

Our Identity with the Ascended Jesus

Preached: 5/16/2021, Germantown;

Ascension Sunday

Scripture

Luke 24:50-53

In the last few verses of Luke's Gospel, he gives us a brief account of the Ascension of Jesus. A more detailed account is found in Luke's companion book, Acts 1:1-11. As I read this brief account in the gospel, there is a thought that captures my attention.

⁵⁰ And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.

After His death, Jesus' disciples were heart broken. He was gone from their sight, no longer with them, and they were filled with sadness and grief. When they met the Risen Jesus, their hearts and spirits are renewed. They were overjoyed.

Now Luke tells us that as they watched Jesus ascend into heaven, they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. Initially it seems like an odd emotion. Jesus is leaving them again, but instead of being sorrowful like they were after Jesus died, they are filled with joy. What is the reason for their joy?

They are now convinced that Jesus is alive. He will "be with them". He has conquered death and lives forever. He has now ascended to a place of authority where he can rule over the powers of evil. He will be able to guard and protect them from heaven. So we join Jesus' earliest followers in Worshipping Him as He has taken His place in heaven. We choose to rejoice because Jesus is now seated in heaven at the right hand of God.

As we read the writings of the New Testament, the writers often refer to Jesus' ascension and his position in heaven and the benefits that His followers experience as a result of His position at the right hand of God. I want to look at a passage in Colossians for some helpful instruction about how Jesus ascension helps us.

Read Colossians 2:20 – 3:4 (ESV)

The apostle is writing to correct some false teaching that was causing confusion among the Colossians. There were false teachers who were trying to persuade the Colossians that the way to overcome sin and gain favor with God was to "beat out bodies into submission" by following lists of rules and regulations. **Vs. 21 – Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch...** These rules and regulations originate in the world. Paul calls them the "elemental spirits of the world". This is what **people with no spiritual life in them think. Pleasing God is following impossible rules and regulations.** But Paul says that when we experienced conversion through our faith in Christ, we are set free from such thinking. He says that we "died" to those principles. On the surface, rules and regulations seem to make sense. That's how we live our lives. That's how we teach our children. But Paul says they have no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. The choices that we make, our behavior are determined by what is in our heart. If we are going to overcome sinful behavior, it will not happen by following a list of rules and regulations. We need to experience a change within. Our hearts need to be transformed. Some of you may have grown up in a "Christian" culture that had lots of rules – No dancing, no movies, no cards, no smoking, no drinking, etc. But those rules did not change your heart. We need something different.

Paul declares that **our relationship with Christ is where we find victory over sin.** How does that happen? I believe that the answer is connected to this event that we are observing today – the Ascension. Whenever we become a believer in Jesus as our Savior, as our Lord, there is a power that is released into our lives that we did not have before. We are now **connected to Jesus.** In verse 3 he says that **Our life is now hidden with Christ in God.** The point that Paul wants us to understand then is that if we are connected with Christ,

our minds need to think from the perspective of where Jesus is. He is now **seated at the right hand of God**, and we are connected to Him. If Jesus is seated above, at the right hand of God, he is in a position of authority over all other powers that influence this world, and the people in it. If we are attached to Jesus we are seated with Him. We now enjoy strength and confidence over all the evil powers that could harm us or lead us into sin.

So our thinking must now be oriented from a different perspective. We may continue to be physically present on the earth, in this world, but the way we look at things and respond to things is controlled by where Jesus is. **Seek the things that are above....Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.** We must choose to allow our thoughts and decisions to be influenced by heaven's standards because that is where our true position is. That is our true identity. When we remember that we are attached to Jesus who is seated at the right hand of God, we will no longer live as if this world and what happens in this world is all that matters. We will realize that there is a bigger plan unfolding. God is establishing His Kingdom. We live life with that in mind, because we are connected to Jesus.

I use a devotional book entitled **The Eternal Journey**, written by Jonathan Bailey. Bailey observes that when we are trying to break free from the vices of sinful behavior, we need to operate from a different place. He quotes Mark Twain who once wrote: "It is very wearying to be good." When we are trying to break sinful habits and behaviors, we can wear ourselves out when we are trying to do it on our own. We must get to a place in our spiritual development where our behavior is seamless with our character. Doing the right thing, overcoming sin must become habitual, or second nature. I believe that when we are living our life, controlled by our connection to Jesus who is seated at the right hand of God, we will begin to experience victory and freedom from sin.

How do we become connected to Jesus?

- Acknowledge that we are sinful, and realize that our sins separate us from God
- Believe that Jesus came to this world where he died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin so we can be forgiven and so we can have power to overcome sin
- Make a decision to invite Jesus to be our Savior by turning from our sin and seeking God's forgiveness.

If you would like to experience this spiritual connection with Jesus, you can do so by praying and asking Jesus to be your Savior.