in these three ways.

Pray: Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4; Matthew 6:5-8; John 16:24; Luke 18:1-8; Luke 21:36; Mark 11:24-25

Participate: Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-17; Matthew 5:16; Galatians 6:9-10; 1 Peter 2:12; Titus 3:8; Hebrews 13:16; 1 John 3:18

Provide: Matthew 6:1-4; Luke 12:13-21; Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4; Matthew 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22; Luke 6:38; Acts 4:32-35

As simply put:

Are you alive?

Are you praying?

Are you participating?

Are you providing?

A couple final tactical thoughts.

When it comes to spiritual impact, think depth over breadth.

You can’t give to all needs and ministries, but you should give to some. You can’t mentor all people, but you should mentor some. You can’t love all people well, but you should love some as deeply as you can. There are billions of people out there and if they received a random text message from you saying “I love you,” they would think it was awfully weird and awkward. There are hundreds of people out there that would think, “OK?” There are 3 to 12 in whom a text message saying “I love you and you matter to me” would be unbelievably meaningful.

Lastly,

Remember Jesus is coming back!

Acts 1:10–11 (ESV)

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.”

Conclusion:

Why am I a pastor?

I believe God is the place where all the beauty comes from. Would you help me help others know this too?

Next Steps Cards:

What is God saying to you? What is God revealing to you? What might he be calling you to do?

Luke 24:46–53 (ESV)

“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. 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 he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.

1. 1 The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)