

Ascension Festival – Luke 24:44-53

When a person departs this life for the next, people sometimes ask, "What did he leave behind as a legacy for the people he loved?" As we celebrate Jesus' visible departure from this life and His return to heaven in glory, we might well ask, **"What is our Lord's legacy to His Church?"** Let's find out as we explore our lesson today.

Luke records, **"Jesus said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms.' Then He opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures."** Perhaps you're thinking, "If I were with Jesus for three years, surely I would not have been as dense as the disciples. I would have understood why Jesus came into this world." It's easy to pass judgment on the disciples. But remember that their Old Testament training from their youth was a longing for an earthly Messiah, a King to conquer their earthly foes! Jesus was not that King. So Jesus carefully and thoroughly opened the minds of His disciples so they would finally see that the entire Old Testament declared that the Messiah's suffering, dying, and rising again was God's plan to rescue us from our real foes, death, hell, and the devil's power. When Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Micah and the other prophets spoke of the Redeemer and praised Him, they were pointing to those things, which had now recently been fulfilled.

Although we have both Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment, don't we often still fail to understand? Don't we often allow earthly concerns and priorities, economic or political situations, earthly fears, sinful pursuits, guilty fears to block appreciation of Christ's work for our eternal well-being? It is well to ask ourselves from time to time such basic questions as these: Do I believe I am a sinner, totally lost and helpless on my own? Do I believe God still loves the world – even me? Do I believe that Jesus Christ came in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy to keep the Law as my Substitute and to give His life as a punishment for my sins? Do I believe that He was delivered over to death for my sins and raised to life for my justification, that He ascended on high and now rules over all things, and that He will one day come again to take all who believe in Him to heaven?" When you can say, "Yes, Lord, I believe this," then by the grace of God and through the power of His Holy Spirit, you have that spiritual understanding which the ascending Lord left as a legacy to His Church. It is the one thing you need if you are to be blessed and content in this life, and in that which is to come!

Ordinarily partings are sad, but look how the disciples felt after Jesus returned to heaven. Luke records, **"Then they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God"** (v. 52-53). Jesus was once more in His rightful place, enjoying the praise of heaven as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and they were glad for His sake. They also rejoiced that the tale of tragedy and woe, which they had witnessed when their loving Master was taken from them and nailed to the cross, had a happy ending after all. Jesus' ascension was final evidence that He had gained the victory over His enemies and that He would come again to take them to be with Him forever. They could in the meantime trust His promise, **"Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** No longer would they hide behind locked doors. They joyfully and openly worshiped and praised Jesus as Savior and Lord

Joy, true joy -- not the passing happiness we may experience as the result of some earthly pleasure -- is closely related to peace. Indeed, we cannot have a joyful heart, if we are not at peace with God. The disciples knew that in Jesus they had pardon, peace, and the hope of eternal life. So they rejoiced! Who or what could be against them since the almighty Lord was now with them and for them? They had nothing to fear, not even death itself.

Can we have similar joy? Yes! Christ died not merely for the twelve, not merely for the world of His day, but for you and me as well! He promised, "I am with you always," not only to those who were with Him on the Mount of Olives, but to all His followers until the end of time. His promise to return at the end of this age and take us body and soul to live in His glory applies to us and every generation of believers. He is ruling over all. No matter what may happen on your journey through life, be it illness, loss, the fickleness and unfaithfulness of friends, the abuse of foes – no grief is permanent. We shall one day rise from the dead and ascend to join our Lord in the eternal home He has prepared for us!

Can you keep this good news to yourself? No! It is so wonderful we can't help but share it! Jesus

declared, **“Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His Name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”** (v. 46) The Lord Jesus gave His disciples everything they needed for their world-wide mission work - the message, the understanding, the joy, and the power. The book of Acts tells the glorious history of what followed. From Jerusalem the good news of salvation was carried in all directions. Not only the disciples, but also all who believed spoke the Word and spread it mightily throughout the world.

Why is it necessary that we not only preach repentance but daily live in repentance ourselves? Let me ask it another way - "Do you find it hard to live with “certain people” at times? You know the kind I mean, they’re stubborn, rude, selfish, lazy. They don’t fulfill their commitments and responsibilities. And you look in the mirror and realize you are indeed that “certain people!” Not to mention that's only the beginning of a long list of other bad traits and behavior that is in us and also in others. Did it ever occur to you that God would have a hard time living with you and me? Our selfishness and sinful desires have rendered us unfit to live with Him. So we repent. We admit our sin. The second part of repentance is faith that God forgives us for Jesus’ sake. God counts you holy because Jesus was holy for you! God considers you innocent because Jesus paid the full punishment for your sins by His innocent suffering and death. Now God has no problem living with you, surrounding you with His love, and planning your eternal life with Him in heaven. In fact, you’re now one of His special people. He wants to be with you, so He comes to you by Word and Sacrament. He wants so much to be with you He prepared a home in heaven for you! Jesus’ ascension assures us God will admit us to heaven. As the Father welcomed back His victorious Son, so He will welcome all whom Jesus brings with Him, all who believe in Him.

Many people wonder, "Why am I here?" They have no sense of purpose since they don’t know what to believe or how to live. So many church bodies are wondering, “Why are we here?” Membership is declining. The church's influence is waning. They'll restructure their teaching to try to attract people in today's pick-and-choose buffet of morality and spirituality. They'll try to entertain them into coming to church. Why are you here? Why are we here together as Christ’s church? Jesus calls us to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations. He said the gospel would be preached in all the world, and then the end would come. Since the Lord has not yet returned in glory, there still must be people and nations He wants to reach through us. New generations are constantly arising, and each in turn must be taught to know the Savior.

Perhaps the cold, cloudy weather of the last few days has gotten you down. Do you realize that despite how miserable things seem down here, above the clouds the sun still shines radiating its warmth and beauty? There are days in our lives when all we can see are the clouds of doubt, the shadows of uncertainty, and the gloom of pain and sorrow. But that doesn’t alter the fact that God’s Son of eternal love is still shining above this world’s clouds! Jesus’ ascension means He is high above this world’s woes, working out all things in our lives in a way that will lead to our eternal glory.

Now, you can get through gloomy weather when the forecast calls for sunshine and warmth in the future. The weather man may be more often wrong than right, but consider the historical forecast for the future – Satan will cast his clouds of gloom and sorrow around the world. He will thunder and lighten and his storms will howl and rage as he tries to destroy Christ’s Church. But we can get through the gloomy weather now because we know the long-range forecast. It’s 100% accurate. Jesus will come again in glory!

So let’s thank Him for the legacy He left us – and use it to his glory! He left us the gift of spiritual understanding; the gift of a joyful heart; the gift of service, service to our Lord and others that requires that we do our best in faith in Jesus and love for Him. Please stand and join in singing a prayer that God will bless us as we serve our ascended Lord Jesus. We use the words of the hymn 173 v. 3.