

The Ascension Of Our Lord

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Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Ephesians 1:16-23

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (NIV)

I wonder what kind of people would want to hear the words: *"I am going to be leaving you, but it is for your good that I am going."* Who wants to say good-bye to someone they love even if they know it is for the best? Those would be heart wrenching words for parents who watch their child board a plane or a ship to head overseas to fight for our freedoms. Those words would be difficult to hear from a father who has to leave his family in a crisis situation to get help or food. I'm sure these were hard words to hear when Jesus said to His disciples on the night before His death: *"Now I am going to him who sent me...Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away"* (John 16).

On this Sunday we are celebrating the fact that Jesus made good on this promise. Jesus returned to the Father who sent Him. Before His disciples very eyes, Jesus was lifted up until a cloud hid Jesus from their sight. Jesus ascended into heaven. He left so that His visible presence would no longer be with the disciples. His followers would not see Jesus on earth anymore. But do you know what? This is a reason for rejoicing not grief. It is a reason for celebrating and not mourning. This is a fact that brings joy, not sorrow. That is because it was for the disciples own good that Jesus ascended. It was for our good that Jesus returned to heaven. Today, as we turn to Paul's words in His letter to Ephesus, we will consider how: **Our Lord Jesus' Ascension is good for us.**

Paul writes this letter from prison in Rome. Perhaps you recall that Ephesus was a city that Paul spent more time in than any other on his missionary journeys. Perhaps you recall Paul's tearful good-bye with the elders at Ephesus. These believers were close to his heart.

They were certainly a part of his prayers. *"I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."* What

an awesome prayer this is for the people! Paul prays that they may know the God of our Lord Jesus Christ even better. He prays that the eyes of their hearts might be opened to see three things - the hope to which God called them - the riches of the glorious inheritance that is theirs - and the incomparable great power of God.

When Jesus told the disciples it was good for them that He was returning to the Father, He added: ***“Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”*** (John 16) Jesus would send the Holy Spirit not just on the great day of Pentecost which we will celebrate next week, but Jesus continues to send the Holy Spirit to us. The Holy Spirit continues to work through the Word and Sacraments so that Paul’s prayer is answered. Through the Word we know God the Father even better. Through the Word we see how through Jesus God became our Father. Through the Word our eyes are opened to see the hope that we have and the riches we will one day enjoy.

But what assurance do we have that God will and can keep His promises? Paul’s prayer is also that our eyes be opened to ***“His incomparably great power for us who believe.”*** Knowing that power is the basis for trusting God’s Word. But where’s the proof of that power? Paul goes on: ***“That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”***

Paul points the Ephesians’ attention and ours to what God did in and through Christ. God demonstrated His power on our behalf with the resurrection of His Son. Jesus’ body which was cursed on the tree was dead. Jesus died for all. There was no life at all in that body that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took down from the cross late on Good Friday afternoon. But God’s mighty, incomparable power restored life to that lifeless body. Jesus was raised from the dead. More than that Jesus was then lifted up to the right hand of God - a position of power. More than that, when Jesus ascended into heaven He was placed above all rules and powers and authorities. More than that, not only are all things now placed under Jesus’ feet, but Jesus controls everything for the good of the church which is his body.

I don’t want to lose any of the parts of my body, but I know there is one part that I need to live and that is my head. It goes without saying that we could not function without our head. Dear friends, I pray we never, ever forget that Jesus is our head! In Jesus we live and breath and have our being. In Jesus we have life and forgiveness. Without His perfect life in our place, without Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins, without Jesus’ triumph over the tomb we would be as dead as bodies without a head. There is only one person (and it wasn’t Paul nor is it any pastor) that the church absolutely needs and cannot do without - that is Jesus. We are His body and He is our head.

Can you see why it is for our good that the Lord Jesus Ascended? At God’s right hand Jesus works out all things for our good. He controls everything so that it benefits His church. Jesus may not be visibly present with His disciples on earth, but Jesus now fills everything in every way. He will be here in a special way in a few minutes with His own body and blood, in with and under bread and wine to strengthen our faith and assure

us of our forgiveness. He will continue to guide His church in the way that is best. Jesus will go with us as we serve as His witnesses in this world. Jesus will be with us, just as He promises, always to the very end of the age. Even now Jesus is preparing a glorious place for us. Yes, our Lord Jesus' Ascension is good for us. That's why we celebrate today. That's why we rejoice to see our conquering Hero return to heaven from which He came. That's why we pray that until the day the One, who has all things under His feet, returns, we may grow to know Him and His great love for us even better. Amen.