

The Joy of the Ascension.

Text: Luke 24:49-53

1) The Saviour's Own Joy

Suggested Hymns:

2) The Disciples' Joy

106, 111, 166, 114, 113

3) Our Joy

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 24:49-53, ⁴⁹ ***“Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”***

⁵⁰ ***And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.*** ⁵¹ ***Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.*** ⁵² ***And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,*** ⁵³ ***and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

What a glorious occasion it is that has brought us together in the house of the Lord! This occasion is none other than the ascension of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, His return into heaven from which He had come to redeem the world.

As His lowly birth in Bethlehem marked His humiliation, so His majestic ascent from the Mount of Olives marks His exaltation, His glorification.

Indeed, the ascension of Christ constitutes His coronation as King of kings and Lord of lords. The everlasting doors of heaven were lifted up, and the King of Glory entered in. The angels then did prostrate fall and, bringing forth the royal diadem, crowned Him Lord of all.

Shall we do less? Great is the joy in England when there is the coronation of a new king or queen. There are vast expenditures and magnificent the ceremonies. Throughout the vast Commonwealth there is participation in such an event.

Now, if all the professing Christians in the visible Church of Jesus Christ on earth were mindful of the meaning of the ascension of our Lord, would not all Christian churches be filled to capacity?

And if we who are here to worship our crucified Saviour, our risen and ascended Lord, will enter into the joy of His ascension, will not our hearts be filled with a holy joy and peace, such as the world can neither give nor take away?

Here is the great fact, as recorded in Mark 16:19, ¹⁹*So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.*

And here is the Holy Spirit's interpretation as given to us in Ephesians 1:20-22, [The Father] *seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. ²² And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church.*

So, then, the triumph of our Lord is for the benefit of His Church. His coronation is for our salvation. What a wonderful glorious day of Ascension!

The Psalmist writes, *God has gone up with a shout, The LORD with the sound of a trumpet. ⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!*¹

Truly, *"This is the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it."*² — With believing and happy hearts let us meditate on the narrative of our text which portrays to us *The Joy of the Ascension*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Saviour's Own Joy

And He led them out as far as Bethany. We do not need to guess what emotions filled the Saviour's heart on this occasion. The last time He had led the disciples this way was on the night of the Passover and betrayal. Then the way led to the base of the same Mount of Olives, into the Garden of Gethsemane, but this time the way leads past the Garden, on to the top of the mountain.

That night it was a pathway of suffering, leading to His sacrificial death for the redemption of a sin-lost world, but today it is a pathway of victory, celebrating the completion of the work of redemption. Then pain, anguish, crucifixion, but now joy, satisfaction, and coronation.

This is the event our dear Redeemer had looked forward to when in deepest agony He prayed in John 17:5, ⁵ ***“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”***

This is the day of His glorification. His Saviour heart is filled with that holy joy of which the writer to the Hebrews speaks in Hebrews 12:2, ***who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***

However, the Saviour is joyful not only for His own sake; for He is incapable of what might even in the remotest degree suggest or resemble selfishness.

He is joyful chiefly on account of His disciples, joyful for the Church He had purchased with His own blood, and joyful for your sake and mine. From the Mount of Olives He views Jerusalem, not with sadness, as on a former occasion, but with gladness of heart. He foresees Pentecost, ten days time.

“Behold,” He says to the disciples with Him on the Mount of Ascension, ***“I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”***³ He sees His apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, witnessing boldly for Him. He sees the three thousand converted under their powerful preaching of the Word. He sees men and women and children added to the Church daily.

With divine vision He sees the fruit of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. He sees the light going forth from Mount Zion into a sin-darkened, devil-worshipping world and sees the Gentiles coming into the spiritual Zion. His eye foresees the apostles out in all the world, teaching, preaching, baptising in His name, bringing men, women, and children into the Kingdom of Grace.

Yes, His loving Saviour eye looks down through the vista of ages, seeing all the redeemed children of God, foreseeing you and me. And so His heart of love is filled with a great joy for our sake. He envisions the day when because of His

finished redemption and His own return to glory He may say to you and to me, *Enter into the joy of your lord.*⁴

The heart of the ascending Redeemer is filled with joy because of the blessings He will bestow in the future. He has led captivity captive and received gifts for mankind. Very fittingly, then, *“He blessed them”* as He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. As the happy Dispenser of heavenly treasures the Son of Man leaves this earth which He had blessed with His presence. Truly, great was the Saviour’s joy.

2. The Disciples’ Joy

When Jesus set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem and told His disciples about His forthcoming rejection, they became increasingly disappointed and fearful.

When on the night of the betrayal He spoke of leaving them, they were perplexed and sad. When He had died on the cross and His body lay in Joseph’s tomb, they were unspeakably sorrowful and dejected.

Now, the beloved Master had foretold not only this sorrow, but also the subsequent joy. *“Your sorrow will be turned into joy.”*⁵ The occasion for this joy came with His triumphant resurrection. Yet the disciples could not at once enter fully into this joy. We read in Luke 24:41 that *they still did not believe for joy.*

For forty days their joy was clouded by uncertainty. The establishment of Christ’s kingdom, the promise of the Father, the coming of the Comforter, — these were all matters of faith mingled with speculation.

But here on the mount of Olives all fears and doubts, all anxieties and perplexities, are left behind. Despite their personal weakness and unfitness; despite their past ignorance and folly; despite the shameful record of their desertion, Christ confirms them in their apostleship, and commissions them in His name to go forth into all the world with the Gospel of redemption, and gives them the assurance of the outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit after they have tarried in Jerusalem.

