

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

Lord God Almighty, give us patience; we want to know the secrets of Your kingdom, but we cannot know everything. We therefore give You thanks for all You have revealed to us through Jesus Christ, for His teaching, for His life and death, and especially for the revelation that He will come again in glory to establish Your rule. Help us, each day, to be so devoted to You that we become content to do not our own will, but Yours; both now and always. AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: TRANSPORT

**1. For yourself**

*If you have a car or a bicycle or any other personal means of transport, offer this to God in prayer, and pray that God will bless you through its use.*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Pray that God will bless the various means of transport used by those you know and love. If any of these are on long journeys at this time, pray for them especially.*

**3. For the church and its work**

*Pray for God's blessing on any forms of church transport used by your church. Minibuses, cars or the like. Pray for the protection of God's servants when doing godly work in this world and especially when travelling.*

**4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)**

*Ask the Lord in prayer what He thinks about the immense pollution of the world, which is a by-product of personal transportation. Pray that the oil industry and the car industry will be responsive to adjust concerns of many that unless there is change the future of the world is compromised.*

### Meditation

What is heaven?

What is your picture of this place where Jesus' lives?

Is it far above, untouchable, or it is there within your grasp, touched, like a feather at fingertips.

Think and pray,

and do not let imagination run too riot,

Jesus left a final Will and Testament,

words that have been written down to tell us all about His home.

It is the pasture wherein rest is found;

it is the place where love has conquered death;

it is the home of many mansions,

all prepared beforehand;

it is a place where even sparrows

do not fall unnoticed;

Yes, glimpsed by faith beforehand,

it is the place where Jesus holds a little child,

and smiles 'welcome';

it sparkles in its crystalline design,

and reaches farther than the eye can see;

it is the place where lamb and lion live as one,

and 'saint' and 'sinner' place their trust in grace.

Let these pictures from God's words inspire you,

let these visions of God's people speak,  
let the fire of God that burns within  
encourage you to grasp the eternal truth,  
that heaven is your one true home,  
both now, and then, for ever.

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## Bible Study

Bible passage – Acts 1:6-14

<sup>6</sup> So when they had gathered together, they asked Jesus,

‘Lord, has the time now come for you to restore the Kingdom to Israel?’

<sup>7</sup> He replied,

‘It is not for you to know the times or seasons the Father has fixed by His own authority, <sup>8</sup> but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’

<sup>9</sup> After He said this, He was raised up, while they were watching, before a cloud hid Him from their sight.

<sup>10</sup> While Jesus left them and they were still staring up to heaven, two men in white robes suddenly appeared beside them, <sup>11</sup> and said,

‘Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking up into heaven? This same Jesus who has been taken from you up into heaven will return in the same way you saw Him go to heaven.’

<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called ‘The Mount of Olives’, which is about a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. <sup>13</sup> When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying, that is, Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. <sup>14</sup> They devoted themselves single-mindedly to prayer, together with some of the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus and His brothers.

### Review

***Jesus leaves the disciples for the last time, and gives them more than a hint of what their work must be from now on. He is taken up into God's glory, from where He will come again, and the whole experience is sufficient to send the disciples back to Jerusalem, where they wait for the coming Holy Spirit, expectantly.***

After Luke's introduction to ‘Acts’ (in the first five verses), he picks up rapidly where his Gospel left off. Our reading today, contains the extraordinary description of Jesus' Ascension, and it adds flesh to the brief account of this event found at the end of Luke's Gospel. It is worth reading this (Luke 24:46-51), before starting our reading today (you can find it below, in ‘going deeper’). The link between these two is very important, because Luke is the only evangelist to describe Jesus' Ascension, an event that is essential to our understanding of His work and ministry. Outside of Luke and Acts the only other description of Christ's Ascension comes from the writings of Paul. In his letters to the Romans (10:6f.) and to the Ephesians (4:8f.), he describes Jesus returning to heaven triumphant to be seated at God's right hand, having defeated all evil and all heavenly opponents, and at last able to pour gracious gifts on all those who believe in Him.

Of course, Paul writes about the Ascension to help his readers understand the gracious gifts of God, but Luke is more concerned to tell us what this event meant to the disciples. He attempts to convey their true story, stretching out through Jesus' life, death, resurrection and Ascension, and into His presence through the Holy Spirit in the communities of the early church and their leaders. This is no more obvious than at the beginning of today's reading, where Luke describes the disciples as still struggling with what was happening to them. They still did not understand still why the Messiah had to die, and they were stuck the old Jewish expectation that the Messiah would simply to turn up and ‘restore the kingdom to Israel’ (1:6). They asked why Jesus had not yet done this, but Jesus' reply diverts their attention.

