

5-16-21

Sermon- Going Up! (Ascension Sunday)

Scripture- Luke 24: 44-53, CTW: Psalm 47

Hymns- 461, 272, 271

Theme: The moral of the Ascension story: It's your job to share the gospel. And don't let anyone temper your zeal. Jesus is alive. **Everyone** needs to know that.

I. It is Our Responsibility to Spread the Gospel.

"D.L. Moody made a deal with God that he would witness for Christ to at least one person each day. One night, about ten o'clock, he realized that he had not yet witnessed; so he went out in to the street and spoke to a man standing by a lamppost, asking him, "Are you a Christian?" The man flew into a violent rage and threatened to knock Moody into the gutter.

Later, that same man went to an elder in the church and complained that Moody was "doing more harm in Chicago than ten men were doing good." The elder begged Moody to temper his zeal with knowledge.

Three months later, Moody was awakened at the YMCA by a man knocking at the door. It was **the man** he had witnessed to. "I want to talk to you about my soul," he said to Moody. He apologized for the way he had treated Moody and said that he had had no peace ever since that night on Lake Street when Moody witnessed to him.

Moody led the man to Christ and he became a zealous worker in the Sunday school."

A. The moral of that story: It's OUR responsibility to share the gospel. We have been entrusted with it and have responsibilities in relationship to it! Do not let anyone temper your zeal. Jesus is alive. Everyone needs to know that.

We've considered the various evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We've looked at the historical evidence, and the archaeological evidence and the massive expansion of the church. Now we consider the last moments that Jesus spent face to face with his eleven disciples.

Jesus died on the cross, and remained dead for 3 days, before rising from the dead, and appearing to his disciples and various people in Jerusalem. The female disciples encountered Jesus at the tomb, then later Jesus appeared to the men as well. They didn't really understand why they were seeing Jesus. They thought they were seeing a ghost.

But Jesus wasn't a ghost, he was really alive. So we see in our scripture today from Luke 24, it says, "Then Jesus helped the followers understand these Scriptures about him. 46 Jesus said to them, "It is written that the Messiah would be killed and rise from death on the third day. You saw these things happen—you are witnesses."

B. What's the most powerful evidence in a "he said she said" court case? An eye-witness. Jesus appeared to his disciples after rising from the dead, because he was appearing to witnesses.

Jesus knew he needed eye witnesses or people wouldn't believe it. The Disciples saw Jesus face to face, they touched him, and ate food with him after he had resurrected. And so they were eye-witnesses. They saw these things happen.

Jesus continues by saying:

"You must go and tell people that they must change and turn to God, which will bring them his forgiveness. You must start from Jerusalem and tell this message in my name to the people of all nations. 49 Remember that I will send you the one my Father promised. Stay in the city until you are given that power from heaven."

II. Theologians call this "the great commission." It's a great command, an order, given by our King, Jesus. Go and tell this message to the world.

Two thousand years ago they started in Jerusalem, proclaiming the message of salvation. They declared to the people that they must repent, change their ways, and become followers of Jesus. And I'm telling you the same thing today, you must change your ways and follow Jesus!

The gospel, the good news started in Israel, in Jerusalem, then it spread to the Roman empire, and further. It started with one country, today the gospel has spread to every country in the world, 193 countries.

A. Today, this great commission, this final order of Jesus our commander is ours to fulfill. It's not **JUST MY JOB**, as your pastor, it's your job as soldiers and followers of Jesus to get the message out there. You've got to win people to Jesus. Proclaim to them that they must change their ways, and turn to Jesus for forgiveness of their sins. It's the only way to heaven.

Our scripture today continues like this: " Jesus led his followers out of Jerusalem to the mountain. He raised his hands and blessed his followers. 51 While he was blessing them, he was separated from them and carried into heaven. 52 They worshiped him and went back to Jerusalem very happy. 53 They stayed at the Temple all the time, praising God." -**Luke 24:50-53**

So, Jesus was born, we celebrate that on Christmas. Jesus died, we celebrate that on good Friday. And Jesus resurrected from the dead by the power of God, we celebrate that on Easter Sunday.

Today we remember and recollect the ascension of Jesus. The fact that Jesus was raised from the ground and taken into heaven by God. And that's where Jesus is right now, in this parallel dimension, this reality the Bible calls heaven. And the

whole idea is that Jesus is coming again. He ascended, but he will come again, to rule and reign on Earth.

