THIS SAME JESUS!

Catechism Two, Lesson 28

Reading: Acts 1:1–11; Philippians 2:5–11

1. Who Were The Witnesses Who Saw Jesus Alive After His Resurrection?

The Bible records at least eleven occasions on which one or more people saw Jesus alive after being dead and buried—and risen. Before listing these, however, we want to point out three important facts about the kind of witnesses God selected:

A. They were people who had known Jesus well during His life on earth.

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection (Acts 1:21, 22).

B. They were witnesses chosen and prepared beforehand by God.

Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead (Acts 10:40, 41).

C. They were especially anointed by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses and to interpret what they saw.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

We have our evidence of resurrection from the words of reliable eyewitnesses who shared what they had experienced firsthand. They were as follows:

(1) Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; John 20:11–18).

(2) Other women (Luke 24:10).

(3) Simon Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).

(4) Cleophas and another disciple on Emmaus Road (Mark 16:12, 13; Luke 24:13–35).

(5) Ten apostles in a closed room (John 20:19–24).

(6) Eleven apostles, Thomas included (John 20:26–29).

(7) The apostles at Tiberias (John 21:1–23).

(8) More than 500 brethren at one time (1 Cor. 15:6).

(9) James, Jesus’ half brother (1 Cor. 15:7).

(10) The apostles at the mount (Matt. 28:16, 17; Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50; Acts 1:3–12).

(11) Paul, years later (1 Cor. 15:8; Acts 9:3–7).

When we take the time to examine every one of these appearances in detail, we learn much about Jesus’ love for each individual. We see His special care in helping Thomas overcome doubt. We see His words set the hearts of Cleophas and his friend on fire with renewed hope. In every case a resurrection appearance changed the person.

2. How Do We Know That These Were Real Appearances?

We can tell by the lasting results in the lives of those who experienced them. These appearances were not visions or hallucinations, but actual encounters with the risen Christ. The women took hold of His feet (Matt. 28:9). Thomas put his finger in Christ’s wounds (John 20:27). The disciples saw Him eat real food (Luke 24:42, 43). These encounters were life transforming to those who experienced them. They produced lasting changes. James, a half brother of Jesus, had had little confidence in Jesus’ claims before his encounter with the resurrected Christ. Then James became a pillar and leader in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9; Acts 15; 21:18). Paul was transformed from a bitter, persecuting enemy of Christ into an apostle to the Gentiles. Peter, who was depressed because of his own failure to remain loyal to Christ under pressure, declares that he was “begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3).

3. How Was Christ’s Ascension Related To His Resurrection?

Christ’s ascension was the completion of His resurrection. It was not enough that He arose again from the dead with a new body; He still had to go to His Father to receive His approval of the finished work of redemption. Without the acceptance of the Father of His blood shed on our behalf, we could never have received justification or been eligible to receive the promise of the Father, the precious gift of the Holy Spirit.

A. Jesus told Mary not to touch Him until He had ascended to the Father (John 20:17).

On this occasion Jesus demonstrated His deep identification with us in His going before God the Father, for He speaks of this as ascending to “my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” He is rejoicing in the certainty of reconciliation between God and sinners like us.

B. Jesus spent forty days upon the earth giving intensive instructions to His disciples.

The time of fulfillment was near; the Holy Spirit was soon to be poured out. But Jesus had to impart much spiritual understanding to His chosen men before they could carry out their commission to teach and disciple others. Much of this understanding they could not receive until the shocking reality of the resurrection had prepared them to think on another dimension than the restoration of national Israel in

a political way. Spiritual things were becoming more real to them, but even so this idea of a national kingdom lingered in their minds until the ascension and outpouring of the Holy Spirit made the kingdom of heaven more real than anything else to them.

C. Jesus visibly ascended in order to show them how He would come again.

Many people could believe in a purely spiritual coming again, but Jesus promised more than this. His coming again would be as personal and physical as His going away. Nor was He coming back in some different way. He would be the very same personable Jesus they had grown to love and trust. While they were yet watching Him ascend up into the clouds, the angels used this impressive moment to remind them to expect “this same Jesus” to come back exactly as He had left.

