

Sermon Christ Ascended! ! (PP)

Text Luke 24:46-53 ⁴⁶ And he said, “Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. ⁴⁷ It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations,^[a] beginning in Jerusalem: ‘There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.’ ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of all these things. ⁴⁹ “And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven.” ⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Introduction - I want to divide this story of the ascension into 2 parts: First, Christ’s blessing before He ascended, and second, the implications of his ascension today.

Christ’s last act on earth: His blessing - Before Jesus parts from his followers and is taken up into heaven, he provides for their future. He instructs them to stay in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power from on high – so they can carry out His missionary directive. But his last act on earth is to bless them. God is always in the habit of blessing His people ! (PP) Blessing is the gift of God’s favor when God provides his power or protection or peace or presence freely as a gift of his love. I expect His blessing was along the line of the Aaronic blessing Num 6:24-26 (PP): *The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace* (shalom). Plus Jesus’ final gift of peace to the disciples right before his crucifixion – (PP) *Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled; neither let them be afraid. Jn.14:27.* (PP) It probably also included aspects of his high priestly prayer for them: *“I pray not that you take them out of the world but that you should keep them from evil.”* NIV says “from the evil One.” Jn.17:15. Imagine all those blessings wrapped up in his final words to the disciples!!

Christ’s blessing of his disciples is Part One of the story of his ascension. Part Two is the implications of His work for us today. Darrell Bock, the commentator for the *NIV Commentary* on Luke, makes this observation: (PP) “Jesus blesses the disciples as he departs **to continue his work from God’s side.**” (Bock, NIV Commentary John, p. 622) What a wonderful way to put that. I want to emphasize 6 ways Jesus is now “working from God’s side” for Christians globally **Let us pray.**

Working from God’s Side

(PP) First, Paul tells the Colossians that *Jesus Christ is before all things and in Him all things are held together by the word of His power* (Col.1:17) As you know, there is built into all atoms the force to break apart, to separate, but Christ is the glue to keep the universe together, literally. Sounds like a fulltime job to me, but that’s only one facet of His work “from God’s side.”

(PP) Second, Hebrews 7:25 says Jesus *“ever lives to make intercession for us.”* So His protection and intervention in the lives of His people is on-going. Plus, He encourages us to join Him in the throne room of grace so we can receive *mercy and find grace to help in times of need.* (Heb. 4:16)

(PP) third, the risen, ascended Christ is continually appearing, especially to Muslims, in visions and dreams today. Let me tell you a **story that is fitting on this communion Sunday**. A young Iranian from a Shite Muslim background “had a repeated dream of two hands coming down from heaven, breaking bread. This dream was very intense and it troubled him, but neither his friends nor the leader at the mosque could explain it. Several years later, he had joined some friends to go see Mel Gibson’s movie *The Passion of the Christ*. . . In the Last Supper scene when he saw Jesus breaking bread, the man’s dream came flooding back into his memory. He took the dream to mean that Jesus was reaching out to him. Through secret contacts with Christians and many questions later, he was baptized as a follower of Jesus Christ! (Paul Borthwick, *Mission 3:16 God’s one verse invitation to love the world* IVP, 2020, p.27-28) There are countless other stories of how Christ is appearing to people in dreams today which I will interweave in the sermons over time!

(PP), Fourth, Jesus Christ is the believers’ Advocate - always presenting us faultless, clothed with His righteousness, which is called “the breastplate of righteousness” (Eph.6:14), before the Father. This is important, beloved, because Satan is constantly working to condemn Christians and convince them they are not worthy or good enough to be in God’s presence. But that is NOT true! Jesus Christ gives every believer in Him Christ’s own righteousness. And that is completely sufficient!

(PP) Fifth, Christ is seated in the heavenlies with all authority over every power and “god” in the universe. Let me share **2 stories** of how God did this here in Chicago when I was working in the Asian Indian Hindu community. I became friends with a young Hindu woman named Anjana. She had prayed consistently for several years to several Hindu gods- trying to get all her bases covered – of health, of wealth, of success, and she had a god shelf on the radiator of her bedroom where she had pictures of these gods, incense sticks to burn in worship, and Hindu holy books. She worshipped there every day, but she also began attending our investigative Bible study about Jesus in the gospel of Luke. She learned of Christ’s power and love and miracles and began to see answers to prayer as He worked in her life. After a couple of years, she finally could acknowledge Jesus’s greater power than all the Hindu gods. That was a huge step for her.

Then it was time to take down her god shelf. Mind you, this is in Chicago, not India and we couldn’t find any “taking down the god shelf resources” in the denominational manuals for North America. So we wrote our own liturgy. At the ceremony we sang simple praise songs to Jesus that she had learned in our community, read scripture about Jesus’ power and sovereignty as Lord, and prayed for Anjana and her own commitment to Christ. Then she began to dismantle the god shelf.

The idea was to throw away the Hindu paraphernalia but replace each piece with Christian icons and symbolism. So as we sang and prayed softly, she discarded the Hindu pictures and joss sticks and Hindu books. Then she placed a sizeable picture of Jesus conspicuously in the middle of the shelf. Her Bible was placed next to Him as were a few bible tracts and simple Christian books she was reading. Then to substitute the incense sticks, she brought out a small bowl of water with which she would wash her hands each time she came to worship. It was a symbol of her forgiveness and cleansing that Jesus continually offers her each time she comes into his presence. Neat, eh? I was so proud of her.

However, this was a private ceremony in her home. Now it was time for her to profess her faith publicly in Jesus through baptism- as the scriptures mandate. In keeping with the idea of bathing rituals in Hinduism, it was most appropriate for Anjana to be baptized by immersion. We brought her

to see another new convert's baptism a few weeks before her own. That woman's baptism was very revealing. What no one took into account before the baptism was that this other woman wore a wig. When the pastor dunked her under the water, the woman came up clean and rejoicing. But with no hair. The wig was swimming elsewhere in the water!!

PP) Finally, Christ the Ascended One is actively reigning, enforcing His victory over all the power of the enemy. We will discuss more about that in the summer sermon series. But, we get to enforce that victory as well when we put on all the armor of God. Eph. 6:12 **PP) and claim the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. Rev.12:11**"And they conquered Satan by the Blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."

Jesus Christ is reigning in heaven and our communion service is another reminder of these marvelous truths. But first, we will share our joys, concerns, prayers and offering. Then the choir will lead us in the anthem: "The Welcome Table" to lead us into the sacrament of Holy Communion together. By His stripes we are healed. By the blood of the Lamb we come defeating Satan. He IS the Ascended One. Hallelujah! Amen. Let us pray.

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