

Where Did Jesus Go?

Preached: 5/24/2020 - Ascension Sunday

Video Message during Pandemic

Memorial Day Prayer

This is Memorial Day weekend. In our country, we are grateful for those who have given their lives for this country. From the Revolutionary War to the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, many men and women have sacrificed their lives for the freedoms and values that we enjoy and cherish as citizens of the United States. We pause this weekend to honor them for their sacrifice. We pray for their loved ones who have also given up and sacrificed. And we pray for a day when PEACE will be established between the nations of our world.

Welcome to Germantown Church of God, in Cascade, MD. I am Mark Hosler. I am the pastor here at Germantown Church. I am happy that you are watching today. Before we begin today I want to share some news with you. The leaders of our Church met this past week, and we have decided that we will begin to have public services beginning next Sunday, May 31. **Please note: We are not "Re-opening". The Church was never closed.** We are resuming the Sunday morning gathering together. If you would like to gather with us here at Germantown Church, I invite you to come and be with us next week at 9:30 AM. We understand that many people will continue to decide to Stay in and Stay Safe. **That is OK. No Judgment from here. It is not an act of Fear to decide to do what you must to be safe. You are being a responsible adult.** We will continue to make available a video message for those of you who cannot go out, or who do not feel that it is safe to go out yet. We plan to do what we can to make gathering a safe experience. We will clean and sanitize the building. Instead of meeting in the Sanctuary, we will gather in the Family Life Center where we can maintain safe distancing. We are under the authority of Frederick County, MD government. **Frederick county requires that we wear masks when we gather with a group, and we will honor that (No exceptions).** If you do not feel well, have a fever, we do ask that you continue to stay in to protect yourself and others. More information about resuming services will be posted on our web site and Facebook page. Please note this: if the Frederick County officials should determine that it is not yet safe to gather together, if the spread of Covid 19 virus is still at dangerous levels, we will re-visit this decision to resume services. So if there is any doubt in your mind, please check with us on Facebook or our Website for any updates.

Opening Scripture:

Psalm 111

Prayer:

Promise – Is. 26:3 *You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because He trusts in You!*

Sermon Text:

Acts 1:1-11

Message: **Where Did Jesus Go?**

We all are aware that the calendar marks days and seasons of the year. Many calendars will have special markings that let us know about special events. A calendar may have markings that trace the phases of the moon each month. Special days/Holidays are highlighted. Right now in this season when we have been quarantined, it feels like every day is the same. Almost hard to realize that Monday is Memorial Day. So a calendar comes in handy. Many Christians and churches use a

calendar that we sometimes refer to as the **Church Calendar**. The Church calendar highlights special days and events that trace the life and ministry of Jesus. The Church calendar begins with the season of Advent, the season of preparation for the coming of Jesus which we celebrate at Christmas. It then moves toward the season of Lent and Holy Week when we remember the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection. It is helpful for us as we learn about Jesus to follow these special seasons and days on the Church calendar. This past Thursday was a special holiday on the Church calendar. It often goes unnoticed by many people. It was Ascension Day. This Sunday is the day closest to Ascension Day and so it is the day we commemorate Ascension Day. As this text that I read from the book of Acts tells us, for 40 days after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and taught them about the Kingdom of God. The writer – Luke – tells us that Jesus gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He was not a figment of their imagination, or a dream. It was really Him. Then on the 40th day, Jesus and his disciples were gathered together. He instructed them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and then commissioned Him to be His witnesses. Then Luke tells us that **“He was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid Him from their sight.” (vs. 9).** So the answer to our question **Where did Jesus go?** is, He went to heaven. The gospel writers emphasize on several occasions that Jesus came From Heaven. Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3:13: **“No one has ever gone into heaven except the One who came from heaven – the Son of Man”** (Son of Man is a reference to Jesus). So when Jesus ascends into heaven, He is going back to His place of origin. I saw a Facebook Post from a Steven Simpson: **This is Ascension Day. For those of you who don't know it, this is the day Jesus began to work from Home!** This emphasizes the eternal nature of Jesus. His existence did not begin in Bethlehem, but He existed before that, from the beginning.

