

Eyes Toward Heaven.

Text: Acts 1:10-11

1) Eyes on the Ascension

Suggested Hymns:

2) Eyes on Christ's Return

113, 111, 108, 114, 106

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 Acts 1:10-11, *¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, ¹¹ who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."* (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Last Thursday was Ascension Day, forty days after Easter.

The earthly journey of Jesus is celebrated by Christians on three occasions, Christmas, Easter, and the Ascension. Christmas marks His coming to earth, *¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*¹

Easter marks Jesus' triumph over death, *⁶ "He is not here; for He is risen, as He said."*² The Ascension, which we are commemorating today, marks the return of Jesus to the eternal glories of heaven, *He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.*³

Christ's ascension marked the conclusion to His earthly life and his farewell to the disciples. Leave-taking is often the occasion of tears and sadness. But not so this good-bye of Jesus. There were no tears, and no sadness.

His ascension was as prophesied by the Psalmist, as we read in Psalm 47:5-8, *⁵ 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! ⁷ For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with understanding. ⁸ God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.*

And to His disciples Jesus said, ²⁸ ***“I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”***⁴

For Jesus, His ascension was His coronation in heaven. He had His eyes toward heaven since they opened upon the star shining over Bethlehem the night of His birth. His eyes were set upon the celestial homecoming since He left the mansions on high.

Through all His human experiences, living and dying for man’s salvation, Jesus had His eyes toward heaven. We can only imagine what a glorious welcome was given to Him by the angels on His royal return. Their heavenly choruses must have made His triumphal entry a glorious beginning to His everlasting reign as true Man and true God at God’s right hand in the heavenly places.

Ever since, His close disciples and His following Christians have turned their eyes heavenward, in remembrance of His ascension and in anticipation of His return to take them where He is.

The encouragement of the return of Jesus is assured to us in the words of the angels in our text, ***This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.*** Our theme for this special day is, *Eyes toward Heaven*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Eyes On The Ascension

The disciples had become accustomed to looking on Jesus with eyes of wonder. They were drawn to Him by the wonderful works He had done. They had seen Him in action, forgiving sins, healing the lame and the blind. They had witnessed His miracles. What a joy it must have been for these disciples to ask one another, ***“Have you seen the Master yet today?”*** Blessed was the day their eyes fell upon the Person of Jesus, and yet more blessed when His eyes fell upon them.

Their eyes had been upon Him in Gethsemane, in Pilate’s hall. But only one disciple’s eyes could see the Lord upon the cross of Calvary. The others could not bear the sight of the torture of the Master. It was too much. His promise to suffer and die to take the place of man’s deserved death was dreadfully fulfilled, but their eyes could not look upon Him.

Their eyes were beaming with joy at His resurrection. How they cherished His appearances to them, on the way to Emmaus, at the seashore, in the Upper Room. And now, on the Mount of Olives, their eyes saw His ascension. Their eyes were directed heavenward.

A cloud received Jesus out of their sight. The phenomenon by which the Father protected the Children of Israel when they were led from Egypt to the Promised Land now clothed Jesus for His entrance into the holy places not made with hands. He rose out of sight, but their eyes never moved from the vision that disappeared before them.

Their wide eyes doubtless expressed the surprise that burst within them. *They looked steadfastly toward heaven.* We might say they were bewildered. Often they had shared in the marvellous mysteries of Jesus' miracles, but never before had they witnessed such a majestic sight.

Witnessed by Angels

Two angels stood by in shining white apparel. A mild rebuke is forthcoming. So absorbed had the disciples become in this disappearance of Jesus that they failed to notice the angels in white. Words at this imposing moment startled them. *Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?* Angel words have a way of heightening even such an occasion as Christ's ascension. Their question was begging no answer. The angels went on to say, *This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.*

"Why are you so bewildered and surprised? You were told by the Lord that He would depart from you, to ascend on high and to lead all who are captive to sin to the freedom of heaven's grace and mercy. At this moment He is restoring you to the Father's love and preparing your home with Him."

The disciples did not have our Bibles with the perfect revelation of today, nor did they have worship services to glorify His love and express His will to have all people saved through His own precious blood.

But in a better sense these wondering disciples had the blessed presence of Jesus as their Teacher, and He told them all things that were to come. *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.*⁵

To His disciples, Jesus had always been a Man of action and direction. He was never merely an observer of the sinful condition of man in his estrangement from God. He came from heaven to remove this evil from the human heart. He came to live for man and to suffer and die. Their eyes had seen this attitude and purpose carried out, and now His mission was fulfilled before their opened eyes.

