

The Wonderful Ascension Of Jesus Christ Into Heaven.

Text: Mark 16:14-20

1) Wonderful in its nature

Suggested Hymns:

2) Is wonderful because of the blessings it gives us

114, 111, 112, 109, 169

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 Mark 16:14-20, ¹⁴ *Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.* ¹⁵ *And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.* ¹⁶ *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*

¹⁷ *"And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; ¹⁸ "they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."*

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. ²⁰ And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen. (NKJV)*

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

Dear friends in Christ,

In the very first verse of our text we are told that Jesus upbraided His disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He was risen.

If at that time, under those circumstances, there was occasion for such reproof, how much more is such upbraiding in place today, when hardness of heart, unbelief, and worldliness meet us on every side!

The very fact that so little attention is paid to this great festival of the Church, commemorating the ascension of our Lord, shows that even professed Christians need correction.

Indeed, if we examine ourselves, Do we not find in our own hearts the understanding of, and therefore the interest in, the ascension of our Lord which ought to be found in every Christian's heart? If Jesus was with us today, as He was with the Eleven on that memorable day near Bethany, He would have occasion to upbraid us, too.

Let us accept the reproof with repentance and humility, and let us pray that He may melt our hard hearts and fill us with faith. The answer to such a prayer is found in the Gospel lesson of Ascension Day, for in this Gospel lesson we have the story of Jesus' wonderful and blessed ascension. May the Lord bless our meditation as we celebrate the ascension of our Lord.

1. The Wonderful Ascension Of Jesus Christ Into Heaven Is Wonderful In Its Very Nature.

The occurrence itself is wonderful. Some people are troubled because the ascension of Christ is so wonderful. They are offended because they cannot understand the mysteries of God and of Christ. How foolish!

They are just as foolish as the people who want water which is not wet, fire which does not burn, and food which does not need to be eaten or chewed. God in His very nature is wonderful and incomprehensible. We read in Romans 11:33, ³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!*

And His works are all wonderful. Who, when looking at this wonderful creation of God, has not cried out with the Psalmist, ²⁴ *O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all.*¹ And as nature is wonderful, so much more are all the things connected with God's work of redemption.

Why should anybody be surprised that everything in Jesus' life is wonderful since He Himself is the Wonderful One? We read in Isaiah 9:6, ⁶ *For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful ...*

Likewise, we read in 1 Timothy 3:16, ¹⁶ ***And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.*** Birth in a stable, childhood in Nazareth, teaching and miracles, baptism and temptation, — is not all this one miracle after another? Why, then, should anyone be offended that His ascension into heaven is so wonderful

We read in Luke that Jesus, after His resurrection, was seen by His disciples for forty days and that then He led them out as far as to Bethany and there, while blessing them, was taken up into heaven. And just so, we read here in our text, ¹⁹ ***So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven.***

This meant, first of all, that Jesus' body actually began to rise from the earth, higher and higher, until a cloud received Him out of their sight. This was a truly wonderful, mysterious occurrence, the only one of its kind known or recorded. It is true that Elijah and Enoch were taken up into heaven without passing through the gates of death, but Jesus alone died, was resurrected, and ascended up into heaven visibly.

The Ascension of Jesus is wonderful also because of what took place and was not seen. For while He actually arose before the eyes of the apostles, higher and higher, and while they saw a cloud cover Him, so that they could no longer see Him, this is not all that happened.

Jesus' body was not simply taken up higher and higher till it was up so high that the clouds covered Him and He could no longer be seen. No, Jesus, we are told, ascended into heaven. That is not some small space which is high up in the clouds or above the clouds, but it is the abode of the angels and of the saints made perfect in light, where Jesus is seen face to face by angels and by all who have inherited everlasting life.

Scripture describes the ascended Jesus as we read in Ephesians 1:20-23, ... ***He raised Him from the dead and 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, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.***

We are assured that the believer in Christ will certainly see Jesus as we read in Job 19:25-27, ²⁵ *For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;* ²⁶ *And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,* ²⁷ *Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*

And in John 14:2, ² *“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”* And in Luke 23:43, ⁴³ *And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”*

Heaven is an actual place, as the Bible teaches. It is frequently pictured to us. For example we read in Philippians 3:20-21 that *our citizenship is in heaven.*² And in Matthew 22:30 we learn that *“in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.”*

And yet, although we know that our bodies will be there and our souls will be united with our bodies and we shall see Christ face to face and we shall be in the company of the holy angels, and we shall be perfectly blessed, without sin, without ignorance, without any suffering, yet there are many mysteries connected with it that we do not understand.