In these last words before he finally leaves earth (1:7,8), Jesus echoes what he said before His death about His coming again in glory. He had already warned the disciples that they would never know when God would come to establish His kingdom (Luke 12:40, 21:34-46), so instead of pursuing this unknown, He makes a promise that will come true in real life. He says that if they wait, the Holy Spirit will come and change their lives. Something new will happen, and the disciples will be empowered to do the will of God on earth! The same Holy Spirit who was with Jesus will be present with them (1:8)!

Remarkably, it is precisely when Jesus gives this promise that He is taken up into heaven (1:9). Luke describes the scene with only a few words, saying that Jesus was 'raised up'(1:9), and he adds that this was done while the disciples 'were watching'. Luke is keen for us to know that the disciples saw these things, for church's witness is at every stage bound up with the truthful testimony of the disciples about Jesus Christ, whether of the early days of His ministry, His death on the Cross, or His Ascension into heaven. Then, the glory of the Lord envelops the ascending Christ in the form of a cloud (1:9), which comes to '*hide Him from their sight*'. It is God's will that His people no longer see Jesus in the flesh; from this point on, God intends to be with His disciples through the Holy Spirit.

The Ascension is not left unmarked. As with so many other Biblical events (for example, at Jesus' birth and his death, Luke 1:11f. and 22:43), angels appear, challenging those who witness these great events and directing their attention to Jesus and to God's purposes. The angels do not add anything to Jesus' promise of the coming Holy Spirit, they reveal something entirely new and exciting about what will happen when Jesus Himself returns; they tell us that He will return '*in the same way you saw Him go to heaven*' (1:11). In other words, He will be seen visibly from within the clouds of God's glory! We might interpret this in a number of different ways, but the vision is simple enough; we will see Him coming in the sky.

After these amazing events, and with a significant amount to absorb on the brief journey (1:12), the disciples make their way to the single room in Jerusalem they call home (1:13). Luke is careful to list the disciples in order, using the same names he used earlier (Luke 6:14,15), but without the last tragic figure of Judas Iscariot (more about him tomorrow). But the lives of the disciples have been transformed; they are no longer struggling to understand what is happening to them, instead, they remain completely focussed on Jesus although He has gone (1:14). Moreover, as if to indicate the new things God is now doing, Luke tells us that the new single-minded devotion of the disciples aroused by these events is shared firstly with the women who witnessed the resurrection, and also with some of Jesus' own family. It is a hint of the healing work of God's Holy Spirit yet to come.

## Going Deeper

- Notes on the translation of the passage
- The Ascension of Christ, as described in Luke's Gospel (Luke 24:46-53)

### **Notes on the translation of the passage**

#### **V12 '*from the hill called the "Mount of olives"***

The disciples returned to Jerusalem from the place where the ascension took place, which bears the Greek name 'Elaionos'. This is the name given to the olive orchard on a hill opposite Jerusalem, often called the 'Mount of Olives' or 'Olivet'

#### **V14 '*They devoted themselves single-mindedly to prayer***

*'all these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer' (NRSV)*

*'they all joined together constantly in prayer' (NIV).*

The two main Greek words in the sentence speak first of constancy or devotion and then of being of 'one mind'. Some versions translate the first as if it means constant prayer, but I reckon that after the experience of the ascension it is netter to emphasise the intensity of devotion rather than its frequency.

### **The Ascension of Christ, as described in Luke's Gospel (Luke 24:46-53)**

Reading this passage from Luke's Gospel is helpful for our understanding of today's passage of Scripture. It is printed out here so that you can do just this. Notice that the main themes of our reading today are found within this passage of Scripture; the preaching of the Gospel, Christ's being 'lifted up', and the effect of this event upon the disciples, principally that they prayed and worshipped God.

<sup>6</sup> He told them,

'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

<sup>50</sup> When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.

<sup>52</sup> Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup> And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. (Luke 24:46-53)

### **Verses 7 and 8, a program for the life of the early church**

Jesus' words in verses 7 and 8 reads like a direct instruction to the Christians of the early church, and henceforth, to us. To begin with, He warns us against undue speculation about the things of God. The speculation He mentions is that of trying to guess when God will come to judge the world (1:6), but Jesus' words are far more general, He says '*it is not you to know the times or seasons the Father has fixed by his own authority*' (1:7). In general, therefore, we are warned not to try and speculate when God will act. The rest of Jesus' words here leap out at us as being godly guidance for Christian mission.

There is a clear progression here within all that Jesus says; we must wait firstly for His power and anointing, and then do the specific work He has command of us. It is easy to forget that the coming of the Holy Spirit is not just an event that brings power; to think this would be to be too presumptive. The reason we must wait before doing God's will is because we need His anointing for the task, that is upon his blessing, his approval, his inspiration, his understanding, and much more. This is not the place for a full discussion of the word 'anointed' as it appears in the Bible, but if we do not know what it means then we need to find out.

