

The Ascension  
Luke 24: 50-53, Acts 1: 9-11

Years ago a church decided to do an Easter play, depicting the last week in Jesus' life. It was an excellent production. The music, the costumes and the acting were first rate. Desiring to end the drama on a high note, the director of the play decided to include a scene depicting the ascension of Christ. A special harness was designed so that Jesus could be lifted up as the disciples watched him rise above the stage. Everything went just as planned until Jesus was about three-quarters of the way up. Then things went haywire. Jesus gradually descended back down on to the stage. However, all was not lost. The actor portraying Jesus was quick witted. When his feet touched the stage, he raised his right hand to get the attention of the confused disciples and in a loud voice announced, "And one more thing!"

Throughout the pages of the New Testament there are numerous references to the ascension of Christ, His departure into heaven. For example, Paul writing to the church in Colossi says, "Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). Another reference can also be found in 1 Peter 3:22. Peter says that Christ has "gone into heaven and is at God's right hand." Then, of course, there is this brief statement in the Gospel of Mark which declares, "After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was taken up into heaven and He sat at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19). Nowhere, however, is the ascension of Christ more clearly described than in the writings of Luke. As you may remember, Luke was a Gentile doctor who wrote about Jesus' life and ministry as well as the history of the early church. His writings were based upon eyewitness accounts. At the end of the Gospel of Luke and then once again in the first chapter of the book of Acts, he tells us that Jesus departed into heaven after spending forty days with the disciples who had now been commissioned as His apostles.

Let's take a look at both of these passages of Scripture. The first is Luke 24:50-53. After leading them out of the city of Jerusalem to the village of Bethany, Jesus blessed the apostles with uplifted hands. Luke says that even as Christ was pronouncing that blessing He left them and departed into heaven. As you can imagine it was an awe-inspiring worshipful moment, after which His followers returned to Jerusalem with great joy. In the book of Acts, Luke provides us with additional information in the first chapter, verses 9-11. He says that after commissioning the apostles to be His witnesses, Jesus was "taken up before their very eyes disappearing into a cloud. Then much to their amazement, even as they were still staring up into the sky, two men dressed in white were standing beside them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven."

Can you image for just a moment, what it must have been like to be a part of that experience? Many years ago, I took my daughter, Joy, to an Easter presentation called "Living Pictures." Just like a painting, men dressed in Biblical costumes, portrayed the apostles of Christ staring up into the heavens. As they stood there on the stage frozen in time, like living pictures, the church choir sang a song based upon what the angels said to the disciples of Christ. I can still remember some of the words which were repeated over and over again as the choir sang, "Why, oh why, are you still standing there looking up into the sky. The same Jesus who has been taken away from you will return just as He said He would." It was one of those moments when you could almost sense that you were right there with Christ's followers, caught up in all of the wonderous feelings they experienced as they witnessed His departure. I wish that somehow I could convey to you the impact of that experience upon my life and ministry. Suffice it to say it was something that I will never forget and it is something that none of us should ever forget.

Here's why. Not only did Christ ascend into heaven, but one day He's coming back for us. That's what the angels told the apostles and that same message is proclaimed throughout the New Testament. Listen to the testimony of God's Word.

- Speaking about the events that will transpire at the end of this current age, Jesus said of Himself,  
"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And He will send His angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth and the ends of the heavens" (Mark 13:26-27).
- Writing to the Philippians Paul says, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20).
- Then there is this incomparable declaration in the letter to the Thessalonians, "For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (I Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Let us remember and treasure the ascension of Christ this morning and the wonderful promise of His return as we celebrate the Lord's Supper. It is an opportunity for us to remember what Christ did for us through the giving of His life on the cross for our salvation. It is also an opportunity for us to remember that we have been neither forgotten nor forsaken. Christ will return for us. At any moment the heavens may open and Christ will return to gather us unto Himself just as the Scriptures promise. He will return to claim His kingship as the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings. But even if that promise is yet to be fulfilled in the future, even if we ourselves depart from this world before His heavenly return, there remains the promise of His abiding presence and protection. Even now as we prepare to partake of the bread and the cup, these words from the Gospel of John, chapter fourteen and verse three echo through our minds and hearts, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself that where I am there you may be also." In the Kingdom of Heaven, promises made are promises kept.