Jesus gave the mission to us, to be witnesses of how much Jesus has done for us, to the world. And for two thousand years that has continued, with the church spreading around the world.

The church is how Jesus spreads the gospel in the world. But now, in these end times, we consider the return of Jesus, that Jesus will return to the Earth, and every eye will see Him. Isn't that amazing? He **will** return the same way he left.

In the gospel of Matthew, the great commission and ascension is recorded in this way: "The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. 18 Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

III. So Jesus had led the disciples up the mount of olives, and from there gave his final words, then ascended. But Jesus didn't leave the disciples alone. And he doesn't leave us alone today. Jesus left us, the church, with the Holy Spirit, the 3rd person of the Godhead who lives within us, and ministers through us. And Jesus promises that he is with us always, as we call people to repentance and belief in Jesus for forgiveness.

A. It's not always easy to spread the gospel. In fact today in our modern world many don't believe in God. They think they don't need God. And the truth is many of us know there is a God but we prefer to ignore him because we're selfish, and we want to live our lives for pleasure, and not for God.

But we should consider what we're putting at risk. There is a real heaven, and a real **new heaven and new Earth**. But how often do we focus on silly pleasures, selfishness, sex, money, greed, power when we're offered eternal joy with God in heaven?

Consider the old legend of a swan and a crane. A beautiful swan landed by the banks of the water in which a crane was wading around seeking snails. For a few moments the crane viewed the swan in stupid wonder and then inquired:

"Where do you come from?"

"I come from heaven!" replied the swan.

"And where is heaven?" asked the crane.

"Heaven?" said the swan, "Heaven? You have never heard of heaven?" And the beautiful bird went on to describe the grandeur of the Eternal City.

She told of streets of gold, and the gates and walls made of precious stones; of the river of life, pure as crystal. In eloquent terms the swan sought to describe the holy city, **but without arousing the slightest interest on the part of the crane.**

Finally the crane asked: "Are there any snails there?" "Snails!" repeated the swan; "no! Of course there are not." "Then," said the crane, as he continued his search along the slimy banks of the pool, "you can have your heaven. I want snails!"

This legend has a deep truth underlying it. How many people to whom God has granted the advantages of a Christian home, has grown up to turn their back upon it and gone to search for snails!

How many men will sacrifice their wife, their family, their everything, for the snails of sin! How many children have deliberately turned from the love of their parents and home, to learn too late that heaven has been forfeited for snails!

We all have done that in one way or the other, at one time or another!

CS Lewis said this: "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a puddle because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased and occupied."

B. How about your track record in going up the hill to follow Jesus? Have you spent more time going DOWN than going UP?

I am not exempt for that examination at all! One of the main reasons that I came to God in my late in life, was because I had tried everything else: drugs, alcohol, sex, pop culture, philosophy, new age, college, friendships, everything to try to find ultimate meaning **apart** from God.

The result? I was left completely empty, and broken, a sad, miserable rebel exhausted by pleasure seeking. Emptiness! I got tired of making mud pies in the dirt, and decided I wanted to be a prince, a coheir with Christ in heaven.

But more so, I didn't decide anything, God chose me. And He is calling you also, turn to Him before time runs out. The clock is ticking!

IV. Logically it does make sense. Nothing in this life satisfies. There's something in us that longs for more.

In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis said: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. "

A. You are made for another world. That's why this life can feel so miserable, so empty. That's why you ought to be active in the church, the living body of Christ on Earth and follow the one who **really matters**, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is calling the shots right now from heaven, speaking through His people, through you, through me, to call the world to

himself before time runs out. We all need a savior for our sins, and if we don't have that we'll go to the place of darkness and evil forever.

I don't say that to scare you, but to warn you, both heaven and hell are real places. Put your faith in Jesus, turn from your sins, and live for Him. Because Jesus is coming again to rule and reign on this Earth.

You will see Him with your own eyes. He's real. The hour is late right now. Now is the day of salvation. So turn to Jesus today. Say it in your heart right now.

Cry out to Jesus, "Jesus be my savior right now. You died for my sins on the cross. I am yours. You are mine. I turn away from my old ways, I turn away from my sins, and I live for you now. Thank you, Jesus."

Live in relationship with God today, God is our Father, love Him because He loves you.

Let us be bound together on that journey. Jesus is coming again. He is alive, he ascended, and he will come again.