The Ascension of Jesus to heaven is an event that is quite important for us a followers of Jesus. It is of great significance. I want to talk about some of the reasons why Jesus' Ascension is so significant. Before I get to that part of this message there are two things that Luke tells us about the Ascension that are noteworthy. In the verse I referred to a moment ago – verse 9 – Luke very intentionally tells us that Jesus was taken up **BEFORE THEIR VERY EYES**. This event was visible to His followers. Now why is that important. Its important because it tells us that Jesus did not just disappear. In those 40 days that Jesus was with his followers after His resurrection, there were several times when Jesus would just appear and then disappear from their sight. It happened with the 2 men travelling on the road to Emmaus on the day Jesus was resurrected. When they realized that this fellow traveler was Jesus he disappeared from their sight. Then when the disciples were gathered in the room at the end of that day, Jesus just appeared while the doors were locked. And there are some other instances where Jesus disappeared. **BUT, this time He doesn't disappear.** They watched Him visibly be taken up. This time they know where He was. He was up in heaven. And that is a truth that they will remember in the days ahead as the Church was born and as they took the message about Jesus into the world. Jesus was in heaven guiding and directing them and sending His Spirit to them – we'll talk about that exciting story next weekend!

Luke tells us one more thing about this Ascension of Jesus into heaven. **He says that He ascended into a cloud.** Now why is that important? In the Bible, a cloud was God's way of revealing His glorious presence among His people. In Exodus there is a story about the people of Israel in the wilderness. When Moses their leader would go into the Tabernacle, a cloud would descend upon the Tabernacle which the people understood represented the glory of God. God was present among His people. In the gospels there is a story about a time when Jesus took 3 of His disciples up on a mountain and His appearance was changed before their eyes. We call this event the Transfiguration. A cloud descended over them, and the disciples heard the voice of God from within the cloud saying, **“This is my Son whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!” (Matthew 17:5)** The cloud was the glorious presence of God. So as Luke tells us about the Ascension of Jesus into a cloud, I believe that cloud represents the Glory of God. Jesus is not just disappearing into thin air, He is Ascending into the very presence of God.

Now, what is so significant about **Where Jesus Is**? There are many reasons. Jesus' position in heaven is a recurring theme throughout the New Testament. I want to mention just a few:

1. Jesus has been exalted to the highest place of authority. *Romans 8:34: "Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is interceding for us!"* God is the Sovereign ruler of the world. He sits in the position of authority and power. And now Jesus is seated along side Him, reigning with Him. During His life, Jesus claimed that He was the Son of God. That claim was offensive to His Jewish opponents. A man, claiming to be God. That's blasphemy! Now Jesus' claim is confirmed. He is seated alongside Israel's God in the highest position of authority. He is ruling from heaven. This is not just some literary or poetic statement. For New Testament believers it was a reality. The first martyr to die for His faith was a man named Stephen. Just before He died, here is what He said: **"Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man (Jesus) standing at the right hand of God."** From His position of authority, He is aware and watching what is happening to His children on earth.

2. He is able to intervene in the lives of people. From His position in heaven He is able to direct the events of life and intervene to accomplish His purposes. On the road to Damascus, he appeared to a man named Saul, to call him to repentance and to experience a transformed life. In the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* the author suggests that the Ascended Jesus is in the role of a Stage Manager, moving people and events to accomplish His purposes.

3. His return will be a visible return. As the disciples were standing there looking up into the sky, two angels appeared and told them, **"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven" (vs. 11).** Our hope as believers in Jesus is that He will come again and will gather His people and take them to be with Him in heaven for all eternity. Some people scoff at such a suggestion. Some people believe that His second coming is just a "spiritual" return. But we are convinced that He will come back in bodily form. The same way He went up, He will come back. We must be prepared for His coming, and we must do all that we can to prepare others for that coming, because His promise to return is real!

4. We can approach God through Jesus. Jesus invited His followers to pray in His name. Paul says that from His position at the right hand of God, Jesus is interceding or praying for us. So our prayers become more powerful because Jesus has ascended into heaven.

5. He is there to welcome believers. I want to share a final thought that helps us understand why Jesus' Ascension into heaven is so significant. This became personal to me this week. A few weeks ago, I shared in my sermon that my father-in-law Harold had been in the hospital. His health has been in decline. On Thursday (Ascension Day), we got the news that Harold had died. (Thank you to all you were praying for Him) We had our Telephone prayer gathering on Thursday, and for my devotions that night, I read the verse from Romans 8 (Jesus is at the right hand of God). As I read that text when I got to that line it suddenly struck me that Jesus is in heaven to welcome His followers into His presence. And that He had just a few hours before welcomed Harold into His presence. What a comforting thought for me in that moment. He is there to welcome all who look to Him for salvation.

I hope you will understand how important it is to know that Jesus has gone into heaven. Its not just a nice ending to a good story. It is a reality that can change the way we live our lives in the difficult days of life in the world. You have an Advocate in heaven, reigning over the world, praying for you and who is ready to receive you into His arms. You've got a Savior in High Places!

Prayer