

Acts 1:1-11

Ascension, May 29, 2022

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Lay Service

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; "for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

In the name of Jesus Christ, our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord, dear fellow redeemed.

Have you ever noticed that the more important the Christian holiday, the more distractions the devil creates? There is the materialism of "what did you get" at Christmas time, along with the jolly man in the red suit. At Easter, there are bunnies and baskets. And Thanksgiving, a day set aside for the specific purpose of giving thanks, often turns into an opportunity to eat too much food and drink too much wine. The devil loves to use the things of this world and the pleasures of this world to try and distract the children of God from Jesus Christ.

And what of Ascension Day? You'd be hard pressed to find any "Happy Ascension Day" cards—even at your local Christian book store. "Ascension Day" appears only on religious calendars. Very few churches have church services on the Thursday of Ascension Day. It seems the devil is trying to get us to forget about another very important Christian holiday—especially as we live in a time of virus distractions and isolation. Today we want to consider some reasons why the devil would want us to forget about Ascension Day. We begin by looking at the forty days of proof that the devil wants you to forget about.

THE FORTY DAYS OF PROOF

On Good Friday the followers of Jesus had absolutely no doubt about what happened to Jesus. They knew He was dead. They knew He had been buried. When the Sabbath ended, some women immediately went and bought spices to anoint the DEAD body of Jesus the next morning. Like every other family member or friend that they had seen die, death meant the end of their earthly relationship with Jesus.

Then on Easter Sunday morning when these women spoke of angels appearing to them and telling them that Jesus had risen, how did the disciples respond? We read that they didn't believe. And when

the risen and living Jesus Himself appeared to the disciples on Easter evening they still doubted for fear. When they told Thomas that they had seen the risen Lord, Thomas refused to believe it until he saw Jesus and stuck his finger into His nail prints.

When it came to Jesus' death on Good Friday, they had no trouble believing what had happened. However, when it came to Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday, they weren't sure what to believe. For this reason, Jesus used those forty days after Easter to leave NO DOUBT in the minds of His people that He had truly risen from the dead. We read in our text, "He...presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during those forty days." Jesus used those forty days to prove to His followers, who knew He had really died, that He had now truly risen from the dead.

This is one reason the Devil wants us to forget about Ascension Day. He wants us to forget that Jesus who really was crucified and really did die, then really did overcome death by rising from the dead. The devil wishes us to forget about what is written in Hebrews 2—Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

As our nation and our world deal with the pandemic of coronavirus, why is the world in such an upheaval? It is the fear of getting sick from this virus and dying. And the effects of this virus has rightly shown us that this virus can be deadly. The devil wants to use this to hold you in spiritual bondage and fear of death. He wants you to forget about Ascension Day and forget that Jesus has PROVED that He has overcome death. And by His resurrection, Jesus has assured us that we too shall rise. The devil wants to hold you in bondage of the fear of death, forgetting that Christ has arisen, He has arisen indeed!

THE COMMISSION

Another reason the devil wants us to forget about Ascension Day has to do with what Jesus commissioned His disciples to do. In verse 8 of our text Jesus tells His disciples that after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The followers of Jesus were commissioned to tell the world about Jesus and the free salvation He won on the cross for all sinners. This commission is also given in the last chapter of Matthew, Mark, and Luke's Gospel. They were commissioned to go "into all the world" and preach the Gospel to all creatures. They were commissioned to make disciples of "all nations" by baptizing and teaching the Words of Christ.

This too is something the devil wants us to forget about. The devil wants us to forget that as Jesus ascended to God's right hand, He left us with some very important work to do here on earth. The devil knows that the message of the Gospel is the tool God has given man which defeats him. The devil knows that "the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16) As His followers Jesus wants us to continue to take this message into all the world. Whether that be our next-door neighbor, our classmate, or supporting missions in India and Nigeria—"you are My witnesses," Jesus says.

It is in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone are all your sins atoned for. And it is ONLY in Christ Jesus that hope for eternal life in heaven is to be found. But, as Paul writes, How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Rom 10:14) Upon His ascension into heaven, Jesus commissioned us—His redeemed followers—with the important work of making the disciples of all nations by baptizing and preaching the Gospel. A commission which begins in our own backyards—telling others what we have heard about Jesus from God’s Word. The devil wants nothing more than us to forget about this, for this message means his defeat.

THE TRIUMPH

On Good Friday Jesus looks like a defeated leader. His enemies seemed to capture and arrest Him with such ease. And with relative EASE we see them doing to Him whatever they wanted. With EASE they tortured Him and falsely condemned Him to die. With EASE they nailed His hands and feet to the cross. With EASE they mocked and ridiculed Him as He hung there bleeding and dying. And then after only a few hours on the cross Jesus died. It seemed like it was so easy to defeat Jesus.

But in Psalm 2 we read that “He who sits in the heavens shall laugh!” God laughs at the futile attempts of man to fight against Him. While on Good Friday it seemed like Jesus was another defeated leader, we see on Ascension Day that it is just the opposite. Returning to our text we read, “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” Jesus is victorious and His ascension into heaven proves that. Like a mighty King who has just destroyed His enemies, Jesus having paid the price for sin and overcome death, ascends to His throne in heaven to rule.

The Apostle Paul talks about what this means for us, His followers, in Ephesians 1. As the believers in Christ, He is our Head and we are His body. As His body, He watches over, protects, and cares for us—just as you feed, cleanse, and take care of your body. Ascended to God’s right hand He is omnipresent—He fills all in all. Since we are His body, where He goes, we go. His victory over sin, death, and the devil means our victory over sin, death, and the devil. His ascension into heaven means that we will be where He is even now. In fact, Paul writes something amazing to the Colossians. He says that right now our life “is hidden with Christ in God.” (3:3) That means heaven is already yours—signed, sealed, and delivered by your Lord’s death, resurrection, and ascension!

But the devil wants you to forget about your victorious Savior. The devil wants you to be discouraged and downcast about the affairs of this world. The devil wants you to forget that Christ has conquered him and given you that victory. The devil wants you to forget the promise that Jesus gave about His ascension, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (Jn 14:3b-4)

THE PROMISED RETURN

Finally, the devil wants you to forget about Jesus’ ascension into heaven because of the promise given on that day. As the disciples stood slack-jawed, staring up into the clouds where Jesus had gone, two angels appeared with an important message. As angels announced the birth and resurrection of Jesus,

so too they announce a promise of His return—“This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

This Ascension message the devil wants all Christians to forget about. He wants you to forget that the Victorious Lord of Life who ascended into heaven promises that He will return. As we say in our explanation to the Third Article, the devil wants you to forget that “on the last day He will raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life.” The devil would rather that you despair of life in this world and your struggle against sin. The devil wants you to forget the exhortation of Jesus to be spiritually alert and watching for His return. The devil wants you to forget that your Lord is coming soon!

The message of Ascension Day is clear—Jesus has won and is still victorious! Having completed His work of redemption and assured His followers of His resurrection from the dead—Jesus ascended into heaven. Having commissioned His followers to be His witnesses to all the world—Jesus ascended into heaven. Having triumphed over our enemy of sin, our enemy of death, and our enemy of the devil—Jesus ascended into heaven. And now we are left with the promise that our victorious Lord who has ascended into heaven will return in the same manner in which He left. We see why the devil wants this day to be ignored. Ascension Day means that he has been defeated and now only Jesus rules and reigns forever. May God help us to ever remember and cherish the power of Christ’s ascension! Amen.

This sermon was written by CLC Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer and delivered by Mr. Leonard Benter