

Ephesians 1:15-23

Ascension Sunday, May 12, '24
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

If you could have one thing that would make you perfectly happy in life, what would it be? Let's say there's one thing that if you had it, you would be able to meet all of life's problems. What would that one item be? Perhaps the first thing that comes to most people's minds is more money. Maybe you remember when, just a year-and-a-half ago, a man in California won the lottery jackpot of \$2 billion. I know that money doesn't buy happiness, but if you saw that headline at the time, you probably thought, like me, "If I had \$2 billion, my problems would be over!" Except we see time and again that's just not true; there are plenty of super-wealthy people whose lives prove that you *can* be fantastically rich and utterly miserable at the same time.

So maybe, thinking about the one thing that you really need, you set your sights much lower—family and friends. Perhaps you think, if you have family and friends, then you're perfectly happy! And that's a much better answer than money, but it is true that even with family and plenty of friends, we all still feel lonely at times. And people come and go, even *they're* not permanent. So, while much happiness truly comes through family and friends, they're not the answer to *every* problem.

But there is one thing that can lead to perfect happiness. And the Apostle Paul knew it. He knew that there was one thing that he could have which would help him to meet all of life's problems. And He prayed here in our text that all Christians, including us, would know that answer too. The *answer* is to have an Ascension Faith. And so, today, I'd like each of you to ask yourself this question:

Is Yours An Ascension Faith?

- I. It's a faith that knows God has done everything to save you.
- II. It's a faith that knows God can do anything else to serve you.

Is Yours An Ascension Faith? You've probably never thought about it before. For many Christians, Ascension Day is simply an event which bridges the gap between Easter and Pentecost. It's just the story of Jesus' going from here into heaven, right? Actually, the fact is that Christ's Ascension is much more than just a story of Jesus saying goodbye. It is the positive proof that **God has done everything necessary to save you.**

This is one of those Pauline texts which is sort of easy to get lost in because much of it is one long sentence. But when Paul references the hope to which God has called us, the basis for that hope is

found in the latter verses, the section about Christ being seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places. And when did that take place? It came at Christ's Ascension into heaven. This text is *focused* on the Ascension. When Paul prayed that God ***"may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you,"*** he's talking about faith, and he was thinking about the Ascension. You see, Paul knows that Christ's ascent into heaven wasn't just a goodbye. Just as the disciples saw Him ascend into heaven and didn't stand there weeping—they got right to work—so Paul sees in Christ's Ascension something much more important than a final farewell.

That final event was the capping-off of Jesus' entire work of redemption. It meant that *not one single item* was lacking in the plan of salvation. Jesus was going back to heaven just as a triumphant king returns from battle. He was victorious. And that victory belongs to everyone who trusts in Him! That's what the Ascension proclaims.

Now, perhaps we don't emphasize the festival of Ascension as much as we should. In days gone by, every Lutheran church would have a Thursday evening service on Ascension Day—and I think many have dropped that service from the rotation. But it is an important day, because the Christ's Ascension is the rock-solid assurance that we are saved. It's the proof that nothing and no one is ever going to be able to condemn us. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, ***"Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised-- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."*** (Romans 8:34)

So, at Christmas, we remember how God loved us enough to send His only Son into the world. On Good Friday, we remember how Jesus brought us forgiveness and freedom with His death on the cross. At Easter, we remember how Jesus was raised up as proof that God accepted the sacrifice He made for us. And now, *Ascension* completes the cycle. Today, we remind ourselves that our Savior is at the Right Hand of the Father, triumphant, with all power in heaven and on earth. Today, we commemorate Jesus' glorious return to the throne of His heavenly Father, where He *constantly* intercedes for us, as Paul says.

And that should be a big comfort to you. Because there are times in our lives when we find it hard to believe that we are really forgiven. There are times when our consciences nag at us and condemn us. And there are people who want us to question whether we are really saved. Sometimes even *we* might have doubts—"Will I *really* go to heaven when I die?" We often treat it as an open and unanswerable question! Well, if you ever find yourself thinking that way, I want you to remember the Ascension. Remember that Jesus is ascended and seated at God's ***"right hand in the heavenly places,"*** and that there He intercedes *for you*. Do you know what that means? It means that Jesus is pleading your case. Right now, Jesus is in essence saying, "Father, this person I have redeemed, and You must forgive him. I paid the price for his sins, and You have already accepted it." And with your *Savior* pleading your case, your salvation is *not* an open question; it's been guaranteed.

