

Sermon for May 17, 2020, Ascension; St. Paul's Green Garden, MI

Colossians 3:1-4

¹Therefore, because you were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Theme: The Ascended Jesus Keeps Us Looking Up

Intro: Imagine you are one of the disciples present at Jesus' ascension. Picture yourself present at that scene. You hear Jesus tell you that he will be with you to the end of the world, and then you see him ascend into heaven. What does this mean? He will be with us yet he has ascended. What would you be thinking? “How can Jesus say he is with us if he has gone back to heaven? Why would Jesus say one thing and then do another? How are we ever going to do all the things Jesus wants us to do? How will the Holy Spirit be able to help us?”

And just as a cloud hides him from your sight two angels appear and one of them speaks to the whole group, “Men of Galilee, why are you looking up into heaven?” Was the angel chiding the disciples? Perhaps the angel was challenging them to think through WHY they were looking up. Were some of them already doubting his promises? Were they wondering how Jesus was going to keep all his promises when he was in heaven and no longer with them in body.

Friends, the angel may have had any number of reasons for asking them why they were looking up. Perhaps more than anything, he wanted them to look into their own hearts and ask themselves why they were looking up. Some have suggested he was simply telling them that they should not look after Jesus too long, they should not long for those days when he was instructing and teaching them because now they had work to do. They had his mission to carry out. No matter why the angel asked the question, “Why are you looking up”, the fact of Jesus' ascension reminds us, It is OK to look

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up if you are reminded that heaven is where Jesus IS and it is where I am going. Looking UP after Jesus' ascension reminds us of everything Jesus did for us. But we also need to look UP in a more spiritual sense, to the life that our ascended Savior empowers us to live **right now**. What that means is, we remember what Jesus did for us and we know how he wants us to live UNTIL he takes us to heaven.

I. Toward heaven where we are going

A. Because you have been raised with Christ.

1. Remember what Paul wrote to the Romans: “**don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.** Paul reminds us to look up toward heaven where we are going because Jesus died to pay for all our sins.
2. Remember who those disciples were: they were men who had been guilty of violent hatred: James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village that would not honor Jesus.
3. Peter had resorted to violence in the Garden of Gethsemane and cut off the ear of a man. He had denied Jesus even after the Savior had warned him.
4. They had all quarreled over which of them was the greatest in the kingdom.
5. All of them had forsaken Jesus when he was arrested.
6. Didn't they need forgiveness for all of those sins. Perhaps they were looking up remembering Jesus had paid for their sins, washed them completely clean. Did they understand they had died with Jesus?

7. Don't you and I need the same forgiveness as those disciples? Haven't we been guilty of the same kinds of sins? We have denied Jesus, we have been guilty of violent words and actions against other people. We have quarreled with family members about things that Christians should have no need to quarrel about.
 8. Do you understand you have died with Jesus, and because you have, you now also live with Jesus? Remember what Paul wrote to the Galatians: "**I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me.**" Do you understand, do you believe that when Jesus died, all your sins died with him. They are all paid for. My Savior lives in me. That means God sees me as pure and holy. Jesus' forgiveness of my sins is NOT my license to sin, Rather, what Jesus has done for me is my assurance that I will be with him in heaven.
- B. So put earthly things and heavenly things in their proper places.
1. Set your mind on things above. Paul isn't talking only about accumulating things in this life with no thought for our eternal future, though that is certainly part of his thinking.
 2. Paul really means, everything we do, the way we think, the way we plan for our children's future, the way we plan for retirement, the way we explain to others all the blessings we have; in all those things and more we will show that God is the one who has the final say; God will bless our efforts or he may not allow the kind of earthly success we have asked for. But we trust God has the reason for all that he does.
 3. So set your minds on things above. That means we NEED to be IN God's Word regularly. We need to not only be assured that we are forgiven sinners; we also need to keep focused on the eternal blessing of heaven because it is the greatest gift we could ever receive.
- C. Because you want to be ready when Jesus comes again.
(Remember he is sitting at the right hand of God and he will come back from there to take us home.)

