

Saying Goodbye. We use the word frequently. The Word spells both sadness and joy. A young mother spends the first 6 weeks with her baby. But now, her company insists that she come back to work. She takes her baby to the local child care center for the first time. She has tears in her eyes as she hands her baby over to the caregiver. For the next 8-9 hours, her baby will be away from her. But still she knows that the goodbye is temporary. She will see her baby again at the end of the day. And when she picks up her child on that first day, her heart is again filled with joy. Goodbye. It spells both sadness and joy. 2000+ years ago, Jesus Christ was saying goodbye to his followers. He was departing back to heaven. For 3 years, He had been with his disciples. They had done everything together. They were very close to each other. The disciples were sad at his departure. What is amazing too is that Jesus didn't drive away in a General Motors car, while his disciples waved from the front porch. Rather, Jesus suddenly began to ascend up into the sky. It must have been something. We have watched helium balloons ascend into the sky, until they were out of site. But can you imagine, a human being without a jet pack, not a rocket man, just moving up into the clouds on his own power, until his disciples could no longer see him. What a spectacular event it must have been. They just remained flat-footed, staring. That is until a couple of angels, told them it was time to get moving. Further, these angels informed the disciples that this goodbye was temporary. Jesus would return. And that He would come back to this earth in the same way they had seen Him leave.

But goodbye did not mean that the disciples could just sit in their homes, twiddle their thumbs, and remain idle until the return of Christ. The disciples would have work to do, responsibilities to carry out. The same held true for Jesus. Going to heaven was not just going to be a time for Him to sit in a lounge chair, set his stop watch, and wait for the Final Judgment. He would have new responsibilities to carry out. So tonight on this Ascension night, let's remember that Goodbye Spells Blessings and Further responsibility.

When you think of Jesus ascending into heaven, it was a fantastic day in his life. His ascension meant triumph and glory for Him. Have you ever gone down to the airport or the bus station when a victorious basketball or football team came home? Think if the Detroit Lions would win the Super Bowl this year. We would be down in Detroit at Metro airport, welcoming them home and give them a parade down the streets of Detroit. When Jesus Christ came home, the Father and the Holy Spirit were there to receive him with approving arms; the Christians in heaven were waving their eternal banners, while all the angels fluttered all around singing Hallelujahs and blowing their trumpets. Heaven's hero was returning. God sent his Son into the world on a mission. He sent him here to save the world from sin. He sent Jesus here to rescue us for heaven. The fact that Jesus ascended back into heaven to be with his father at his right hand means that Jesus completed his mission. If the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth when our Savior was born to begin the battle for buying us back from sin, who can imagine how they sang when the victory was won and He came back home? What a glorious day for Christ!

But that leads us to a question. What is Jesus doing now? As we know, Jesus is now at the right hand of his Father. When I was a kid, I thought there were three armchairs up in heaven, one for God the Father, one for the Holy Spirit and one for Jesus. I thought Jesus took a seat at the right hand of the Father. But boy was I wrong. Right hand of God, means Jesus occupies his position of power and majesty with the Father and the Holy Spirit once again. He now directs the affairs of this world for the good of his church. When you consider Jesus up in heaven, remember too that He has officially closed sin's account against us. When he ascended it was basically, Mission Accomplished. If you believe in Jesus, your sin account has been closed forever! Quit beating yourself up. You have received the righteousness of Christ! You are forgiven.

In fact, right now, Jesus is representing us before the Father. You might be thinking, “How can we be saved if we continue to sin? Doesn’t sin disqualify us? John spoke to this when He wrote, “My little children, I am writing this to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate before the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for those of the whole world.” [1 Jn. 2:1-2] When we sin, the Lord Jesus presents His blood marks as the payment for our sin. Don’t hold any charges against them, Father, they believe in me. That’s why the writer of Hebrews says, “...He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” [Heb. 7:25]

Further, Jesus is praying for us. Do you ever feel as if life has caved in on you? You don’t know what to do or what to pray. Listen to what Paul wrote, “Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” [Ro. 8:34] Stop and think about this. Jesus Christ, who has all authority in heaven and on earth, is praying for you. He wants you to be a successful. He wants you to finish the race that is set before you. What a prayer partner! We all know that if someone at church tells us that they are praying for us, it really picks up our spirits.(they are not just idly saying it, but you know they are a spiritual family and really will pray for you) (Give an example of someone in your congregation of someone who is praying for someone else, or maybe your church has a prayer chain that you can mention here) Again, the Lord of the Universe, the most Powerful person in the universe is praying for you. That is comforting and uplifting news! This is why the writer of Hebrews wrote, “Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.” [Heb. 4:16] We have access to the Father. He cares for us and Jesus prays for us. What more could you ask?

