

The Solution: The Ascension, His Kingdom, and the Local Church

1. Intro- Recapturing the Ascension (Acts 1-2)

- Might be the most important doctrine that we take for granted
- A feature of every orthodox creed (ex. “He ascended to heaven and is now seated at the right hand of glory.”- Nicene Creed)
- Two of the four Gospel writers record the event
 - Mark 16:19- Mark mentions it plainly but without detail
 - Luke 24:50-53- Luke mentions it here as well, but without detail.
- Luke begins Acts with a detailed account of the event in Acts 1
 - Vs. 9- Upon giving his disciples instruction and commission, Luke records that he began to be lifted into the sky, being taken by a cloud.
 - Vs. 10- The disciples continue to stare up into the sky, astonished by what they have seen.
 - Vs. 10-11- two angels shown up, asking them why they are continuing to gaze rather than getting on with it and then they promise that He will return in the same way, as they have heard Him promise.
- There are other elements that are taking place here as well that are not spelled out in the narrative accounts. Five of which are:
 - Ps. 2- The reign of God’s Anointed One over the nations
 - Ps. 24:7-10- The entrance of the victorious King
 - Dan. 7- The ascendancy of the Son of Man from the earth to rule over the affairs of the earth as the regent of the Ancient of Days
 - Rom. 3:25 with Heb. 2:17 and 5:14-16- The immortal High Priest who has ascended to offer His eternal, propitiating sacrifice, that absorbs the wrath of God, cleanses both the heavens and the earth, and makes reconciliation possible.
 - Eph. 1:15-23- The elevation of those people that will come under His rule back to their proper place in the courts of the Lord.
- **Jesus bore the curse on His brow (crown of thorns) and did not merely bear sin but became it to remove the enmity between us and God, elevating us back to proper relationship with Him. (Col. 2:14)**
- What is the manifestation of this rule? A Spirit-enlivened People
 - Acts 2- Peter’s message is focused on proclaiming that the manifestations that are being demonstrated are not merely God

deciding that it is time to fulfil the promise He made in Joel. Rather it is proof positive that Jesus has ascended and is now ruling!

- Vs. 22-28: Peter makes the connection to Jesus back to David, highlighting the promises that God made to David concerning his descendants.
 - Vs. 29-30: Peter says that the greater promises about God's Holy One not seeing abandonment to death or even to experience decay could not have been had David as the referent ("...the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day."- vs. 29)
 - Vs. 30-31: David was prophesying about one of his descendants that was to come, and Peter says that it was the resurrection of the Christ that David foresaw and about which he prophesied.
 - Vs. 32: According to Peter, Jesus met these qualifications, and they could attest to that fact.
- **This leads to Peter's key assertion about the "why" of what is occurring on the day of Pentecost in vs. 33-36: Jesus is ascended and ruling!**
- Vs. 33: Because of His ascension, Jesus is now putting every aspect of the cosmos on notice that He is now ruling as the regent of the Ancient of Days (as Daniel saw) and the fulfilment of the promises made to Adam (offspring that would crush evil), Abraham (a son who would bless every nation), Moses (a prophet and priest who could communicate with God as he did), and David (a perpetual ruler of the nations).
 - Vs. 33: This moment of the Holy Ghost manifesting God's OT promises is proof positive that He now in charge.
 - **Vs. 34-35: The most quoted/allude to verses of the OT in the NT are from Ps. 110. NT writers are making sure that those that hear them know that this is a KINGDOM MESSAGE!!! Peter is saying here that the epoch that being inaugurated by the Spirit's arrival is both the announcement of His rule and how He will assert it: through Spirit-filled people that are delivered from darkness and ruled by Him.**
 - **The Ps. 110 passage here highlights that this will occur "...until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." The Kingdom coming into the earth is about subduing and**

supplanting rebel, rival governments to His Kingdom that are administrated by wicked spirits through their own “inspired” earthly representatives (Acts 26:15-18- The Gospel comes to deliver people out of the power of Satan to the power of God).

- The Gospel’s power and the Spirit-filled life of those that preach it are joined to an active and real King that is truly ruling from a throne in heaven and extending that rule into the earth through His people, who will be the only ones to make it through His judgement when He returns. (“**God has become King of the whole world through the person and work of Jesus!**”- this is the “good news”). **The existence of the Church is supposed to be proof positive of His rule!!!**
- Converting to becoming a Kingdom citizen must be done for these reasons alone; **all others are bankrupt and deception:**
 - **It is not in the self-improvement of “this will make me a better person, both mentally and spiritually.”**
 - **It is not in the “feel good” of family relationships.**
 - **It is not in the pragmatic understanding of “well, it is just better to live this way than another way.”**
 - **It is not in the sentimental reasoning of “well, I want to raise good kids and give them the best chance at having a good life as well.”**
- **Conversion and living a life of the Spirit with whom He joins you should only be undertaken because**
 - **You have realized that you are bankrupt without the Cross/the Spirit and you are ready to live a life of obedience marked by repentance**
 - **You realize that gaining the knowledge of and life with the Person of Jesus is enough, no matter when it becomes fully real to you and what it costs in the interim**
 - **You realize that without Him, are an enemy of Him, making you a member of a doomed kingdom that will be destroyed and that destruction will be an eternal one (fear of God/Hell should be real!)**
- Conversion to the Kingdom of the Ascended One requires not just a decision but also deliverance from a dominating force that is making you its slave, just as it was with the children of Israel and Egypt (Moses’ mission is that of administrating God’s deliverance and the manifestation of that is the

destruction of the gods of Egypt, not merely the earthly Pharaoh and his power/influence!)

