

INI-SDG

In the Name of Jesus – To God Alone the Glory

5.24.2009 Exaudi Sunday – St. Stephen Lutheran (West Bay) Mountain View, CA

Grace, mercy, and peace is yours from the Word of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

If I were to ask you, "What happened at Jesus' ascension?" you might quickly respond by saying, "Ah, Jesus ascended?" You might give quite a bit better answer than that but that's basically what happened right? Jesus ascended into heaven? End of story, end of service, let's go home? No, let's continue like we discussed last week and *Put "Love" to the Test!* Let's examine as we had read from 1 John a bit ago about that love of God which reminds us that ***We love Him because He first loved us.*** Jesus ascended into heaven. OK, is that it?

NKJV Luke 24:44-53 Then He (Jesus) said to them (disciples), "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. 46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 "And you are witnesses of these things. 49 "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." 50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. 51 Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.

This is the Word of God. In Christ Jesus, our risen and ascended Lord and Savior, dear fellow redeemed. Luke tells us in verse 51 that, **While He (Jesus) blessed them...He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.** What does it mean that Jesus **was parted from them and carried up into heaven?** After this worship service, you and I will be parted from each other and we will go to our respective homes. We will no longer be together, but rather we'll be separated by the space that lies between our homes. But when Jesus ascended, did He separate Himself from us? Is He now up in heaven, while we are here alone on earth? We know that is not what Jesus' ascension means, for shortly before Jesus ascended into heaven He promised, ***Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).*** He also promised earlier in His ministry, ***Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20).*** Jesus is in heaven, but He is also right here, right now among us. Therefore, when we ask what happened at Jesus' ascension, we can say more than simply "He ascended," but that when Jesus' ascended into heaven He simply withdrew His visible presence from us. We no longer see Him as His disciples had, nor can we touch Him as His disciples did. Yet, we can be *confident* that our Jesus is here present and watching over us even as He promised, and that He will one day return visibly to this earth in all of His glory to judge both the living and the dead! Yes, **JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN!** But He did so only after doing two things. And the result of these two things we want to discuss this morning.

1. JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN - After Fulfilling His Mission.

Jesus told His disciples before His ascension in verse 44, **All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.** What were those things Lord? Jesus went on to explain in verse 46, **Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day.** We have been studying in our midweek Bible Class the minor prophets which continually pointed to what the Messiah would go through when He came. God's plan, determined already in eternity, was prophesied about, and then continued to be worked out in time through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's plan has continued on as individuals have been called to faith in Jesus Christ through the preaching of the Gospel. It is a plan, which will be completed only when the Christ our Savior returns at Judgment Day to bring all believers to heaven to live in joy and comfort for eternity with Him.

How many of us can say we followed everything our mother or father told us? That's almost a joke right? But when Jesus said that, **all things must be fulfilled**, He had perfectly in mind His Father's eternal plan. That plan was revealed all the way back when God told our original parents after they had sinned that a Savior would come to crush the head of Satan from Genesis 3:15, but that victory would not come without a painful struggle! The Psalmist David spoke of the Savior being forsaken by God, being mocked and ridiculed by His enemies, and having His hands and feet pierced (Psalm 22:1,7-8,16). And Isaiah spoke of the promised Savior serving as our substitute, enduring the punishment our sins justly deserved, so that we might be at *peace* with God—those sins having been forgiven (Isaiah 53). That Savior *is* Jesus Christ. Yes, **JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN after fulfilling His ministry** — His work of redemption, which served to reconcile us and bring us back into a good standing relationship with God!

Why am I reminding you of these things? The same reason we celebrate Memorial Day... to remember life given for freedom. These truths are important to remember for they have a direct impact on your life and your future. They are necessary for you to know, for they help you understand the love of your Savior and the life He gave for your freedom, as well as the relationship He wants to have with you. Like we said last week, these things help you to Put "Love" to the Test... your Savior's love for you and your love for your Savior. His love reveals the one and only way to eternal salvation. Jesus thought they were so important that He spent much of His time during those forty days between Easter and Ascension reviewing them with those first disciples.

Now graduations are beginning to take place all over the country. Yesterday at our high school, college, and seminary in Eau Claire, WI many graduates said goodbye to friends as they returned to their homes all across the country. Two of our own high school graduates are moving on to college as well, and we continue to pray for Debi and Phil as they continue on with their schooling and encourage them to not forget their continual and more important education from the Lord. You and I can easily imagine the disciples' sadness in saying goodbye to Jesus when He ascended into heaven. We often have to say goodbye to friends and our loved ones in this world, but for Christ's disciples of all time the angels gave great comfort in reminding them that Jesus will come again in great glory!