So, Is Yours An Ascension Faith? It is if this is what you believe, **that God has done everything to save you.** But the power of the Ascension is there for you not only in eternity, but even in your day-to-day life. Again, this type of faith is the one thing that empowers us to meet life's worst problems head on,

and to walk away victorious. That's because an Ascension faith also **knows that God can do anything else to serve you.**

Paul says that God raised up Christ ***“and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion...”*** Each Sunday, we confess that Jesus “sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.” That's picture language, of course. We're not confessing that Jesus is perched a physical right hand belonging to God the Father. In Bible times, the right hand was the sword hand. It was the power hand. To say that Jesus is at God's right hand means that Jesus has complete power over everything that happens in our world.

That *that* is true is very good news. You know, people tend to think that most power decisions in the world are made by the very wealthy or by the politically powerful. We are led to believe that our destinies are determined by men in influential positions. And even though we enjoy democracy in this country, we still feel as though we have no power at all. But having an Ascension faith reminds us that it is our Lord *Jesus* who is finally in control; that over the long course of history, *He* rules. It is not the captains of industry nor the titans of finance, not the economic systems or the political maneuvering; not even the forces of nature have control. The Father has placed Jesus Christ in control over *all* things in this world.

So, when trouble crops up in your life, do you feel totally powerless and helpless? Or do you have an Ascension faith? Do you remember that your own Savior Jesus—who loves you very, very much—is the one pulling the strings and manipulating the events around you *for your good*? **Is Yours An Ascension Faith?**

In the Bible, there are *many* examples of people who had an Ascension faith. One of my favorites is the account of David and Goliath. King Saul had to find somebody who was willing to fight the giant warrior Goliath. Now, if you could have walked through the ranks of the Israelites before that fight, I think you would have found the same kind of “faith” that a lot of today's Christians exhibit. If you asked one of them, “Do you believe in God?” he would have responded, “Of course I do!” “Do you believe that God has all power?” Again, he'd have said, “Certainly I believe that God has all power!” And if you asked, “Ok, then—are you ready to trust in God and go fight Goliath?” He'd have said, “Not in million years!”

On that day, none of the Israelite soldiers was willing to trust God *that* far. So, a youthful shepherd boy stepped forward. He had no armor, and for weapons, he had nothing but a slingshot. But he did have one other thing—he had an Ascension faith! He walked onto the battleground certain of one thing, that the Lord was in control. ***“Then David said to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.’”*** (1 Samuel 17:45) Then, with one small stone, David knocked the giant forever off his feet.

Is Yours An Ascension Faith? It should be, and it *can* be. Just think about it: God has already defeated your most powerful enemies—sin, death, and the devil. Can't you trust Him to handle the other problems that confront you in life? Yes! As Paul says in his letter to the Romans, ***“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also***

with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:31-32) Our Lord is *continually* controlling the events of the world for the good of His children.

When the Apostle John was given a glimpse into God’s throne room to see his Ascended Lord reigning triumphantly, he described what he saw in his Revelation. He writes, ***“In the midst of the throne . . . stood a Lamb as though it had been slain.”*** (Revelation 5:6) As Jesus ascended to this position of glory, He was exalted as the one who was crucified. And this is important! The one who is exalted is also the one who was humbled to the point of death on a cross. The one who holds all authority in His hands is the one whose hands were pierced for your transgressions. The one who is reigning as the King of kings and Lord of lords is also the one who loves you more than you could imagine.

So, no, Jesus didn’t ascend in order to get away from us! He did it to show that the same loving Savior who died for us on the cross is now the one who holds all authority in heaven and on earth!

So, what do you need the most in life? Isn’t it an Ascension faith? The next time you’re in a hospital waiting room, remember the Ascension. The next time you’re searching how to make ends meet, remember the Ascension! The next time you feel all alone and depressed, when you feel like giving up—remember the Ascension. Keep your eyes focused heavenward, where Christ is, seated in the heavenly places. In Him you will find that the battle has already been fought and won—and you have been made a conqueror through Jesus Christ your Ascended Lord. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.