2. The Problem- Real Evil and the Dominion of Darkness (Eph. 6: 10-18 with Acts 13-18)

- Paul is clear to the Ephesians, who are amid a terrible and long-lasting trial in their church (see Acts 20 with Ephesians, 1 Timothy, and 2 Timothy) that:
 - Evil is real and present in the age in which they live (5:11-15).
 - The fight with evil proceeds primarily from unseen rulers and principalities that affect our lives, even if it seems that it proceeds from other humans, thus the need for “spiritual armor” made up of virtue traits which can only come from a life lived with the Holy Spirit (6:10-18).
- Paul centers on this with the Ephesians because he is reminding them of what he taught them (“...the full whole of God...”; see Acts 20:36) because it is a key element of his mission as an apostle.
- Real evil exists in this world, and it is rooted not only in the actions/dispositions of humans, but also in an unseen world that impacts all our lives because of the rule of fallen spirits in rebellion to God.
- **This is why the message is a Kingdom one rather than only a salvic one or a family one or a self-improvement one!!!!**
- **All the places that Paul was sent to plant churches had associative spiritual beings that were ruling there and would have continued to rule there if the Gospel had not been preached and a church not established!!!!**
 - Acts 13-14: Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe- all were under the rule of principalities connected to the traditional Greek gods
 - Acts 16-18: Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth: all were under the rule of principalities that were connected to divination, political power worship, immortality, or more traditional Greek gods/goddesses.
 - Acts 19- Ephesus: connected to the worship of the goddess Artemis in both traditional Greek and locally represented forms as evidence by the great temple there in her honor that was a wonder of the ancient world.
 - Acts 20-28; the book of Romans- Paul being driven by the Spirit to get to Rome, along with the associate letter he sent before him on his way that detailed his Gospel to the believers already established there, can be seen in the same light. He desires to go there to

ensure that a church that has his Gospel is established and functional to dislodge the myriads of principalities represented in that city.

- **These are cities that are not merely selected for economic/social influence or ease of access or something along those lines. It is not their population that necessitates the apostolic mission there. Rather, these are cities that are disseminating a culture of the dominion of darkness in that region. Paul goes there/is directed there to break the power of the rule of those places through the judgement of the Gospel and a demonstration of the Spirit and power of Christ's rule that delivers people and establishes them in a way of life that represents that rule!!!**

3. The Solution- A Christ-Ruled, Cross-and-Spirit Empowered Church (1 Cor. 1:17-2:16)

- Genuine evil is dealt with through what Paul highlights here in 1 Cor. 1:17-2:16
- Considering all the issues that were taking place in Corinth, he starts with the relational division issue (perhaps he saw it as the most pressing/most deadly/most destructive?)
- In the middle of statements/idea that sound closer to what we would give our kids when they are fighting and not expect them to require an encounter with God to accomplish (“Knock off the fighting and divisions! If you don’t, I am going to come and spank you!”), Paul launches into this section where he highlights the importance of the Spirit, and the power manifestation of the Spirit, to all of this.
- Vs. 17-18: *For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*
 - The factions in the church in Corinth are threatening the very heart of the Gospel: God’s house is a house without partiality and should be so unified that the world, and the principalities that are associated with the wisdom of the world, should be judge by it
 - **When we are walking in relational disharmony over anything that is not concerned with the Kingdom of God coming into the earth more, we are “emptying the Cross of its power”**
 - The Cross is the Great Equalizer and Reconciler- we all stand before Him and are similarly judged, found wanting, and restored to righteousness with God and a life together, by it.