It is important as Disciples of Christ to review these truths today and keep them fresh in our minds and hearts, for they are plainly and openly rejected by the world we live in and increasingly rejected by those people in our world who share our Lutheran heritage. It is a heritage that stands on an unerring Word and on that Word alone. My dear friends, let us not grow careless with our faith. Rather let us grow and *abide* in Jesus' word as He encouraged us to do (John 8:31-32). Let us recognize that Moses was correct when he said that God's word is our life (Deuteronomy 32:47), for it reveals that **JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN after fulfilling His ministry**—a ministry intended specifically to provide us with eternal salvation!

2. JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN - After Defining Our Mission.

I heard that less than 25% of Lutherans believe we are to share our faith with others. If that's the case, than how much more important is it for us to review Jesus' words, which define our mission — our purpose in life here in this world? Jesus said in verse 47, that is it necessary that **repentance and remission of sin should be preached in His name to all nations... you are witnesses of these things!**

What is the meaning of life? What is your purpose? The One who created life is NOT silent on the most widely misunderstood question of all time! The Psalm suggested for your pre-service meditation says in verse 1, ***The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein (Psalm 24:1)***. By the fact that God both created and sustains the world, we belong to Him. By the fact the redemption of Jesus Christ worked out as He fulfilled His ministry in which He bought us back from sin, death, and Satan, we belong to Him. Jesus redeemed us, Luther states in his explanation to the Second

Article, so that we *should be His very own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and joy.* Our purpose in life, as Jesus defines it, not how you and I define it, is to serve as His *witnesses* to His Word and to teach *repentance and remission of sins.*

God has not given us life to throw away it in the selfish pursuit of pleasure. God has not given us our talents, so that we can pursue our personal dreams and goals of financial riches and material gain. The pursuit of personal happiness is not to be our *overall* goal in life, although it often comes as a blessing from God as we pursue our real goal of faithfulness to our Savior, and our real purpose of sharing His gospel message with others. It is seeing the joy of salvation on the face and in the lives of believers who know it is by God's grace alone that they are saved!

That message, your message, our message, is not a wishy-washy expression that "God is love" and therefore accepts and tolerates mankind's sinful desires and lifestyles! No, God has called us to preach His law—to reveal His will, which expresses what is morally right and morally wrong in His eyes. We are to condemn sin and lead sinners to repentance, which is a genuine sorrow over sin and a determined desire to abandon sin and follow God. Together with that preaching of the law, however, must come the pure proclamation of the Gospel to all repentant sinners.

In our Bible Class this past Sunday, we looked at the Hindus' caste system. Their purpose and eternal struggle is to be free from desire through personal work righteousness to achieve a nirvana or otherwise called state of "nothingness." Our purpose is to rejoice that we have been set free from the works of the law in order to serve the Lord and share His message of forgiveness of sins through Christ alone! Our purpose is to show Christ's purpose in coming to this world! That is a purpose worth living for isn't it? That is a purpose worth dying for.

Our mission, as defined by Jesus, is not and will not be an easy one. We know that from the start! There will be persecutions. There will be controversies. There will be mockery for our beliefs in God's Word. I say, "So what?" My Savior told me ahead of time that this would be. But He did NOT tell me to give up or through in the towel when it gets tough. Jesus knew this as He prepared to ascend into heaven. That is why He urged His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until He sent **the Promise** mentioned in verse 49 of His Father, who would as our text says **endued** (clothed or put on) those first apostles with **power from on high**. That **Promise** of the Father was the Holy Spirit, who descended upon those early disciples on Pentecost. That same Spirit is present with us today in God's Word. He comes through the Word to strengthen and encourage us as we listen to Him through whatever challenges come our way.

JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN! He withdrew His visible presence from us for a time, but *not* for an eternity. He did so **after fulfilling His ministry** and **after defining our ministry!** The Ascension of Jesus doesn't get a lot of attention from the world's standpoint because it hasn't been secularized like other holidays. So when someone asks you, "What happened at Jesus' ascension?" don't just say, "Ah, Jesus ascended." Tell about what Jesus did and said before He ascended, and then tell them... and show them how your Savior has defined your purpose and your mission in life. May we hold tight to the truths of our salvation worked out by God's grace, as we share those truths with others... and with each other! Jesus has ascended, yet He still remains...with you! Amen.

This LOVE of God that surpasses all understanding will guard and keep your hearts and your minds in our risen and ascended Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.