

Ascension Luke 24 "Victory" May 21 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

Victory!

The Lord gives the Law, the prophets, and the Psalms. More than that, He gives light to read them. He opens them. He bestows a mystery and a code more profound than that imagined by Dan Brown or Harold Camping. "All the Scriptures," He says, "concern Me."

What was the mind of Moses, the hope of Elijah, the sight of Isaiah? That the Christ, God's own Messiah, the One anointed as the Savior, should suffer and die and on the third day rise again from the dead, and that repentance and *forgiveness* of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the Gentiles, beginning at Jerusalem. Victory!

The Gospel began, as it always does, with the preaching of repentance. John stood in the wild place and exposed the dark hearts of men by the Word of God, that they would turn from their sins and throw themselves upon God's mercy. Now the Gospel begun, is complete. He has fulfilled the Gospel in His suffering. He has ended the Father's wrath, hell's demands, Satan's accusations, and the cry of justice against us. There is Good News for men, because Jesus died; because Jesus became sin and a curse, a worm and no man; because our sins have been pushed into Him, and He was pushed off the edge into Gehenna in our place. It is finished. It is done. It is over, perfect, complete, and there is peace for the angels to announce to shepherds. Victory!

Now that the sacrifice long foretold is complete, the Christ solemnly and emphatically insists that repentance is the great fact of New Testament preaching. The Church is to "open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18 KJV). And with this repentance, the forgiveness of sins in Christ is also ever to be preached. In this, the forgiveness of sins, men are made to see and hear and read the Holy Scriptures, to know God in the Christ as the fulfillment and purpose of all creation. Thus, the Scriptures were opened to them and thus the Scriptures, by grace, are opened to us.

God's will is constant. Fallen men need a preaching of repentance, an exposure to our complicity and selfishness, a warning of impending death, and an invitation. You are not God. I am not God. We are not gods! We do not make the rules. We have not behaved in ways honorable or just or good. We have looked the other way. We have cheated.

We are traitors to our own cause, in league with demons, perverts, deviants, liars, braggarts, hypocrites. Repent! Submit! Stop making excuses! Do not seek to have your sins justified; but seek instead seek to have them forgiven, removed, and counted against **Him**, that **His** good works might be counted to you.

The Lord doesn't justify sins. He doesn't wink and nod. He doesn't understand or simply realize, oh well, to sin is human, to forgive is Divine. Because it isn't true. He is a human and He didn't sin. What He **does** is **declare** sinners to be just for His sake, as the beneficiaries of His sacrifice, substitute, and ransom.

God has sent His Christ for you. He is historical. He lived in the time of Pontius Pilate. He is incarnate, born of the Virgin Mary, bone of our bones, one of us, flesh for hell's roasting fires. He has suffered, been mocked by soldiers and priests, rejected by family and friends, betrayed by disciples, crucified, executed as the King of the Jews, and is risen from the dead. Victory!

Most shocking and unexpected of all, is that He is not angry. He does not hold a grudge. He walks into the upper room and they are reasonably afraid, but He comes speaking peace and breathing out His Spirit. All this He has done for you and for me. He has been sent by His Father not only for sins, not only for His Father's will, not only to defeat the devil and to show who is **really** good, but He has been sent also for us—to rescue us, to pull us out of the flames of judgment, to redeem us for Himself, to forgive our sins. He **could** be angry; He should be angry; but He isn't. