Ascension Day Ephesians 1:16-23
May 21, 2020 170-175-173-171

What Is our Ascended Lord Doing Now?
I. He gives us the Holy Spirit.
II. He is preparing our glorious inheritance.
III. He is ruling this world for our good.

Dear Christian friends,

"While Jesus was blessing them," Luke told us, ***"He left them and was taken up into heaven."*** WITH THAT Jesus was gone. MAKE THAT Jesus was no longer visibly present with the disciples. NO LONGER could they walk or talk with Jesus. **No longer** could they see Jesus with their eyes. But Jesus was still with them – **and us**! ***"Lo, I am with you always,"*** Jesus has promised us.

"OUT OF SIGHT – out of MIND." **What** we don't see we **usually** FORGET about it. We don't see Jesus but He's not out of our THOUGHTS or hearts. **Every week** we confess and remind ourselves that Jesus has "**ascended** into heaven and **is (now) sitting** at the right hand of God the Father almighty."

Just what does that **mean**? Why celebrate Ascension Day? These verses answer our questions. WHAT IS OUR ASCENDED LORD DOING NOW? 1)Jesus is giving us that **Holy Spirit**, 2)He is preparing our ***"glorious inheritance"*** and 3)He's ruling this world **for our good**.

I. Jesus is giving us the Holy Spirit.

Shortly before He ascended into heaven Jesus had told the apostles, ***"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be My witnesses to the ends of the earth."*** That promise was fulfilled **ten days later** on Pentecost Sunday. When Paul wrote this letter Pentecost was SOME 30 YEARS in the past. Yet Paul tells these Christians, ***"I keep praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, will give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowing Christ fully."*** Paul prays that God would give these Ephesian Christians an ADDED MEASURE of the Holy Spirit – that the Holy Spirit would CONTINUE to teach and guide them **all the more**.

Paul calls the Holy Spirit ***"the Spirit of wisdom and revelation."*** The Holy Spirit is the source of TRUE WISDOM. He reveals the truth to us. HOW WE NEED the Holy Spirit to keep on doing that for us! HOW GRATEFUL we should be that our ascended Lord gives us the Holy Spirit!

Let's face it – God doesn't always act the **way we expect** Him to. That SHOULDN'T SURPRISE us. ***"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,"*** God bluntly tells us. So Paul prays that God would ***"give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowing Christ FULLY."***

Like these Ephesian Christians we already know God. We know WHO He is and WHAT He's done for us. **Paul prays** that we may know God and His grace EVEN MORE. The more we know God's LOVE for us the more confident and content we will be. The **more we know** all that our SAVIOR HAS DONE for us – and is STILL DOING for us – the more peace and joy will fill our lives. The **better we know** GOD'S WILL for us the better we can live **God-pleasing** lives.

As we ***"know God better"*** we will also be BETTER WITNESSES to our neighbors and friends. The better we know the FATHER'S LOVE for **us sinners** the more we will reach out to **fellow sinners** with that love. The **better we know** ALL that Jesus has done to save us sinners the **more** we will want to share our Savior with others.

Notice how nicely ***"know better"*** and ***"witness"*** TIE TOGETHER. What is a ***"witness"***? A person who has seen or experienced something. What does a witness do? He SIMPLY TELLS others **what**

he knows – what he **saw**. ***"You will be My witnesses,"*** Jesus tells each one of us. "You WILL TELL OTHERS what you know about Me." To help us do that our **ascended Lord** gives us the Holy Spirit.

Ascension Day makes us LOOK UP. Today focuses our attention on our HEAVENLY HOME. Right now our **ascended Lord**…

II. Is preparing our glorious inheritance.

Paul's prayer continues. ***"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know the hope to which He has called you, just how rich His glorious inheritance among the saints is."***

In the next chapter Paul reminds these Christians that when they were without faith in Jesus they were ALSO ***"without hope"*** and ***"without God."*** In our risen and **ascended Lord** Jesus God has ***"called"*** us to and given us ***"hope"*** – the sure hope of **eternal life** in heaven. **In His grace** God did not abandon us in our sins to hell's eternal punishment. God didn't say, "TOUGH LUCK! You blew it!" **Nor** did God just give us a SECOND CHANCE. **In pure grace** God sent His Son to **take care** of EVERYTHING to save us.

