

Theme: Happy Ascension Day!

Text: Ephesians 1:16-23 (NIV)

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Happy Ascension Sunday! Did you or your children get some “Ascension Day” presents this morning, or at least an “Ascension basket” full of eggs and candy? No?! How many of you realized before you looked at your bulletin this morning that this is the Sunday we celebrate Jesus’ Ascension? So, is it probably safe to say that you and your family aren’t going to be doing anything special to celebrate Ascension Sunday? (And if you are doing something special this weekend, the chances are it’s because of Memorial Day, and not because of the Ascension of Jesus.)

The Ascension certainly does not seem to rank very high in popularity amongst the church festivals, does it? In fact, we aren’t even celebrating Christ’s Ascension on Ascension Day. Jesus ascended 40 days after He rose on Easter Sunday, so Ascension Day was actually this past Thursday (May 25th). Obviously the world hasn’t seen much value in celebrating Ascension Day either, since it is one church festival that *definitely* has not become commercialized. There are no “Ascension presents” or “Ascension cookies” or candy. There is no such thing as an “Ascension tree” or the “Ascension bunny!”

But, it’s not just the world is it? Don’t we Christians have a hard time sometimes understanding why we should joyfully celebrate Christ’s Ascension? After all, wasn’t that Christ’s “good bye?” Wasn’t that a rather sad day; the day Christ’s visible presence ascended back into heaven? And besides all that, was Christ’s Ascension really all that important? Yes, it was! And no, it wasn’t a “sad” day either. Remember those amazing words we read from the last verses of the Gospel of Luke, **“Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:51-53).**

Yes, Ascension Day is a very important day; a very good day for us Christians. And so, it is good for us to take some time each year around this time to learn more about Christ’s Ascension and what it means for us *today* and yes, even to celebrate it!

In our text for this morning Paul speaks about Jesus’ Ascension into heaven and its meaning and significance for us. Paul prays that God would give his readers—his original readers as well as us and all Christians who read his inspired words—**“the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him [God] better” (v. 17)**. That knowledge of God; knowing **“[God] better”** through a closer, personal relationship with Him is rooted in listening to Him speak to us through His Word, the Bible. When we get to know God better through His Word we will realize and understand more about what great things He’s done for us through His Son, Jesus. That includes all that He has done for us through Christ’s Ascension into heaven. Paul prays that all of us would realize this too. He wants all of us to know the hope of Christ’s Ascension so that we too would have a **Happy Ascension Day!**

In our text the Apostle Paul prays that we would recognize three great blessings from God in particular. He writes, **“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know...**

- 1) **the hope to which he has called you,**
- 2) **the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,**
- 3) **and his incomparably great power for us who believe” (v. 18-19).**

First of all, what is that **“hope to which [God] has called you” (v. 18)?** Well, as we mentioned in last week’s sermon, when we read the word **“hope”** in the Bible we should not think of this word in the way we usually use it, as some sort of fond wish. No, when Paul uses this word **“hope”** he is speaking of a *joyful expectation*; something that we look forward to with *certainty*! So, the **“hope to which [God] has called you” (v. 18)** is the **“riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints” (v. 18b)** as he says in that very same verse. He’s talking about heaven! How can we be sure God will give us this **“inheritance,”** this incredible gift? Paul prays that our hearts may be enlightened to see **“[God’s] incomparably great power for us who believe” (v. 19)**. Knowing about God’s **“great power”** is one of the reasons we know we can trust that God can and will keep His Word!

What does this have to do with Christ’s Ascension? Paul continues with these incredible words, **“That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms” (v. 19-20)**. What Paul is saying is that the power of God that is working for us believers is like the **“power”** that God used to raise Jesus from the dead and restore Him to His rightful throne in heaven at His Ascension! From that throne, our text goes on to say, Christ is **“far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church” (v. 21-22)**. Did you catch that? Christ’s supreme authority and power; the authority and power of God Himself is used by Him for one purpose: **“for the church!” (v. 22)**. That is, for the benefit and blessings of all His believers—you and me! If that doesn’t make us joyful about Christ’s Ascension, I don’t know what will!

Do you understand what all of this means? It means that we have no reason to fear. Christ is now ruling—He’s in control—**“over everything for the church!” (v. 22)**. We’ve got no reason to doubt or be apprehensive. We have the assurance of **“His incomparably great power for us who believe” (v. 19)**. No earthly rulers or governments, no political force or policy is greater than the authority of Christ, the Ascended King of heaven and earth. No spiritual force of Satan, no evil or temptation can withstand the almighty power of the Ascended, ruling Christ who has **“all things under His feet!” (v. 22)**.

Believe it or not, the news gets even better. Paul reminds us that Christ’s relationship with us as our ruler and King is not the same type of dominating authority and power He exerts over all things. Rather, our text reminds us that it is a *relationship*; a connection as close as the one the head shares with the members of its body. Paul writes that **“God...appointed Him [Christ] to be head over everything for the church, which is His body” (v. 22-23)**. Christ’s relationship with us is *so* close and His love for us is *so* great that our text concludes by saying that we, His church—**“His body”**—are **“the fullness of Him [Christ] who fills everything in every way” (v. 23)**. That is one of the most mind-blowing and amazing phrases in all of Scripture, and it’s somewhat of a *paradox*! What Paul is saying is that Christ, **“who fills everything in every way”** and is completely self-sufficient and full by Himself, calls us, His church, His **“fullness!”** How is that possible?! Because Christ *chooses* to be unfulfilled and incomplete without His church! Why? Simply because He loves us so much; because of His *grace*! God determined from eternity that He would save us through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus, and He will not be truly **“filled”** until He has accomplished our eternal salvation and has us there safely with Him in the mansions He has prepared for us in heaven.

Christ's Ascension was part of that plan—and an important part of that plan!

- ✠ It was the ultimate sign that His work here on earth was done.
- ✠ It is an incredibly rock-solid proof that He is true God (After all, how many people do you know can “ascend” to heaven on their own power? Think of how many of His disciples witnessed it too!).
- ✠ His Ascension into heaven is also important for us, in part, because it assures us that after our resurrection from the grave we, the “body of Christ” will ascend, just like our “Head,” Jesus.

Maybe Ascension Day will never “ascend” (pun intended!) to the top of the most popular church festival list. However, we should celebrate it! We will celebrate it, when we recognize and know the **hope**—the *joyful and certain expectation*—of Christ's Ascension! Christ's Ascension means He's coming back again. Remember the words of the angels to the disciples on that first Ascension Day? **“This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).** Christ has ascended; so will we! Hallelujah! That truly will be an eternally **Happy Ascension Day!** Amen.