

## OBSERVING THE ASCENSION

### *Acts 1:8*

On Thursday, the believing Church will quietly mark the 40<sup>th</sup> day since Easter. It is a day known as Ascension Day, yet very few will realize it. While there will be some in our area that will celebrate the Lord being taken up to assume His seat at the Father's right hand, many by-in-large will let the day pass without a second thought. Yet before we become one of the many, let us take time to consider the event surrounding our Lord's ascension into Heaven as seen in Acts 1.

Acts 1:6 – *When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*

<sup>7</sup> *And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*

<sup>8</sup> *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

<sup>9</sup> *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.*

<sup>10</sup> *And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;*

<sup>11</sup> *Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

<sup>12</sup> *Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.*

There are several lessons that can be taken from these few verses. And though I will not be able to capture all of them, nor give exhaustive detail, it is my purpose to look at two of the rich treasures provided for us through the Holy Spirit.

First, we see our commission. Just before the Lord leaves, verse 8 records His last words to His disciples. In just a matter of moments, He will be gone, and they will be left to build His Church. Notice Jesus's final words to His apostles: *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* In short, these men were to be witnesses of all they had seen and experienced as disciples of Christ.

To witness means to give testimony to the truth of something. It is a judicial term used in a court of law where someone is called to testify to what they know or have seen. In other words, if you are called to be a witness, the judge does not want to sit down with you and chit-chat over a cup of coffee. He wants you to give testimony of truth regarding the matter for which you have been called. In similar fashion, when Christ speaks to His disciples here, He commissions them to testify to the truth that they have seen and know. They are to testify that He is the Son of God. They are to give testimony to His death, His resurrection, and the truth that He alone has the power to save men from their sin.

However, there is a deeper meaning to the word "witness." The Greek word is *martus* (mar-toos). We get our English word "martyr" from *martus*. A martyr is one who is willing to suffer death rather than renounce his faith, and Acts describes how God's people were persecuted and executed for nothing more than their testimony of Christ. In other words, witnessing is not a guarantee of ease, peace, and comfort. In reality, there could be a heavy price to pay. Yet, when one considers that the eternity of men is at stake, God's people *must* be a witness. They *must* give truth.

As the Lord leaves the earth to assume His ministry in Heaven, He commissions His people to be His witness. As such, we must give testimony to the truth of God's Word and the power of Christ to save men from sin despite any abuse, persecution, or threat that we may face. And we do it everywhere we go. For the disciples, that was *in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* For us, that includes Walmart, Giant, and Weis. It includes the mall, the community events, and even vacation. We give testimony of God's power to save everywhere we go.

A second lesson we see in this passage is God's faithfulness to His children. Notice verses 10-11—*And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;* <sup>11</sup> *Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.* **In short, the angelic message is a message of hope.**

Can you imagine the range of emotions these men felt?

- >I am sure there was sadness over the fact that they would not see the Lord again while on this earth. But the messengers quickly eased those feelings with these words: *this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*
- >I am sure there was fear in the loss of their leader. Yet the Lord, Himself, gave them authority to lead when He commissioned them as His witnesses
- >I am sure there was a feeling of unpreparedness. That is a natural emotion whenever we attempt something new. However, there was assurance given that they would not be alone. Nor would they be relying upon their own strength. Jesus told them that they would go back to Jerusalem and received the power of the Holy Ghost.

In all, the message is plain: ***God never leaves us nor forsakes us.*** We may have times of doubt, fear, and discouragement. We may even go through seasons of feeling inadequate; however, when it comes to the work Christ has called us to do—those feelings are false emotions that have no basis in reality. God is always faithful to empower us to do what He has called us to do (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

This is why it is so important for us to keep our focus on our vertical relationship with God. He has called us to do “horizontal” work, but the power and ability to accomplish that work relies upon the fellowship and communion we have with Him. Sin will derail us. Sin will cause us to go astray; to leave our ministry; to abandon our calling. Therefore, we must keep a short account with God. David says, *“Search me O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me”* (Ps 139:23-24). Paul tells the Corinthians to come to the Lord’s Supper ready to *“judge ourselves that we be not judged”* (1Cor 11:31). Maintaining a right relationship with God vertically is vitally important to horizontal living. And yet, if we sin, *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous* (1Jn 2:1). God is a merciful God who loves to fellowship, encourage, and empower His children for service.

The Book of Acts is a tremendous book. It takes us through the first thirty years of this new entity called “The Church.” Yet it begins with these wonderful truths: God has given us the calling, the responsibility, and the privilege to speak His name everywhere we go. He will always be with us as we go, and despite our unfaithfulness, He has promised to remain faithful until He comes to call us home. What a great God we serve.

As Thursday approaches, may we all take the time to praise the Lord for His earthly ministry—His work on the cross. May we take the time to praise our ascended Lord for His current heavenly ministry. May we take the time to give praise to God who has promised to be with us all the days of our life and for all eternity.