- The simplicity of the message and the life that it calls us to live together is destructive to the rule/power of the principalities and powers that are represented by the dominion of darkness. The “wisdom of men” cannot deal with the unifying nature of the Cross and the Spirit that comes to awaken us to life with Him and each other!
 - The Cross is the power of God for our salvation (Rom. 1:16).
 - **If we have relational issues between us, then we need to check our devotion to the Cross and the life of obedience that He calls us to out of it!**
- Vs. 19-31- Paul reminds the Corinthians of the paradoxical nature of the Kingdom: God’s weakness is stronger than any other display of strength and His foolishness is wiser than any other display of wisdom.
 - The Cross is the ultimate expression of the upside-down Kingdom that Jesus tried to teach the disciples the whole time He was with them.
 - Expressions like “love your enemies” and “pray for those that persecute you,” “let the greatest be the least” and “those that lose their lives shall find it” are all expressions that find their final form in the Cross.
 - The Cross is the place where God, the immortal, uncreated One, was killed by the hand of those that He created for their sake! (Makes zero sense!!)
 - The Cross/Resurrection/Ascension makes no sense from any earthly standpoint
 - If you are going to rule the cosmos and defeat evil, then why let it destroy you?
 - If you are going to have the power over death, why not show it off?
 - If you are going to have the ability to rule everything from your throne and take whatever you want, then why partner with lesser beings to accomplish your ends?
 - **Paul tells them that God’s weakness, expressed not only in the Cross, but in what He is trying to do with them, is stronger than the greatest strength expression of the powers of evil or the strongest human!**
 - They are embracing these factions because they think in them, they will be seen as wise and, thus, have a more prominent place and

Paul is reminding them that they are falling into the trap of the powers of the dominion of darkness again! (“The Inner Ring” by CS Lewis- the drive of humanity is to be known and accepted by perceived human power structures/the “in” crowd; Jesus gave His life that we might have that desire fulfilled and it only crops back up when we forget the power of the Cross)

- Vs. 30-31: We are completely covered by the Cross and there is no need to boast in anything else...especially not “who you know!”
- 2:1-5- *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of me but in the power of God.*
 - **First, this gives us insight into what was going on those 18-plus months he was there (The power of God was on display...because the Kingdom had come and principalities and powers were being dislodged)**
 - Second, we see the manner of his message: it was not like the manner of the great philosophers and rhetoricians of his day.
 - He did not convince them with reason/argumentation/pragmatics (we rely on this too much!!!)
 - **He “blasted” them into the Kingdom with the message of the Cross and the destruction of the power of the dominion of darkness. (*dunamis*=raw power on display)**
 - ***Apodoeixis*=demonstration of proof; a showing off; a making of manifestation or showing forth; a proof, in this case, by the Spirit and power of God operating through Paul and stirring the minds and hearers and persuading them through what they see, what they hear, and what they feel; the word denotes a manifest, observable proof that validates a claim (only NT usage)**
 - Paul’s message was backed up in ways that the other messages of the day could not be (think about the implications when considering the claims and testimonies of the other religious expressions of the day!)

- **The life that we are called to live together is not merely mutual beneficial or a better idea than others. Rather, it is a living, breathing expression of the active rule of the Ascended One...and His power moving amongst us is proof of it.**
 - While set amid a point he is making about the need to see divisions and factions eliminated in the church at Corinth, Paul is not saying that “the power of a changed life” or even, “people living together in community” is the true expression of the Gospel. **Here he is writing that the same power that overcame death, that dwells in them through Holy Spirit, and delivered them in the first place from the dominion of darkness should be expressed and be the thing that is binding them together.**
 - **This moves any church community beyond the ability of humans to make it happen and to keep it going. If the Spirit is not consistently moving and demonstrating Christ’s victory and rule over the dominion of darkness, then we are going to revert to our natural tendencies, which will necessarily draw us back into the other kingdom that we were delivered from!**
- Vs. 6-16
 - God’s economy is ultimate wisdom, if it can be perceived by spiritual minds
 - The powers of darkness could not figure it out, since they thought that they were wise to kill Jesus. This merely enacted the whole plan for their doom!
 - **We should expect Him to do more than we can express or imagine, since His plan is much bigger than the need in our moment! (Imagination is the key to faith!!)**
 - Jesus was clear that our minds need to be cleansed as well as our actions (Matt. 5-7); the only way to do this is to have a constant walk with the Spirit!!
 - **The only way to understand these things is with regular encounters with the Spirit (Eph. 5:15-21). The Spirit is the only one that can help us understand God’s plan...and why it is that He is using us as a joined community to execute the justice of God on the dominion of darkness! (We have been given the mind of Christ through our consistent encounters with the Spirit!!)**

4. Conclusion- Mind Realignment Through an Encounter with the Spirit

- God is dealing with evil beyond a visible level whenever He calls a church into existence!!!
 - **He does it through the deliverance of people through the message of the Gospel**
 - **He does it through the filling of lives with the Holy Spirit and the new character traits that they start to demonstrate and values they hold**
 - **He does it through the demonstrations of power that the Spirit does in the gifts He distributes and the miracles that He provides**
 - **He does it through the unity of diverse and disparate people that should not be able to live together**
 - **He does it through the reconstruction and renewal of broken lives that no one in the domain of darkness deemed valuable**
 - **He does it through the way that believers reproduce themselves, both in the place they are planted and beyond as the Gospel of the Kingdom goes forth.**
- **We must embrace the purpose for our existence as a church and that means that we must be encountering Holy Spirit with power so that we have His mind and can resist the temptation to drift back into the dominion of darkness!**
- **God is calling us to be reminded of His rule and reign this morning through a power encounter with the Spirit so that we can repent and get back on track doing our part to dislodge the evil principalities that rule over where He has planted us!**