D. Jesus’ resurrection was the beginning of His glorification; His ascension completed it.

Jesus experienced two opposite kinds of identification with man in order to bring us back to God. The first we call His “humiliation.” This included His laying aside the glory of being God in order to come to us in the incarnation. But He became more than man, He became a servant and died a criminal’s death. He descended into Hades to conquer death once and for all. Then He arose. The resurrection marks the beginning of the second aspect of His identification with man: His “exaltation.” This exaltation included the restoration of all His former glory and His being seated at the right hand of the Father to take up active rule in the affairs of men. This made the ascension an absolute necessity. The wonderful thing about all of this is that Jesus identified Himself with us in our death in order to take us with Him in resurrection and ascension! He did not return to heaven empty-handed. Redemption was accomplished.

4. What Did Jesus Accomplish Through His Ascension?

The ascension was an important historical event. It could not have been omitted. Had we learned only that Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to His disciples at times, we would be expecting similar post-resurrection appearances in our day. But this was limited to the specific season of forty days and nights. God had something else on His calendar: Pentecost. Jesus was taken upward to heaven to mark the end of His limited personal earthly ministry to enter into a larger dimension in which He could be spiritually near to every believer.

A. The ascension provides historical continuity between the Jesus of the Gospels and the spiritual Christ of the epistles.

We know we are speaking of the same Jesus as described in the letters of Paul, Peter and John, as well as by the Gospel writers. He had simply entered into a new dimension. He is continuing the work He began on earth through the Holy Spirit in His believers who have become literal members of His Body.

B. Jesus ascended that He might fill and permeate all things with His presence.

While on earth, His personal presence was limited to His physical body. Now He can fill all of His own with His personal presence through the Holy Spirit, and He can fill the heavens and the earth.

C. Jesus ascended above all His enemies.

All His enemies—and ours—were put under His feet when God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand. This is the place of ultimate authority and power in the universe. Jesus reigns now, no matter what things appear to be.

D. Jesus ascended in order to begin His high priestly ministry for us.

We now have a God-man in the heavens interceding for us. We have a high priest who really understands us because He went through all the temptations we experience. He is easily moved with compassion toward us. But He is present with the Father to act as our advocate every time we sin. He is constantly interceding for us that we might be saved to the uttermost.

E. Jesus ascended in order to give special ministry gifts to the Church.

Jesus extended His own leadership in a very practical way. He gave to His Church five ministry gifts, each one continuing some important aspect of His own ministry. These gifts are: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. We need each of these for three reasons: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the Body of Christ. Christ gave these gifts to men through His ascension. (See Eph. 4.)

F. Without His ascension, we could not have had the Spirit shed forth upon us.

Pentecost would have been an impossibility if Jesus had not returned to heaven first to have His work of redemption approved. Because His blood was acceptable, He could shower His redeemed people with the gift of His indwelling presence. Peter specifically linked the sending of the Spirit with the ascension of Christ, when 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 for this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33–36).

This is a key passage in understanding the present ministry of Christ. Take some time to understand it. This is how God fulfilled the Davidic covenant which promised a king to rule upon the throne of David forever. It required a supernatural fulfillment in Christ.

5. What Does Christ’s Ascension Mean To Us In Every Day Experience?

We must understand doctrine. But more important, we must be sure that each vital truth of the Bible affects us personally. This begins with knowledge, such as we are receiving in this course. Then we take hold upon these things by faith and appropriate them. Spiritual truth properly received will always make a change in our character and living.

A. We have a real hope of His personal return (Acts 1:9–11).

B. We have deep assurance that our spiritual enemy is defeated (Eph. 1:15–23).

C. We have authority in His Name because He is presently ruling at His Father’s right hand—this is the authority we need to carry out the great commission (Matt. 28:16–20).

D. We redirect our affections to things above where Christ is (Col. 3:1–4). This gives us effective power to overcome worldly habits and entanglements.

E. Our faith is given additional support and centered in God (1 Pet. 1:21).

F. We share with Christ in an intercessory prayer ministry (Rom. 8:26, 27; Heb. 7:25).

G. We know He is always with us (John 14).

Home Study: Lesson 28

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What kind of witnesses did God select to tell us of the resurrection?

a.

b.

c.

2. List five of the eleven witnesses who saw Jesus after His resurrection and tell why you picked these particular five—what stood out to you?

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

3. How was Christ’s ascension related to His resurrection?

a.

b.

c.

d.

4. What did Jesus accomplish through His ascension?

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

5. What does the word “ascension” mean?