In addition, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to live within the believer. Jesus told His disciples, “But now I am going to Him who sent Me...But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.” [Jn. 16:5,7] If you are a believer, your body has become the temple of the Holy Spirit. He has unlimited power to grant victory, success, freedom, and an abundant spiritual life to you. You now possess wonderful Christian virtues. “The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. What potential you have as a result of this special gift from the ascended Christ.

Finally, Jesus is preparing a place in heaven for you. (give an example of a home being readied for renters, or a new home being completed in your area. Mention the things that are done to get that house ready for new occupants) Likewise, Jesus is preparing a much better home for all of us. In fact, He told His heartbroken disciples, “Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.” [Jn. 14:1-2] Can you imagine what our Lord is preparing for us? That’s how much He loves us!

Wow! Don’t you want to serve a God who still loves you and ministers to you eternally? We can no longer remain flatfooted. Christ has changed us for the better. After the ascension, the disciples were changed men. At this time they knew a lot more and believed a lot more than they had on that earlier day. Now they knew for a fact that Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God, the promised Messiah and the Savior of the world. Now they believed beyond a shadow of a doubt everything He told them, how for instance He would send the Holy Spirit upon them, how He would establish a church through them, how he would come one day and take all his followers with Him. Consequently, no longer did they hide behind locked doors. Now they went openly into the

temple and thanked God and praised Christ. In Luke's account of the ascension it says, "Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God." Before their enemies, the disciples displayed peace and joy and courage beyond compare. You see, though Jesus was no longer with them in body, they knew He was with them in spirit, and this assurance gave them all the courage they needed to face the world and build the church. So far as you and I are concerned, Jesus Christ is with us too. Sometimes, however, you perhaps are inclined to think like me, that we would be much better Christians and that the church would be much stronger if Jesus Christ were only with us in visible form. We are inclined to think that He made a mistake when He ascended into heaven and left us alone by ourselves. However, let me assure you that Christ's ascension involves all assets and no liabilities. He knew what He was doing, He is an ever-present and ever-ready power plant, offering you and me the opportunity to plug ourselves in for life. When we do, we find love, hope and heaven. In addition, He assures you and me that though He is in heaven and we are on earth, He will be with us always, even to the end of the world. He assures us that He will never leave or forsake us, that He will walk with us every step of the way, even through the valley of the shadow of death. By ascending into heaven, Christ is to be everywhere together at the same time. For where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of them. Christ is here with us tonight.

Christ's ascension means something further for you and me. It means that we have work to do. Yes, our ascended Lord is counting on us. It is up to you and me to get the Word out. We've got to teach our children about Jesus Christ. We've got to reach our neighbors about Him. We are the ones who need to send out missionaries to preach His name to people across the seas.

Finally, Christ's ascension means that I too, shall ascend into heaven. It may be from a sickbed, or after an auto accident. It may be from a jungle battlefield, or from a bombed out city. Or it may be from old age. At any rate, sometime and somehow God is going to call me out of this life, and I shall then ascend into heaven. My ascension day will have no particular significance for other people except possibly for my loved ones. I won't leave any disciples behind to gaze up to heaven after me. There won't be an unusual cloud receiving me out of their sight. I know that I shall ascend because Jesus has made atonement for my sins. Because He lives, I too shall live! The Ascension of Jesus Christ means a great deal to me. It's not an end but a beginning. A beginning of a whole new set of responsibilities for Jesus and for us. Goodbye Jesus. Thanks for all you continue to do for us. Help us not to be flat-footed, staring at the sky Christians, but ones who keep moving and looking for opportunities to witness for you.