Eyes of Blessing

As He rose, Jesus lifted His hand in blessing upon these men, whose eyes had shared His earthly life. Upon this action their eyes would never close. In blessing them He promised to send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit from on high.

The Holy Spirit would dwell richly in them to teach them all things and to be a strengthening comfort to them during His absence. In this sense of sending the Holy Spirit to dwell within them, Jesus did not go away at all. He would always be in constant touch with them. It would be even better now than it had been before.

Now Jesus would dwell within them through the Holy Spirit, whether they were haled before a Jewish court or whether they became victims of the Roman arena. The Holy Spirit would bring all the power of heaven and earth, the possession of Jesus, to bear in the believer's heart. This blessing and promise of the Holy Spirit must have put stars in their eyes to make them stare with wonder and thanksgiving.

Divine Assurance

The intent of their eyes searching the skies was to wait for His return. The angels had said, *This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.* Jesus Himself had promised in John 14:3, *I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.* The disciples knew He would come back. He had promised, and they believed what He told them.

2. Eyes On Christ's Return

The disciples made a mistake in expecting the return of Jesus to take place immediately. His visible return in glory, prophesied by the angels and spoken of

by Jesus, will be the glorious Day of Judgement, when the believers in Christ shall enter the heavenly realms and the unbelievers shall enter the dark shadows of hell.

But in another sense, Jesus would return frequently. In fact, He would never be away from their eyes of faith. He would be with them in the need of a dreadful hour, in the prayer-hour of an aching heart; to soothe ruffled nerves, and to assure the penitent sinner of His forgiveness and cleansing through His holy, precious blood.

Waiting Period

But there was something more important to do than gazing into the skies for the reappearance of that cloud. The disciples were directed to return to Jerusalem and wait. There is a time for waiting, and there is a time for working. They were instructed to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit.

They could not witness effectively until they were empowered with the Holy Spirit's help. There are things we can work for, and other things for which we can only wait. We can work for a living, but we can only wait for spring. The disciples could only wait upon God now and thereby find the wellsprings of strength and spiritual ability to do the work the Master commanded.

Their waiting was not to be a worthless silence, a wringing of hands. It was to be a prayerful waiting, with eyes of faith focused upon the risen and ascended Christ. Their eyes no longer stared vacantly into space, but were filled with the glories of Christ's memorable stay with them. They had His promise to be with them always, and His power over heaven and earth to be their own. How much they had to ponder and think about during this waiting period!

Eyes Toward Action

After this period of waiting they had a great command to follow. ***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.***⁶ The circle of work was to be increased as the Holy Spirit accompanied the disciples' efforts.

The fact that you and I know of Jesus' love for us, His taking our place in dying for our sins, and His promise to take us to heaven, is due to the fulfilling of this Ascension Commission.

This waiting of the disciples was a prelude to mighty action and gained for them and for us, the glorious privilege of sharing the word of God among all people.

From that time on, the rebuke of the angels, the reinstatement of the promise of Jesus' return, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the eyes of the disciples remained heavenward. But they also took in the vision of everyone around them.

They could now see heaven as the home for the people of Asia Minor, in Europe, and in Rome. It was no hazy vision. It was a clear sight that considered every human being against the background of the eternal home where Jesus has prepared a resting place for those who receive His salvation.

Our Eyes Heavenward

In our day we are Christ's chosen disciples. Our eyes have been heavenward since our baptism. Our daily life is a constant witness to our eyes of faith. And our desire to share this joyous message of salvation makes our task as wonderful as it was for the disciples. Like them we are reluctant to turn away from this Ascension Day sight. We linger long with loved ones, and after they have gone from us, we look into the distance and remember all the wonderful things we have enjoyed together.

But we would not expect that individual to return immediately, unless he had forgotten something. *"I will come again"* means at a future date. We long to be with Jesus. But ours, too, is a waiting for the heavenly Paradise. Meanwhile we live to praise and worship Jesus all our days. Our eyes must never turn from heaven, where our heart is, but we are not cloud searchers, just staring into space.

Through eyes that God has opened for visions of heaven, we see all people around us. We see their need to be that which was our need before we came to know and understand and love the Lord Jesus. To overlook them, to fail in bringing His Word of salvation to them, would be like the wishful looking of the disciples, who waited to see Jesus return in a cloud. He returns in the hearts of His believers every day.

And the promise of Jesus that we shall be with Him forever rings true. ***I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*** Then not only shall we see Jesus sitting on the right hand of the Father, but we shall be sitting with Him.

Let us conclude with this word of Scripture, Revelation 7:12, ***Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever.*** Amen.

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

¹ John 1:14

² Matthew 28:6

³ Luke 24:51

⁴ John 16:28

⁵ John 16:7

⁶ Acts 1:8