How impressive the scene! What solemnity and yet what sacred joy filled their hearts! Then, as they looked into those nail-pierced hands outstretched over

them in blessing, they knew that they were forgiven, they knew that they were the elect of God, they knew that, although Jesus was leaving them, yet He in very truth was abiding with them. And so they ***“returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”***

For the next ten days their hearts were filled with a holy and expectant joy. No longer did they mourn the departure of their beloved Master. They knew where He had gone. His assurance ***“All authority [which includes power] has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”***⁶ gave them a feeling of great security even in the midst of their enemies.

And while they stayed in Jerusalem according to His direction, they ***“continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.”***⁷ Confidently and joyfully they were waiting to be ***“endued with power from on high.”***⁸ With joyous assurance they relied on His promise in John 14:18, ¹⁸ ***“I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”*** With the word “orphans” also comes the meaning that Christ will not leave you desolate or comfortless.

And after He came to them again in the person of the other Comforter, their joy was beyond description. Nor did this joy ever leave them.⁹ Even in the days of persecution nobody could take their joy from them.

Moreover, they radiated this joy, the joy of salvation, into other lives. They taught, preached, and wrote the Gospel of Christ so that the joy of forgiveness, the joy of fellowship with Christ, and the joy of Christian service might come to others also, joy for time and eternity. We read in 1 John 1:4, ⁴ ***“And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.*** Thank God, this joy of the first disciples is also ours.

3. Our Joy

It may seem superfluous to say that sin is at the root of all trouble. And yet this fact needs to be emphasised even in our day. Many church-members seem to forget that behind their many troubles and at the source of their cares and sorrows lurks sin, their own or that of some one else.

To deny the prevalence of trouble would be folly. The majority of those who call on pastors have some care or sorrow on their heart. ***“Trouble, trouble everywhere!”***

Now, not only pastors but also other Christians who dare to speak the condemning sentences of God's holy Law will often be called ugly names, such as "kill-joys," and the like. Nevertheless, the truth is that we are the real joy-bringers in the world. For in the Gospel of our risen and ascended Lord we have the only message that can get at the root of all trouble and bring a word of hope and comfort, of peace and joy.

The Gospel of Christ brings us the assurance that ***"God has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities,"***¹⁰ that the trials and sorrows of life, though connected with sin, are not the expression of God's wrath over our sin but of His fatherly interest in us; that since ***"the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,"***¹¹ ***"there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."***¹²

Thus the message of the cross and the empty tomb becomes the message of reconciliation and peace. We read in Romans 5:10-11, ***"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. "***¹⁰ ***And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.***

And as the resurrection of Christ is the proof that God the Father accepted the sacrifice of His Son for the reconciliation of the world, even so His ascension offers the final evidence that ***"we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."***¹³ In brief, our joy as believing disciples is first of all the joy of forgiveness, the joy of salvation, given to us by the ascension of Jesus who ***"died for us and rose again."***¹⁴

Now, like those first disciples we, too, are to enter into the joy of service. We also are to be ***"witnesses of these things"***¹⁵ which we have learned from the Scriptures and which we have experienced in our hearts and lives.

Like Anna in the Temple we are to speak of Christ to all who look for redemption. This we are unable to do of ourselves. Our own flesh and blood strives against this, and the world sneers and opposes. But the ascending Saviour also promises to us the gift of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶

We, too, shall receive power as the Holy Spirit comes upon us, power to witness for Christ by our lives as well as by our words. We, too, shall find that

the kingdom of God is ***“righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”***¹⁷ We shall find joy in serving Christ, as countless thousands have done through the centuries. After any and every adventure with Christ, we will ***“return to Jerusalem with great joy,”*** assured of His abiding presence and power, seeing with the eye of faith His outstretched hands blessing us.

My friends, by the wondrous grace of Christ you and I belong to God’s elect. Happy people we should be. Yet, while we live here below, we shall be assailed by doubts and fears, especially when undergoing some severe afflictions.

But when Satan seeks to assail and accuse us, we may boldly challenge him and say with St. Paul in Romans 8:33-34, ³³ ***“Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.***

The ascended Christ, sitting at the right hand of God, interceding for us, is our guarantee that nothing ***“shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***¹⁸

But in order that such a joyous faith and such sustaining comfort always be ours, we need to be more like those first disciples, who ***“were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God.”***¹⁹ We need to be more in the house of the Lord, more often at the Lord’s Table, more with Christ in the closet, reading His Word and communing with Him in prayer. In this way their joy in the ascended Lord will be ours also.

Then, when the shadows lengthen, when infirmity and old age creep upon us, when at last we must enter the valley of the shadow of death, let us take ourselves in spirit to the Mount of Olives and with the eye of faith view the Saviour with His outstretched hands, blessing us with forgiveness, life, and salvation.

In His ascension we shall then find the final evidence that the gates of heaven, which sin had barred, have been opened to us by Jesus. And in the power of His ascension we shall ascend to His Father and our Father, and enter into the glory which He is now preparing for us in the Father’s mansions. There joy will be forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psalm 47:5

² Psalm 118:24

³ Luke 24:49

⁴ Matthew 25:23

⁵ John 16:20

⁶ Matthew 28:18

⁷ Acts 1:14

⁸ Luke 24:49

⁹ See John 16:22

¹⁰ Psalm 103:10

¹¹ Isaiah 53:6

¹² Romans 8:1

¹³ Romans 5:2

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:15

¹⁵ Luke 24:48

¹⁶ Acts 10:45

¹⁷ Romans 14:17

¹⁸ Romans 8:39

¹⁹ Luke 24:53