

Ascension of the Lord – 05-24-20

The disciples who watched Jesus disappear from view that day could only stand and gaze after Him. What now? He had left them. At first it was shocking and troubling to see the Lord there one minute and gone the next. Truly Jesus rose up and made the way into His glorious future. This is a beginning, not an ending!

All things – *all things* are “summed up in Christ.” (Eph 1:10) That is, all things in heaven and all things on earth. Jesus is the culmination. Yet, some believers confine their associations and their activity to a small, comfortable, predictable set of things. The promise – the inheritance we have in the God-man who has returned to heaven – is not limited to a narrow world of ideas and actions – commonly thought of as “church.” The best is yet to come as the Holy Spirit leads Jesus-followers to accomplish *new things* – glorious things in the name of Jesus. This does not have to do with rule-keeping or isolation from the world. Part of our legacy in Jesus Christ is the working of His Spirit in our midst so that powerful witness and powerful transformation happen – often without our planning or “starting a program” or “organizing a worldly movement.”

Once I met a man named Wade. He grew up in an intensely religious and narrow church – his family’s church. No dancing, no tv, no card playing and only KJV Bible. Wade was forbidden to have friends outside the church. Leaders of his congregation claimed to be the only ones going to heaven. When his father, a leader in the congregation, questioned a fellow leader about sexual misconduct, he was told to keep quiet and mind his own business. He kept asking questions, and at last he was kicked out of the church. So, to young Wade it seemed he and his family were condemned to hell.

Time passed. Wade completed high school in his hometown and headed off to college. He was pretty low emotionally. But he decided to be faithful. He found a fellowship near the school – the same denomination he had been part of back home. He felt more and more isolated and lonely as the weeks passed. Then new friends at college invited him to a Bible study and fellowship on campus. He became more and more disillusioned with the church he was attending. At last, the teaching and Bible study and friendship he experienced among his college crowd began to soak into his soul.

“One evening as Wade sat eating fast food, he got the image of a mountain in his mind. All his life in the church he had grown up in he was told that he had “arrived” – in other words, “He was on top of the mountain with God.” But in his vision, it was like the fog and clouds rolled back to reveal that he was NOT on top of the mountain, but rather on a ledge far from the top. These thoughts did not drive him further into despair. Rather, it was the lightbulb moment for Wade that changed everything! Suddenly there was so much more room for him to grow in his relationship with God! It was a wakeup call!” (<http://mystory.me>)

The Apostle Paul tells us, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*...” (Eph 1:18-20) God lifted and brought His beloved Son to sit at His side.

Ascension power *is* resurrection power. We are given a changed heart by the working of the Holy Spirit within us – a changed mind again and again as the Lord Jesus beckons us to step out with Him. There is no formula – no secret word – no guarantee. Nobody inside or outside the church knows who God favors. Instead Jesus invites us risk seeking the truth of who He is.

Paul wrote to a church that was beginning to struggle with the cult of Gnosticism. Some preachers and teachers travelling the Roman roads were bringing a Gnostic mythology different from the Genesis account of creation – and opposed to the Biblical claim that God – the Holy One of Israel – the God of Abraham – is the supreme Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of the cosmos.

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Does intellectual argument win the hearts and minds of our family, or our friends and neighbors? Not at all. Rather, we seek the transformation of ***our*** hearts and ***our*** minds – so that we share the Good News – so that we praise and worship Jesus – under whose feet God has put everything that is. The Lord places His willing disciples where He can work in and through us.

Here is the final promise of the passage: Jesus Christ is “the head of everything in the church, which is His body. His body, the church, is the fullness of Christ, who fills everything in every way.” (vv 22-23)

Here is your take-away. Here is the main point: “The church...is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ’s body, in which He speaks and acts, by which He fills everything with His presence.” (vv 22-23 MSG) You and I are called to risk opening up and speaking up and following through by offering ourselves. Christ works very often in spite of what we ***think*** we do. The Holy Spirit changes hearts and minds. We only open our mouths and share our faith in Jesus – our hope in His return.

As Jesus rose into the clouds and the disciples stared toward the heavens, two men in gleaming white were standing next to them. “You Galileans —why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky? This very Jesus who was taken up from among you to heaven will come as certainly—and mysteriously—as he left.” (Acts 1:11 MSG) We don’t just stand still until we see our Lord returning to the sound of the trumpet with legions of angels.

The very power and goodness that lifted Jesus back up to His heavenly home, is able to transform our hearts and minds. You ***are*** the heart and hands and feet of our Lord until we meet Him again. Amen.