

Luke 24:44-53  
The Ascension of our Lord  
May 21, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It took this worldwide pandemic and this season's odd observance of the Resurrection of our Lord for us to notice what Jesus himself all along had confessed. If you recall, I mentioned this past Easter Sunday that – even on Easter morn – Jesus was looking to the ascension: “Do not cling to me,” he told the woman, “for I have not yet ascended to My Father.” And, as I mentioned in that audio-recorded sermon for Easter Sunday, where the first day of Easter was rather quiet, the actual day of the Ascension was *glorious*. And, I'm glad to be able to serve you the glorious benefits of our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord on this glorious Festival of the Ascension.

Perhaps we do well to ask the question: What makes the Ascension so glorious? Why would the risen Jesus speak to his disciples in our text as if the resurrection was just ‘a step’ of that divine journey and it's really the ascension that is the climax of that divine journey?: “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.” Notice, the resurrection isn't envisioned by Christ to be some grand finale.

We can notice the same trend in our Creeds: the resurrection isn't the end of the Second Article, but just another step in a bigger picture: Jesus rises from the dead, but also then ascends into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father and will come again as our brother to be our most favorable and merciful judge.

And that's why the Ascension is glorious: because the Christ ascends to the throne with the mission of salvation complete, the will of the Father carried out, and the God-man in his rightful place upon the throne.

But, notice I said, the *God-man* in his rightful place upon the throne. That's equally the glory of the Ascension... not that God has left man to be on the divine throne, but rather that the God-man ascends to the right hand of the Father. Not only does the Son of God take his rightful place, but so also the Son of Man. How glorious, how mysterious, how breathtaking and awe-inspiring is it that the Church forever sings that the God-man has "begun his reign"!

Interpret this rightly and completely: **rightly**, in that we see that the Ascension is the climactic goal of Christ's mission; **completely**, in that this climactic goal also confesses the final glory of all men who have believed in Christ and whose lives are hidden in Him. Yes, if we interpret the ascension *completely*, we recognize that *it* – not the empty grave - confesses the life of the world to come. To be sure, Jesus' resurrection promises your own vindication over the grave; but it is not a vindication by which you *remain* in a fallen

world. We are to *leave* the realm of the fallen and to inherit the ascension of our dear Lord who has gone on ahead of us and prepared the place in His Father's house reserved for us, that He (Christ) may come again and take us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also.

How often we live our daily lives as if our hope is for a restoration of life in this broken, miserable realm of the Fall! We live in a time of viral pandemic, and so we think that the only possible divine answer is a cure or vaccine in *this* world, an overcoming of the disease for continued life in *this* world. And, because we think that way, we tremble in fear and anxiety and paranoia about the 1 in 100 possibility (at most) that – should this disease strike us – we may visit the grave on its account.

Is the mortality rate of sin not infinitely larger and more dangerous? And has not Christ taken that 100% mortality rate of sin and – by his sacrificial death – not only flattened the curve, but completely eradicated it... with the result that any visit to the grave is temporary, short-lived; and, on the other side of the grave, not merely new life for this world (no, “do not cling to me, world,” you can say, “for I too shall ascend to our Father who art in heaven”)... not merely new life for this broken world, but new life with Christ at the right hand of the Father, in glory and whatever inheritance of a “world to come” he has in store for us.

In Christ's death is your death; in Christ's resurrection is your resurrection; in Christ's ascension is your ascension. An ascension that reaches the things above and leaves behind the things below. So then, why allow this broken world's tribulations to define your outlook for tomorrow? Why tiptoe around the house of God in fear of this world's ills? True, we ought not put God to the test and be careless with those things that may harm us this side of heaven, but we need not fear them or pay them any more attention than they deserve. For our life is not defined by our current tribulations... not defined by a resurrection back into this broken world... but by the ascension that awaits our resurrected bodies.

Our epistle reading hints at this, when St Paul writes to the Ephesians that he prays "that the Father of glory may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him." Notice that: Paul prays that the Ephesians (and, by extension, we) would be given 'a spirit of wisdom' – that doesn't mean some 'free-floating' ghost of wisdom; it means that we be given the Holy Spirit, who gives our spirit wisdom to see our lives wrapped securely in the plans of God... a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." Is it not the greatest wisdom to have revealed to us the eternal plans of God, that we may not live lives primarily "focused on today," but lives steadfast today because they're certain in the Church's "everlasting day" earned by Christ who suffered in your place, rose from the grave and ascended into heaven.

So, Paul prays “that the Father of glory may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened” – will we not confess after the glorious gift of the Supper that that very Christ of whom we have just mysteriously partaken is “a light to lighten the Gentiles.”

[Paul continues] “Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you” – why live in fear of a pandemic (or fear of anything else, for that matter), when the Lord has called you to lives of faith and hope?

Paul continues, “[that you may know] what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints”... do we live as if the riches of his glorious inheritance are earthbound?, climaxing in a resurrection back into this fallen world? No, let us know from Scripture what are the riches of his glorious inheritance – not just resurrection, but our own ascension to share with Christ in all the glory he has inherited.

And, finally, Paul concludes “and [that you may know] what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.” Notice that word? – immeasurable. Let’s be honest, friends: we think of the word ‘immeasurable’ as meaning “spiritual, heavenly, beyond and thus irrelevant to daily life.” When it comes to daily life, we think everything needs to be measurable, so that we live our lives by percentages and ratios and “infection rates.” And, if that which we can measure looks threatening, we wonder if clinging to God’s power is of any benefit... and – more than that– as we *doubt* God’s

immeasurable power on behalf of and for the benefit of those who believe, and as we instead put all our trust in measuring every six-foot space and two-week quarantine around us (yes, perhaps we should currently do these things out of love for neighbor, but as we put *our* trust in these things)– we change our daily lives, we change our practices and customs, we change everything to a very “present focus of living,” rather than living with our eyes fixed on Christ Jesus who ascended into the heavens as one with our own measurable human likeness and as our own human brother... and he ascended to a glory that is immeasurable and to a kingdom and power that is forever and ever... and he took our nature with him and gave us a share in it.

And, because Christ has so gloriously ascended into the heavens and, as our intercessor and mediator, now safeguards our share in the life of the world to come, we need not stand gazing up into the heavens, envious of what is there, while fearful and contemptuous of what is here. Rather, we may here live our daily lives in boldness and confidence that sin, death, and the grave have no power over us... no measure of power over the immeasurable greatness of our God’s power toward us who believe.

So, on Christ, build the hope of your own ascension. And on that same Christ, build your confidence and certainty for daily life in this fallen world and continual presence in the house of the Lord to bless God. For that Christ has achieved that which was necessary,

and just as it was written of him, so he has gone: “that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.” Every time you hear that call to repentance, every time you receive that declaration of forgiveness and that sustenance of your ascended Lord’s body and blood, return to daily life with great joy, for you may be sure that your God-man brother has reserved your inheritance and will come again to usher in your own ascension out of this fallen world and to the life of the world to come.

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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