

## **Christ's Ascension Into Heaven Is The Most Comforting Assurance Of The Success And Ultimate Triumph Of The New Testament Church Of God.**

Text: Eph 4:7-16

Suggested Hymns:

113, 108, 111, 114, 106

1) A Free And Open Course

2) The Labourers It Needs

3) Increase And Perfection,  
Both Externally And Internally

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 Ephesians 4:7-16, <sup>7</sup> *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.* <sup>8</sup> *Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."*

<sup>9</sup> *(Now this, "He ascended" — what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)*

<sup>11</sup> *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; <sup>14</sup> that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, <sup>15</sup> but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.* (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

On Thursday is Ascension Day. Christ's ascension into heaven is the source of unfailing joy and comfort to the Church.

At first glance this would seem preposterous. How much better, human reason argues, it would have been if Christ had continued His visible presence upon earth! Evidently it was this reflection that filled the hearts of the disciples with sadness when Christ first spoke to them about His going to the Father.

And this is, in spite of Christ's assurance given in John 16:7, *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.*

Even on the day when Jesus was lifted up on high evident regret and unmistakable disappointment was written on their faces. Angels from heaven had to arouse them out of their futile dreams and bid them to be on their way and to wait for the great blessings that Christ's ascension would bring them.

They did not have to wait long in order to realise that Christ's ascension was resulting in undreamed of power, vindication, and advancement of the Gospel cause.

Our theme for today is *Christ's Ascension into Heaven is the Most Comforting Assurance of the Success and Ultimate Triumph of the New Testament Church of God.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. It Provides For, And Assures To, The Church — A Free And Open Course**

The ascension of Christ provides for, and assures to, the Church a free and open course.

Christ's ascension was the grand finale of a series of triumphs over the vanquished foe.

The enemy had already suffered defeat on Calvary.<sup>1</sup> With the victorious cry on His lips: *"It is finished!"* he had left the field of battle, retiring to the grave merely that He might complete His obedience unto death and hallow our rest in the grave.

Then, to bring home to His enemies their utter defeat in the most forceful manner, Christ, in His glorified body, entered the enemy's abode,<sup>2</sup> to demonstrate His victory and to pronounce judgement upon the hosts of hell and their associates in prison. Never has Satan been able to shake off the

consternation, trembling, and fear that took possession of him on that occasion. Now *“one little word can fell him”*<sup>3</sup> as Luther wrote in the hymn, “A mighty fortress is our God.”

Next our glorious Saviour in His resurrection on Easter morning revealed His victory to His faithful own, so that the Church might know and realise that their enemies lay prostrate at their feet. With this fact in mind, they could and should go forth and preach the Gospel in all the world, as we heard in the Gospel reading, Mark 16:15, <sup>15</sup> *And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature..”*

Finally, Jesus who *“first descended into the lower parts of the earth,”* *“ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.”*<sup>4</sup> In majestic triumph He *“led captivity captive,”*<sup>5</sup> and seated Himself at the right hand of the Father that He might, on behalf of the Church, exercise all power in heaven and on earth.<sup>6</sup>

Thus our victorious Lord has as we read in Psalm 68:30, <sup>30</sup> *Rebuked the beasts of the reeds.* This section of Psalm 68 refers to the spiritual submission of the nations to the world-wide spread of the Gospel.

It is true, the enemy has not as yet been committed to his final doom. At times he still growls fiercely and wants to frighten us by his antics. Nor is his subtlety, power, and influence to be underestimated.<sup>7</sup>

Yet we have nothing to fear. Christ through His ascension has rendered him powerless. He cannot successfully and permanently hinder or harm the Church.<sup>8</sup>

Thus our Lord and Champion has prepared for His Church an open way and set the Gospel on its course. Being the *“the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes”*<sup>9</sup> the Word shall accomplish its purpose and prosper in its mission.<sup>10</sup>

We are thankful for the work of the Gideons who help to bring Bibles to people in many parts of the world. We will hear more about their valuable work after the Service.

So is there any excuse or reason for faint-heartedness, timidity, or fear on the part of God’s people? Ought not our attitude be one of utmost confidence and

boldness? Remember the words of Luther, “*The Word shall stand despite all foes.*”

## **2. It Provides For, And Assures To, The Church — The Labourers It Needs**

A second most comforting fact offered to the Church of God by Christ’s ascension is the glorious assurance that Christ supplies the labourers needed to carry on His work.<sup>11</sup> We read in Psalm 68:11, *“The Lord gave the word; Great was the company of those who proclaimed it.*

Our text says, *And gave gifts to men.* The gifts here mentioned include: —

*Apostles*, whom Christ Himself had chosen,<sup>12</sup> that, as eye-witnesses of His ministry,<sup>13</sup> guided into all truth,<sup>14</sup> and inspired by the Spirit of God,<sup>15</sup> they would be the infallible teachers to the whole world,<sup>16</sup> for all times.

*Prophets*, who received special revelations from God for purposes of edification and guidance of God’s people.<sup>17</sup>

*Evangelists*, men like Philip in the early Apostolic Church,<sup>18</sup> or like Boniface, Elliot, Livingstone, and others in subsequent centuries, or the missionaries in our own midst, at home and abroad, who spread the Word in isolated places to every country, nationality, language, class, and colour.

