

Lord, I Lift Your Name on High

Is it stuck in your head now? As you read the sermon title or you saw the lyrics on the back of the service folder, the tune might've popped into your head. Maybe you heard it in Sunday School or a Christian camp. This song by Maranatha! Praise Band is a handy summary of why we praise Jesus. He came from heaven to earth to show us the way of salvation. He went from his earthly life to the cross to pay the debt we owed because of sin. From the cross, he went to his grave; and after the grave, Jesus went to the sky, so we lift his name on high.

That's why we've gathered tonight. As we remember Jesus' ascension into heaven, leaving this world for a time to return to his home, we lift his name on high. We praise him for all he has fulfilled, and we lift his name up as a witness to the world.

How cool it must have been for those disciples as Jesus opened the Scriptures for them! We might wonder what passages Jesus quoted from Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms. What familiar verses were suddenly seen in a new light? Everything that these students had heard predicted about the Messiah - now they could understand that Jesus fulfilled it all! Jesus holds the key to this previously locked insight, and by his power and grace he opens hearts and minds to *know* him. What an aha moment!

I'm a bit jealous of Christians who come to know Jesus later in life. To have that memorable experience where everything comes together, where God opens your mind to understand the Scriptures you've heard. But for all of us, it really is the same. Whether we grew up in the Church from birth or learned about Jesus later, God blessed us through someone sharing the Word with us. Family and friends witnessed to us. And the power of God's saving message pierced through the darkness to shine Christ's wonderful light into our hearts. When we hear how this Jesus lived, suffered, died, and rose again, we know it had to happen. And we know it happened for us.

From the moment Jesus died, we've had extra certainty of our salvation. With his dying breaths on the cross, Jesus proclaimed, "It is finished." When he burst from the tomb, Christ proved that death has died, love has won. Now, he goes from the grave to the sky. This is kind of like Jesus' victory lap. He has ascended to the right hand of God in heaven, sitting on the throne. He's exalted to the highest position, because he accomplished God's plan of salvation. Jesus won the victory, and he deserves all the praise that comes with being a champion.

We all like a winner. Whether you're following your favorite sports team or athlete, a celebrity who's stacking up records and honors, or you celebrate the success of a politician after their election, we like to cheer on the victors. However much praise and acclaim we give to these worldly winners, Jesus deserves so much more.

In Revelation chapter 5, we hear a crowd gathered in heaven shouting in a loud voice, **"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"** And every creature throughout the universe proclaims, **"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"** We want to praise God like the disciples who fell down and worshiped their ascended Lord with great joy. Lord, we lift your name on high! You deserve all our praise. Let's lay that praise at the feet of the one who has ascended and sits on the throne.

When Jesus departed from his disciples, he left them with a job to do. Very plainly he said, "Everything that I fulfilled, everything that's true about the Messiah, about me - **you are witnesses of these things.**" Jesus preached powerfully while he was on earth. And this same Lord guaranteed that the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins found in his name, that message would be preached to all nations.

Well, how, when Jesus went away to heaven? Who's going to preach powerfully now? **You are witnesses of these things.** Lord, *we* lift your name on high. We exalt Jesus, not just to give praise to his name, but so that others may hear and believe. Just as God opened our hearts

to understand when we heard the Scriptures, he uses our praise and proclamation to work on the hearts of those around us.

What did the disciples do right after they saw Jesus go into heaven? They worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And while they waited in that city for the extra empowerment from the Holy Spirit, they lifted God's name on high. They went to the temple, they listened to the Scriptures some more, and they praised the Lord. They were so grateful for Christ's fulfillment of everything they were hearing.

And in the meantime, as they were exalting God's name, others could hear. The people around them were influenced by their infectious joy. The city citizens watched them continually going to God's house, and maybe they wondered, "What's going on? Is there something special we're missing - a sacrifice we should be making, a festival to observe? Why are these people so glad to keep going to the temple?"

Maybe people are driving by our parking lot this evening and wondering, "What's going on? It's a Thursday. Is there something special we're missing - something we should be doing, a holiday to observe?" We are glad on Ascension Day to lift our Lord's name on high. We're filled with great joy for everything Christ has fulfilled for us, as the Chosen One who saved us from our sins and defeated death.

As we see him lifted high to the heavens, we know that he's ruling on God's throne for our good. He has conquered our enemies, and he will bring us safely home in the end. We lift his name on high, even as we go forward from Ascension Day. We continually come to God's house to be filled with great joy as we hear the Scripture truths. And we go out, returning home with rejoicing and telling the people around us, "How great is our God!"

As we wrap up our service this evening, I want to draw your attention to two little phrases. We say them every week. In both the Apostles' Creed, which we'll confess tonight, and the Nicene Creed, we proclaim, "He ascended into heaven." Ascension Day doesn't get as much publicity or stir up as much excitement as Christmas or Good Friday or Easter. But Ascension is our victory day! Jesus can go up

into heaven and take his throne because he wins. It's done. We lift his name as our champion, our wonderful winner.

The other phrase to give some extra attention to is in the Lord's Prayer. "Your kingdom come." We pray this with confidence that Jesus is coming back to take us to be with him in kingdom, and we will sit by his side as God rules forever and ever. But even now, as Jesus has ascended, we know that he's ruling. He's controlling all things as he rules from heaven, and he reigns in our hearts through faith. When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we're asking Jesus to come into the hearts of more and more people. We lift his name on high so others can see how wonderful he is, that their minds may be opened to understand, and so that they join in praising God.

The group who sings this song, Maranatha! Praise Band? Their name actually means, "Our Lord, come!" Lord, we lift your name on high because you are most worthy of our praise, and we lift your name on high so that your kingdom comes into the hearts of the world. From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky, Lord, we lift your name on high. Amen.