1. When Jesus ascended he did so to rule the universe. That is comforting for us because we have Jesus' own assurance that not only is he preparing a place for us in eternity; While he rules the universe, he is also protecting us and all believers from any and every danger of body and especially of soul. What a blessing to have this assurance that the Lord of the universe is watching out for you and me.
2. But Jesus will not stay in heaven forever. He WILL come again. And that will be a day of excitement and triumph. It will be the day believers have been looking forward to since Jesus ascended to heaven.
3. This is why we want to keep our minds focused on things above, or things that pertain to our souls. How useless it is as Jesus says to store up for ourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

Application: And we should not think that Jesus because we are not millionaires that we have no temptations to focus our lives and thinking on earthly things. The temptations are just as powerful for us as for any unbeliever. The difference is that the Holy Spirit lives in us by faith. Let the Spirit keep doing his work in your heart as you hear the Word and take it to heart. Remember that your life on earth is very temporary, your life with God in heaven is permanent; it is forever. So keep looking UP!

Transition: And even while we are thinking of heaven, we remember that we have another reason to look UP. Since Jesus died to pay for our sins, rose from the dead and now ascended to heaven, we have a life to live here on earth that is very different from the life of someone who is NOT a believer. So once again Paul urges us to keep looking up toward the new life we are living in Jesus. We do that because he has ascended to heaven as our victorious Savior.

- II. **Toward the new life that we are living** (new life is “up” because it is a new level from our old life). (Remember, the risen Jesus fuels your new life.)

A. **“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”**

1. Remember that you have to look back at your Baptism, because this sacrament connects us both to Jesus’ death and to his resurrection. When we were baptized into the name of the triune God we received all the blessings of Jesus’ death, namely that our sins are paid for. It is as if we died right along with Jesus. All our sins died with him.
2. So when you were baptized that was the beginning of a new life. Your old life, your old way of thinking, your former focus on earthly things, all that died when Jesus died. Now you and I have a new life. The world cannot see or understand this new life, so in a sense it is hidden, but it is there nonetheless. And if the world should watch us, if it should take notice of the way we speak and act and live and train our children and witness to others, the world will see that the focus of your life is far different from the values and actions of people in the world around you.

B. And more than anyone else, you know what that means.

1. It means you and I are waiting, we are looking ahead. It means that Jesus has a future planned for you and me that we literally cannot imagine except to believe and trust that it is far more wonderful than anything on earth.
2. It means we are looking forward to the one who gave us life when he died and rose from the dead.
3. That means he really IS our life; with him we have a life now to serve him and a life forever in heaven.

C. It means we will appear with him in glory when he comes again.

1. And again, that gets us looking UP because the new life we have in Jesus is on a new level.
2. We need to think of ourselves as new creatures as Paul says. The old has gone, the new has come. We will appear with Jesus IN glory, that means we will be glorified in heaven. That changes the life we live now.

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3. It is a life of service, it is a life empowered by Jesus who gave his life for us so that no service is too menial, no task is too great, and everything we do, we do because Jesus made us his children and heirs.

Application: So remember, you and I look up because that is where Jesus is. His ascension is important because it proves he crushed Satan and won THE only victory that lasts forever. You know when a sports team wins a championship, it never really lasts, does it. It is only good until the next season starts. They may be champions in 2020 but when the next season starts they are defending champions which means they will have to prove again that they are champions in the next year, or lose to another team. But Jesus victory is forever. No one can take from you Jesus' victory or the forgiveness of your sins, or your baptism by which God called you to be his child. When Jesus ascended to rule to sit at God's right hand and rule the universe he was making the greatest possible statement about his victory. Since his victory is complete, as the psalm says, he has ascended amid shouts of joy, that is from the saints, the believers of all time, both in heaven and on earth shout for joy because Jesus' ascension is our proof of our victory, it is like the trophy on which our names are engraved because Jesus won it all in our place.

Conclusion: So even when some times of life are sad and don't seem to live up this passage, remember that the important things of life are UP; they are in heaven where we have set our hearts, on things above because that is where we are going. And things are looking up for us, too because we have a Savior who is coming to take us home to heaven. And his resurrection and ascension give us the strength to live in this sinful world as children of God and to turn away from temptation to live for Jesus. All these blessings hinge on Jesus' ascension. His victory is permanent and it belongs to us by his free gift. Amen.