Lastly, Jesus makes clear, yet again, that His perfect will is that His people proclaim the Gospel throughout the whole world. This is an enormous and enveloping task, but it is surely obvious and easy to understand. The church cannot ever decide his own ministry; it is commissioned by God for the unique and specific task of taking the Gospel to the whole world, and God will not be happy unless it is done, together, by all those who follow Jesus.

### **Witnesses**

Note how often this passage of Scripture speaks of witnesses and testimony, and of seeing things. Jesus asks for His disciples to be 'witnesses' (1:8), and then Luke emphasises that the disciples were staring up to heaven as Jesus was taken from their sight; they certainly 'saw' what happened (1:9,10)! Then, we are told that Jesus will come back in the same way we have 'seen' Him go (1:11); of course, this is done by God so that disciples who know the testimony of the apostles will then be able to see Jesus and understand that He is coming again. Those who do not know the evidence of the first apostles will not know what to look for!

This emphasis is not casual. God is constantly making Himself known in the world, but principally through Jesus, a man who was visibly seen to be a man and to live a human life. Those who follow Him are people who trust the testimony of those who have seen Him. As Paul explains in Romans 10, people will not know about Jesus unless people go out into the world and bear the testimony of what they have seen of God.

### **The women and the family of Jesus become a more obvious part of the disciple's group**

Throughout his Gospel, Luke emphasises the stories of women. He describes the birth of Jesus almost completely from this perspective (see Luke 1), and he dwells on the details of the women who come to Jesus for ministry and support Him right to the end (Luke 8:2,3, 23:49f.). It is wonderful therefore to read here that the women become a more obvious part of the disciples' group after the Ascension; perhaps the new church of God will break down the barriers between men and women so often present within pagan cultures and religions.

Notice also that the family of Jesus is mentioned at the end of verse 14. Now as the other evangelist's record, Jesus had some harsh words for some of His family at times during His ministry (see Matthew 12:48f.), so it is good to see here that they are not exempt from the great blessing of the Kingdom. Perhaps this is a sign of the peace within families long prophesied for the coming Kingdom of God (Malachi 4:6).

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# Discipleship

## Application

### ***A programme of work for the church***

Jesus spoke as he did for a reason, and his last words are importance for us today. He asks us to wait for the anointing and power of his Holy Spirit, and He asks us to achieve His desire to will on Earth, which is that the Gospel is to be preached to all people. What part of this message, clearly conveyed by Luke as the last words of Jesus himself, do we not understand? Everything we do within the life of the church must be subservient to these overarching aims; in our devotion, we await the anointing of the power of God's Spirit, not that we have failed to receive this in the past, but because we need this in a new way for all the new and fresh tasks ahead. Further, the whole mission of the church is to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world in word and deed. If the church puts itself to anything less than this, then it falls short of its vision, and it cannot be said to be doing God's will.

Too often, we become comfortable in something less than what God would have for us, and we prefer a religious life that panders to our needs and wants. We settle too easily for a church that appears to meet our emotional or musical needs, for example, rather than be a part of God's vibrant work in the world to establish His Kingdom. From the first century to this, God has been working through those who hear His voice and read His Word, to achieve exactly what Jesus talks about here in His last recorded words. Let us make sure that we are a part of this.

### ***The focus of our devotions***

Luke helpfully tells us that after seeing Him ascend, the disciples become a more focussed group, spending time in prayer and devotions (1:14). It is indeed a sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and in the life of a church community when questions about God give way to prayerful devotion of Jesus Christ. Over and over again, the historic church of Christ has found that when its people turn to Him in devotion and prayer, God is able to do powerful things in this world.

## Questions for groups

1. What does this passage of Scripture teach us about the second coming of Christ? What do you think it means when Scripture says that Jesus will return *'in the same way you saw him go to heaven'* (1:11)
2. What does Jesus' Ascension teach us about Jesus himself and about His mission on Earth?
3. What does verse 14 teach the church today about Christian Fellowship? Who might need to be included in Christian Fellowship today because they are rejected by society?

## Discipleship challenges

- *Are you a member of a church house group, Bible study group or prayer group? Are the activities of these groups focused? Are they focused upon Jesus Christ, or on earthly things? Look carefully at this passage of Scripture today to see whether it has a message for your prayer or Bible study group, and seek an opportunity to deliver the message.*
- *What do you think about the way in which some Christian groups and donor to discover the actual time Jesus Christ will return? Explore the issue on the Internet, and have a look at some of the messages who find their about the second coming of Christ. To what extent do these messages measure up to what Jesus says, and what the Bible says about his return? It is important to explore these ideas because they effect many aspects of Christian life and discipleship*

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## Final Prayer

Thank You Lord Jesus for the amazing truths we find in You Word. You break down our barriers and overcome every hurdle in the quest to spread the news of Your Gospel to all people and all nations. May we be so enthusiastic for the things of Your Kingdom that we do the same, and find that we are in tune with the work of You Spirit. AMEN

