

## A Fitting Conclusion

### Acts 1:1-11

Right before the end of a hymn or song you often hear a chord that is known as a “seventh.” It is called a “leading” tone because the music doesn’t sound complete if you stop there. It “leads,” directs you to the next sound which we hear as a good tone to complete the verse or music piece. It is also called an “unresolved” chord because it tells us that the music is not over with. We want to hear another chord, a “resolved” chord that we’d be satisfied to hear at the end of a song.

Why talk about resolved and unresolved chords? Life is often an unresolved chord. It never quite seems as though we are satisfied. There is always something that needs to be done, some unfinished business, something unresolved. Now that we are in June people are thinking about summer vacation. It can also be a month for weddings. No matter how much we prepare for a wedding or a vacation, there is always something that needs to be done. School teachers find as the school year winds down to a close that there is so much they could have covered in the course work, but they can never do it all. Families never seem to be able to settle down and say, “We can relax now.” As children grow older, families seem to get busier and busier taking care of their needs. And when the children leave to go to college or work afterwards, mom and dad still keep busy trying to help them financially and then later be grandparents. Even as we sit down by that mountain stream or lakefront on a peaceful summer’s day, thoughts come to our minds about what needs to be done or about what is still unresolved in our lives. We never seem to be able to reach that final “chord” in life when we can say, “I’ve made it.”

In the story of Jesus’ ascension the disciples think they have found the resolution to their lives. After everything seemed to fall apart for them, when Jesus was arrested and crucified, He then rose on Easter. Now they expect that Jesus will play the final “chord” by marching into Jerusalem, as He did on Palm Sunday, not to die, but to overthrow the Romans and become the new King David. They say to Him, “Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?” But what do they get? Do they get that final, resolved “chord” they are waiting for? No, instead Jesus seems to give them a new unresolved chord when He says, “It is not

proper for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes.” Then Jesus ascends into heaven. The disciples are left standing there with their mouths wide open wondering what is happening. It is like having the battery go out on your i-Phone as you are getting an important text, the internet going out during the exciting part of a game, or like the last pages of a mystery novel missing from the book.

We too, can feel like we are left hanging by God. When our lives are hectic, we desire a break. Then when the break finally comes, we have time to think about the sadness of sin our lives. So we go back into the busy routine to escape having to think about the pain. Satisfaction is so fleeting. The refreshing warmth of spring turns into the heat of summer and then back into the gloom of winter. We never seem to make it to a fitting conclusion when we can say, “I have arrived, I’ve made it!”

If you have ever seen a soap opera on TV, you will notice that each episode has one goal—to get you to watch the next episode. Every time you think the plot will be resolved, new elements are brought into the show which bring in more unresolved problems. The result is that a conclusion is never reached—it just goes on and on.

That is what sin does to us. We look for resolution and satisfaction in wealth, popularity, or things, but that only leads to the desire for more and more. It is a vicious cycle. We desire more; we get more. But the more we get; the more we desire.

Expert outdoorsmen tell us that when a person gets lost in the woods, he/she tends to move in a circle. A person feels totally out of control by waiting, which in reality is the best thing to do. But that situation it is so tempting to feel that I have to keep on going. The result is that I end up moving in circles, going really nowhere. So it is as we try to pursue happiness and a conclusion to our restlessness in this world. Like the plot in a soap opera, we get nowhere. Sin traps us in a circle whose only ending is death.

But God refuses to let that cycle go on. That is why He entered into our sinful world in Christ Jesus. And that is why Jesus left this world to ascend into heaven. He ascended to give us a fitting conclusion. The story of Jesus is not a soap opera

that goes on and on. By His ascension, Jesus leads us away from the cycle of death and sin to a fitting conclusion, a resolution to our problems in being with Jesus. Like the disciples, we may not have been looking to end the story with Jesus ascending into heaven. But the Ascension is a conclusion to this life that leads us into a new life with Christ.

Often in the last stanza of a hymn the organist will surprise us by playing the chord in a different pitch. It stops us in the rhythm of our singing. But the result of that change is that we end up singing that stanza in a higher pitch and our volume increases. In a surprising way, the organist gives us a fitting conclusion to the hymn.

Ascension does that for us. Jesus' surprise exit of Ascension may not be what we or the disciples expected, but the result is that our lives are directed to a different path—they are directed upward to God. If Jesus had stayed on earth, we, like the disciples, would be looking for the fulfillment of God's promises in this world. Instead Jesus' Ascension directs us upward to hope in a new world, a new life forever with Him.

A commencement speaker told about how our technology can advance to the point that we could find a cure for death. But where would that leave us? We would be perpetually left in this world. As much as sin has wrapped around us, it would do so even more and more. That is why Jesus ascended into heaven. That is why He didn't stay on this earth where we would look to him to fix things in this life rather than direct us to a life totally apart from sin.

Jesus has given us a fitting conclusion to His story, for it is a story that does end, but not in this word or in this life. His Ascension does not string us along, holding off our complaints until He finds another set of excuses to put off His promises to us. His Ascension directs us to the definite end to all the pain and misery of this life. God grant that our lives be directed upward to Christ as we await the fitting conclusion when He comes again.

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