Nothing on this earth is just exactly like it. In the assurance of heaven, we are not only longing for its happiness, but we are full of expectancy to understand its mysteries. How wonderful, therefore, is the ascension of Jesus into this wonderful and mysterious place, where God is enthroned in His glory and the angels and the souls of righteous people see Jesus in blessedness and commune with each other in perfect joy.

The ascension of Jesus is also wonderful when we consider the words used here in our text, *“Sat on the right hand of God.”* This is, of course, a figure of speech; for God has no right hand such as we have. This figure is used in other parts of Scripture. For example, Luke 22:69, ⁶⁹ *“Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God.”*

A vision of this wonderful occurrence was granted to the prophet Daniel as we read in Daniel 7:13-14, ¹³ *“I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. ¹⁴ Then to Him was*

given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.

This passage, together with others,³ shows that Luther's explanation is correct: *"What else can 'at My right hand' mean than to enjoy equality with God? For He does not sit above Him, nor does He sit at His feet, neither higher nor lower, but at His right hand, on an equality with Him, so that heaven is even His throne and the earth His footstool. Just as He says in the last chapter of Matthew, v. 18: 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.'"*⁴

In short, Jesus' has returned to His mode of existence before He humbled Himself. According to His human nature He ascended on high and led captivity captive.

O the wonderful ascension of Jesus! Wonderful as everything is wonderful in Jesus. It is full of mystery, but God has taught it in His Word. We accept it, we believe it, and we join the angels in worshipping Him.

The hymnist writes,⁵

The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now:
A royal diadem adorns
The mighty victor's brow.

2. The Ascension Of Our Lord Is Wonderful Also Because Of The Blessings Which Are Given To Us, His Believers.

Is it not wonderful that just by His going away, by withdrawing His visible presence, the greatest of blessings should come to His disciples? The disciples thought that was strange. They mourned. Sorrow filled their hearts. But then Jesus adds immediately,⁷ *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the [Comforter] will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you."*⁶ Jesus goes away that He may give us the greatest of blessings.

Let us keep in mind that all that Jesus wished to accomplish by His visible presence here on this earth had been accomplished. The Word had been made flesh and dwelt among us.

Through His words and through His works Jesus had given visible demonstrations of His Messiahship. As child and as man He perfectly obeyed the entire Law of God, in every detail and without the least blemish. Through His innocent suffering, through His cruel death, He, as spotless and at the same time as sinless High Priest, offered a perfect and complete sacrifice and a faultless atonement for all the sins of the whole world.

Now His work was finished, He had grappled with death, fought that monster, entered the grave, and through His death and resurrection gained a complete victory over death and the grave.

Through His repeated appearance during those forty days, before different groups of His disciples at different times, appearing even before over five hundred people at once, He demonstrated to them the fact that He had appeared and had brought life and immortality to light.

All this was finished, done, completed. No purpose could be served by His remaining visibly here on this earth. He was now to distribute what He had gained, and all these treasures and all His spoils, to those for whom He had gained them.

By His ascension heaven received Him, our Champion and Substitute, as Conqueror. That makes His triumph complete. We read in Psalm 68:19, ¹⁹ *Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loads us with benefits, The God of our salvation!* And in Colossians 2:15, ¹⁵ *Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.*⁷

In heaven Jesus now intercedes for us. We read in 1 John 2:1, *And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.* And Hebrews 7:25, ²⁵ *Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

From heaven Jesus now sends His Holy Spirit and rules all things for the glory and final redemption of His work. We read in Acts 1:8, ⁸ *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

And in Matthew 28:18-20, ¹⁸ *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”* ¹⁹ *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ²⁰ *“teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the [world].”*⁸

Finally, from heaven Jesus now draws us to Himself. We read in John 12:32, ³² *“And I, [when] I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”* And in Philippians 3:20, ²⁰ *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.* And in Colossians 3:1, ... *seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.*⁹

So let us close with the words of the hymnist,¹⁰

Draw us to Thee;
For then shall we
Walk in Thy steps for ever,
And hasten on
Where Thou art gone,
To be with Thee, dear Saviour.

This is the wonderful ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven. What wonderful blessings indeed! Amen.

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

¹ Psalm 104:24

² See also Romans 8:18-23, Rev. 21:1-27

³ Psa. 2; Psa 110:1-2; Eph. 1:20-23

⁴ St. Louis Ed., 111, 1910

⁵ Hymn 169

⁶ John 16:7

⁷ See also Philippians 2:9-11

⁸ See also Psalm 2:6-12

⁹ See also Philippians 1:23, Revelation 22:20

¹⁰ Hymn 109