

Longing For Christ and Heaven

Luke 24:50-53,

Sunday after Ascension, May 17, 2015

Sermon Text, Luke 24:50-53: *“And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.”*

Beloved of the Lord..... Let us speak first this morning about visible and invisible things. Most things on earth are naturally visible to our human eye, but the things of God’s kingdom are invisible. Likewise there is a certain glory in this world, which is visible, but the glory of heaven is invisible. Regarding these visible and invisible things, what do you treasure more with your heart? The greatest desire of a young man or woman might be to find a spouse and get married. The greatest desire of a married man might be to be successful in life and to be honored by others. The greatest desire of another might be to be healed of sickness and enjoy good health. But in all this if we are not content with whatever God has given us, we are lusting after the visible things of this world. Moreover whatever we see with our eyes or desire with our heart, that is what will govern and rule us as we live. But how does all this compare to the disciples who just witnessed Christ’s ascension to heaven. The Bible says, “And they worshipped Jesus, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.” Their heart and faith and hopes were in the right place. They were longing for Christ and heaven.

Heaven is not a visible, but an invisible place where the greatest joy and bliss is to be with Christ, enjoying and experiencing His everlasting love for all eternity. As Christians then who still live in this vale of tears, it is necessary for us to daily focus and refocus our hearts and faith on the invisible, not the visible. We should live for and long for heaven, and we should live our life as if it is a race where only a few win the prize of heaven. Thus the Apostle Paul writes in First Corinthians 9, Don’t you know “that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.” Just as an athlete trains and works hard and is focused on winning a corruptible crown, so we are to be diligent and hard working in the faith so as not to lose the incorruptible crown “that fades not away.” Don’t lose sight then dear Christian, of the reward of grace Jesus has promised you. You can’t earn heaven of course for it is God’s gift to you through Jesus, but you can lose it by unbelief and impenitence, the love of this world. Therefore keep your body under subjection. Don’t let your flesh rule you, but govern your flesh by faith.

Luther thus said regarding heaven, “We should learn to bring our eyes, our hearts, and souls to bear upon yonder life in heaven and in a lively hope await it with joy. For if we would be Christians, the ultimate objects of our quest should not be marrying, giving in marriage, buying, selling, planting, building – activities that Christ says the wicked will be engaged in especially before the Last Day. To be sure, we too, must use these things in order to satisfy the needs of the body. But our ultimate quest should be

something better and higher; the blessed inheritance in heaven that does not pass away.” (What Luther Says, Plass, #1891) Dear Christian, don’t then let your life be all about that treasure which you think will make you happy if you finally get it. Jesus said “one thing is needful”. All you need is Christ, His saving Word, His forgiveness of your sins.....that must be the greatest treasure of your heart by grace through faith. Therefore run your race with patience, knowing Jesus is waiting for you there, and He will give you strength to endure.

I. The Almighty power of Christ over all creatures. Moving on now to the ascension of Christ, most every Sunday we confess the same in our Lutheran Liturgy, page 12 in the front of our hymnbook. In the Apostle’s Creed we state that on the third day Jesus rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, and “from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” What does this mean that Christ sits at the right hand of God? This is not a physical or spatial location in heaven, but this means that Jesus according to both His human and divine nature, is an Almighty and powerful King in heaven who rules all things. Since Jesus accomplished the entire will of God the Father, since Jesus kept all of God’s holy commandments with a pure and righteous heart for our sake and salvation, since He laid down His life like a lamb for the sins of the world, and since Jesus defeated the power of the devil by providing to all the world forgiveness of every sin, “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Phil. 2

We then as Christians have every reason to exalt Christ, because “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” We also know that in spite of our shameful sins, like a thick cloud Christ has blotted out our record with His blood. And though we do indeed lament how our life is not righteous and holy as we would like it to be, Jesus is all the righteousness we need, and Jesus is our holiness before God the Father in heaven. We are justified in God’s sight, in, by, and through Jesus Christ our Lord, Himself the Sacrifice, Himself the Priest. Even now in heaven Jesus mediates on our behalf, that is, as a True Man, our everlasting Brother, He takes our side before the Father, so our Father happily hears and welcomes the prayers of all who believe and trust in Jesus. This is why the Apostle John writes, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.”

Knowing Christ in heaven is both our Priest and King, we need not worry today about the “powers that be” upon earth, nor the entire kingdom of the devil himself, for all these are also UNDER and BENEATH our ALL-POWERFUL CHRIST. All the evil angels are afraid of Jesus, the King. When there are wicked rulers in our own government

who abuse their power and war against Christianity, they are still under the control and rule of Christ. Also the devil's legions who work with ungodly zeal to lead us into sin and temptation and unbelief, they too are under the divine heel of Christ, and they can only do what God allows. As mighty as Satan is, he still had to get God's permission before he could afflict Job, and even then God drew a line he could not pass. The same is true for those wicked rulers of this world who persecute God's own beloved children. They can only go so far, and they will all kneel before Christ and tremble with terror on Judgment Day. Therefore just as Christ visibly ascended up high and out of sight before the eyes of the disciples, so all believers and unbelievers will see Christ visible descend and return to judge both the quick and the dead. This is why Jesus said in Matthew 13 that "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." I quote this passage so every believer who hears His Word now will rejoice that on that day you will not tremble, but you will shine like the sun before God your heavenly Father, and your heart will forever rejoice. Therefore do not fear men on earth who will die and perish and be judged, but fear God, love Him with all your heart, and keep His commandments to the glory of His name.

II. What exactly does it mean, that Jesus is with us always? Returning now to our text, the Bible says that as Jesus "led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." Thus He lifted up His hands above them and "while He blessed them" He started to ascend, slowly rising above them until "a cloud received him out of their sight." By doing thus He withdrew His visible presence, but He also gave them the certain promise, "Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the earth." This meant not only that Jesus would be with them in spirit, **BUT ALSO PHYSICALLY WITH HIS BODY** every hour of every day, and through **ALL NIGHTS** even unto the end of the world! This is why the disciples were so joyful as they returned to Jerusalem, and this is why we can be joyful ourselves, for Jesus is with us always in both body and spirit and from His believers Jesus will never depart.

Therefore it is certain we can face every spiritual foe which comes our way, even the devils!.... if God allows it. Likewise when the enemy of death approaches, since Jesus is risen death has lost its sting. But even better, Christ will be with us in that final hour preserving our faith, and Jesus will hold us firmly by the hand, leading us through to the other side for "Lo I am with you alway". So it is written in Isaiah 41:31. "For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee." Even in that final hour of death, when all our world comes crashing down around us, Jesus will be with us there, holding our hand as we face that last enemy. Facing any enemy, can we be afraid knowing Jesus is right there with us? Doesn't the Good Shepherd walk before us preparing the way? And don't His wings cover and protect us like a shield through the night? So it is written in Psalm 91, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge

and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation.For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

Finally beloved of the Lord, let us remember and rejoice, that just as Christ visible ascended up into heaven before the eyes of the disciples, so He will visibly descend down on the Last Day, but only to lift us up. So it is written, “the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” How wonderful that will be and how glorious! Therefore in closing let us remember our introduction. remember that you are running a race in this life and the prize is heaven. Don’t lose your focus, and don’t lose your way for Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” To be with Christ and win that incorruptible crown, is God’s gift to you, yet there is running in this world to do. Faith in Christ and not ourselves, love for Christ and not this world, is the only way we can run and be victorious, in, by, and through Jesus Christ our Lord. Remember the one thing needful, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Amen.