**Luke 24:44-53 (ESV)**

[44] Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." [45] Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, [46] and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, [47] and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things. [49] And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." [50] Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. [51] While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. [52] And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, [53] and were continually in the temple blessing God.

**“A Blessed Word”**

In the Name of Jesus Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father with all authority and power now and forever, Amen. Most miss out on what stands in-between Easter and Pentecost. A beautiful bridge connects the work of God’s Son to work of the Holy Spirit. It takes place at the miraculous ascension of Jesus. 40 days after Easter and 10 days before Pentecost marks the day. Technically, the Ascension was on Thursday, but we still observe the splendor of it all today. Without the visible ministry of Jesus lifted up to the highest heavens. We might turn God against God by separating the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. We might also despair in the Church as if the baptized have to fend for ourselves by whatever means. Jesus neither steps out of the way nor removes Himself from the picture. He makes the ascension the final answer to His faithfulness.

Now when most today hear the word “ascension.” It certainly has nothing to do with Christ. Typically, the word takes on a philosophical meaning. To ascend in our modern mentality is an advancement or getting to that next level like in a video game. Many eastern religions view this in terms of meditation by reaching a state of ecstasy in the mind called “Nirvana”. Of course, the western world cuts corners to this Nirvana like state by abusing drugs, alcohol, and other methods to get to that “high.” One is more deadly than the other, but humanity in general envisions ascending as a spiritual escape from the physical world. How much does Jesus’ ascension in both body and soul deny the ecstasies of man that want to flee from sin, death, and the Devil. Christ risen up over His Church gives reason enough to trust in Him since He has achieved all things for us.

Jesus miraculously fulfills the Scriptures. Rather than trying to find fullness in what man is to do, we are to find fullness in what God does. The Risen Savior said to the disciples before his ascension, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." The Word of God receives its greatest authentication from the Son of God, the Word become flesh. What sets apart the Scriptures from other “holy” books is how Jesus is set apart to be the Savior. In other words, it is the miracle of the Gospel rather than works of the Law. Left behind are the achievements of a sinful world, but to lift up the saving gift of God’s Son sent for the world. What “must be fulfilled” is what drove the ministry of Jesus to die and rise from the dead. Christ’s ascension now drives the ministry of His Church by the same Spirit to fulfill what He says.

If Christianity plays at the level of works, it will never be distinct, it will never have fulfillment. The miracle set apart is in Jesus. As one person puts it,

“Subtract miracles from Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, or Taoism, and you have essentially the same religion left. Subtract miracles from Christianity, and you have nothing but the clichés and platitudes most American Christians get weekly from their pulpits. Nothing distinctive, no reason to be a Christian rather than something else” (The New Evidence 358).

The Church stands and falls on Jesus Christ. His ascension goes right along with the resurrection and virgin birth marking Him as true God and true Man. Yet, what remains consistent is that Christ by His Word lifts up all the Old Testament Scripture. Where our society views anything “old” as obsolete, what God offers in His Word is fulfillment to the sad old story of sinful humanity. The Father directs all to the miraculous sacrifice of His Son. Scriptures purpose is Christ and the purpose of Christ is to save. We ascend not in works to triumph but in believing the triumph worked by the cross.

As the Gospel keeps giving faith in the Savior. He affects our lives to think of Him in it. We read, “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” Christ would ascend, but He was certainly not out of the picture. He sent His disciples back into the Scriptures. Their minds were opened, but made captive to Christ in the Word. The whole Gospel hinges upon the cross and empty tomb. Preaching was to be both Law and Gospel, hell and heaven, repentance and forgiveness. Later in Acts the Apostle Peter proclaims this very message of salvation saying, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

As Christ opened the minds of the disciples, He also does this for you as the baptized. This is not the practical day-to-day quick quotes off the internet or ten-steps to a better life. Meditation on Scripture sets your mind free to face Jesus as savior of sinners. Far from puzzling over how the ascended Jesus can also be fully present in the sacrament. Or, trying to figure out when the Last Day will be. Christ would have our minds captive to the victory He proclaims. The mind must continually repent and believe in the Gospel. We keep saying to God, “I have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed…” Apart from Christ, this mind of ours runs wild. It even thinks itself greater than the God who must save the wisest fool. St. Paul directs our minds as the baptized to the new way of thinking saying, “that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe…” People naturally throw out the phrase “Oh, you need to be more open-minded.” The only response is to who is my mind opened the Devil or Christ, the world or the Word, my way of glory or God’s way of the cross?

Having set the disciples minds upon Him, the final moments of Christ’s ascension were to lift up their heart. The disciples had to bear the cross of Christ in their own lives. This was their witness to the world. Seeing Jesus vanish from their sight was far from sad, but St. Luke tells us they went away with “great joy.” We find this joy from the fact of how Christ gave them His blessing. It was the eternal blessing from the Savior to keep the baptized safe. He reigns as Lord, the Son of God equal to the Father. Those who suffered for the sake of the Gospel would not be put to shame. Stephen later being stoned would be able to look up and declare Jesus’ authority sitting at the right hand of the Father. King David noted this power of Christ long ago saying, “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool” (Psalm 110:1).

Hearts may be heavy in the Church when it remains faithful to Christ. Except, we are still richly blessed beyond all as the baptized. Even the benediction by the pastor when concluding the church service shows forth the ascended Jesus over your lives. This blessing seems small by the world standards, but it makes a world of difference in what the risen Savior does for us. As Martin Chemnitz states,

“For in all our afflictions and temptations—in the depraved infirmity of our nature, among the various offenses and the many pitfalls under the powerful tyranny and the rage of Satan, the world, and all the enemies of the church— our greatest and only comfort is our knowledge that Christ is present as our King, our High Priest, our Head, and the pastor of us who are His sheep in the midst of ravening wolves” (Two nature of Christ 423 CPH 2007).

Since we are eternally saved by grace alone, the heart finds rest in the same love Christ has for each moment in our lives. Our hearts and minds triumph at last by way of the Word and Sacraments. Jesus ascended in glory still brings the victory hidden, but not without His glorious presence as Savior and Lord. Christ risen up over His Church gives reason enough to trust in Him since He has achieved all things for us. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.