For 33 years Jesus lived on this earth **in the land** of the Jews. All during those years – AS OUR SUBSTITUTE – **in our place** – Jesus lived an **absolutely holy** life – perfectly obeying every single commandment. But Jesus DIDN'T STOP there. CARRYING our sins – **everyone's** sins! – the **sinless** Lord Jesus went to the cross and was punished **in our place**. With His **innocent** sufferings and death Jesus personally paid for every one of our sins IN FULL. Now our Lord who died **for us** is our Lord who lives **for us**. Jesus rose from the dead – came out of His grave **alive** and victorious. And on this day so many years ago Jesus ascended into heaven His MISSION ACCOMPLISHED. Jesus has reconciled a **world of sinners** with their holy Creator. Jesus provides us with God's **full** and **free forgiveness** of all our sins. AND NOW our **ascended Lord** Jesus is preparing our ***"glorious inheritance."***

On Maundy Thursday evening Jesus had told the apostles, ***"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and take you to be with Me, that you also may be where I am."*** THAT is the ***"hope"*** to which God has ***"called"*** us. Trusting God's promises we **eagerly** and **confidently** LOOK FORWARD to that day when our **ascended Lord** Jesus will return in glory – raise all the dead back to life – and take us Christians to **live forever** with Him in heaven.

Paul prays that we may know ***"just how rich His glorious inheritance is."*** This hope is an ***"inheritance"*** – a GIFT our loving Father gives to us who ARE HIS CHILDREN ***"through faith in Christ Jesus."*** Just as our heavenly Father is ***"glorious"*** – so too this His inheritance is ***"glorious."***

How else can we describe life in heaven **except** as ***"glorious"***? There will be ***"no more death or mourning or crying or pain – God will have wiped every tear from our eyes."*** The world as we NOW KNOW it will have ***"passed away." "Look, I am making everything new,"*** God promises us – ***"a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness."*** Then we will truly be ***"saints'*** – HOLY people. We will NO LONGER have to contend with sin and **temptations**. **No longer** will we have to resist the **devil** or fight off our **sinful natures**. What a ***"glorious inheritance"*** AWAITS us – one that our **ascended Lord** Jesus is preparing for us.

Even as we look up on high to our **heavenly home** our FEET ARE PLANTED here on earth – in this world and **life**. That's another reason for us to **celebrate** and **enjoy** this day. Our **ascended Lord**…

III. Is ruling this world for our good.

Paul's prayer reminds us that Jesus is now ***"seated at God's right hand in the heavenly realms."*** ***"God is spirit"*** – God the Father and the Holy Spirit don't have a PHYSICAL body. ***"God's right hand"*** is a biblical expression for God's ALMIGHTY POWER and TOTAL CONTROL of all things. As Paul explains it here Jesus is ***"seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, and above every name that is given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. God also placed all things under His feet and made Him head over everything for the church., which is His body."*** Or as Jesus said, ***"ALL authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me."***

Paul prays that we may ***"know just how surpassingly great His power is for us who believe."*** Our Jesus is FIRMLY IN CONTROL and IN CHARGE. He who was betrayed and **beaten** – mocked and **ridiculed** - condemned and **crucified** – He is RULER OVER **all** things. He whom many consider only a great man or wonderful teacher is in fact the ***"King of kings and Lord of lords."*** He will never be replaced. He will **never** be DETHRONED.

RIGHT NOW our **ascended Lord** Jesus is ruling this world. NOTHING is beyond His control. NOTHING happens without **His consent**. Add to this that Jesus is ruling this world FOR THE GOOD of His Church – for us who believe in Him. SO we are told and so ***"we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him."***

Apply that **blessed truth** to life. Paul wrote this letter under HOUSE ARREST in Rome **for preaching** Jesus. Paul's life and work **as a Christian** had been ANYTHING BUT EASY or FAIR – beatings, whippings, stoning, shipwreck, slander, ridicule, rejection, etc. But Paul doesn't WRING his hands – WHINE about **how bad** he had it – THROW IN the towel. Paul knew that **through it all** God's KINGDOM was ***"coming"*** and God's WILL was ***"being done."***

Apply this to our own personal lives. MY **ascended Lord** is ruling MY life and world for MY good. That means there is NO NEED for me to get all worked up and upset when things **don't go exactly** the way I want or expect. Jesus knows what He's doing **even if** we don't at the time. With **Jesus in control** there's no need to push the PANIC BUTTON or even worry for that matter. **Jesus' ascension** doesn't guarantee us an EASY LIFE but it does offer us a life of PEACE – CONFIDENCE and CONTENTMENT.

That's what our **ascended Lord** is DOING RIGHT NOW. Paul prayed that these Ephesian Christians would better see and understand this. That's still a PERFECT PRAYER for us this Ascension Day. Amen.

HYMN #173