*Pastors*, i.e., ministers of Christ in their capacity as spiritual advisers, attending to the spiritual needs of individual members of the flock.

*Teachers*, i.e., ministers of Christ in their capacity as instructors in righteousness in Christian schools, colleges, and seminaries.

Add to this the fact that “*to each one of us*” “*grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.*”<sup>19</sup> and it becomes apparent that as we read in 1 Corinthians 1:5–7, <sup>5</sup> ... *you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,* <sup>6</sup> *even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,* <sup>7</sup> *so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Blessed, therefore, as we are with the fullest measure of gifts of the exalted Christ, may we also offer a corresponding measure of appreciation! May especially we of the Lutheran Church be appreciative and grateful for having had men like Luther, Walther, Pieper and others.

### 3. It Provides For, And Assures To, The Church — Increase And Perfection, Both Externally And Internally.

A consideration of the third point in our text directs our attention more fully to the one great purpose of this wonderful outpouring of gifts, namely, the increase and ultimate perfection, externally and internally, of the Church of God.

Firstly, we consider its external increase and perfection.

We are assured that the temple of the Lord will be perfected. In verse 13 “*We all*,” cannot refer to those who now, at this time, constitute the Church.

Of these it cannot be said that they must yet *come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God*; for such is already their status<sup>20</sup> or they would not be members of the Church.

“*We all*” rather refers to all of God’s elect, including those who are as yet foreigners and without God in the world. And to bring in these,<sup>21</sup> and thereby bring about the “*perfect man*,” the completion of God’s spiritual temple, is the purpose of the above-mentioned “gifts.”

And the Lord’s plans must carry; they will mature. The security of the Church, its blessed activity to the end of time, is hereby assured.

That implies the continuous growth of the Church. There will be added to the Church “*daily those who were being saved*.”<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, we consider its internal growth and perfection.

While the external growth of the body of Christ is in progress, He is not neglecting, but faithfully attending to, its internal growth, its advancement —

Firstly, in spiritual knowledge. Our beginnings in the faith are comparable to the first frail efforts of a child. From spiritual infancy and childhood, therefore, Christ would have us grow into spiritual maturity and manhood,<sup>23</sup> that we “*no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting*.”<sup>24</sup>

Cunning deceivers and vicious errorists of every conceivable shade and stripe threaten us harm. For this reason and purpose Christ has established the personal ministry, so that His Christians may become firmly grounded and settled in sound doctrine,<sup>25</sup> able to distinguish between truth and error and *ready to give a defense*

*to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, it is of equal importance that Christians grow in spiritual service. Just as the human body increases in stature - and strength in the measure that its members function properly, so also the body of Christ will thrive “*according to the effective working by which every part does its share.*”

The Church is not to be a loosely constituted body, but one “*joined and knit together by what every joint supplies.*” Not only the pastors, but the laymen as well are to build the Church.<sup>27</sup> To this end Christ wants to bring every Christian to a realisation and fruitful exercise of his particular gifts.

His final aim, however, is — Internal perfection.

True, as long as we are still in the flesh, our best efforts will be marred by imperfections.<sup>28</sup>

But ours is the glorious assurance that Christ’s body shall attain “*to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;*” “*grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ;*” “*for the edifying of itself in love.*”<sup>29</sup>

Could there be a more encouraging call to consecrated, individual activity in behalf of the Church than these Christ-given promises of His indwelling power and of the privileges, opportunities, and successes the exalted Lord holds out to His people ?

The glorious ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven is indeed a source of unfailing joy and comfort. May we, then, take new courage, strip off all laziness, and labour unceasingly for the expansion of God’s kingdom unto the day of its consummation in glory!<sup>30</sup> Amen.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Col. 2:14; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 2:14-15; 2 Tim. 1:10; Col. 1:13; Gen. 3:15; 1 John 3.

<sup>2</sup> vs 9-10

<sup>3</sup> Hymn 195

<sup>4</sup> Psa. 68:17

<sup>5</sup> Col. 2:15

<sup>6</sup> Eph. 1:21-23; Matt. 28:18

<sup>7</sup> See Hymn 195 v 1

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- <sup>8</sup> John 14:1; John 16: 33  
<sup>9</sup> Romans 1:16  
<sup>10</sup> Isa. 55:11  
<sup>11</sup> Psa. 68:11  
<sup>12</sup> Luke 6:13  
<sup>13</sup> 1 John 1:1  
<sup>14</sup> John 16:13  
<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor. 2:13  
<sup>16</sup> Acts 1:8  
<sup>17</sup> Rom. 12:6  
<sup>18</sup> Acts 21:8  
<sup>19</sup> Jer. 31:34; Joel 2:28; 1 John 2:20, 1 Pet. 2:9  
<sup>20</sup> Ephesians 4:3-6  
<sup>21</sup> John 10:16  
<sup>22</sup> Acts 2:47  
<sup>23</sup> 1 Pet. 2:2  
<sup>24</sup> See also Heb. 12:13  
<sup>25</sup> Col. 1:23  
<sup>26</sup> 1 Peter 3:15  
<sup>27</sup> Eph. 2:10  
<sup>28</sup> Rom. 7:15-18  
<sup>29</sup> Rev. 21:2-4  
<sup>30</sup> Rev. 21:3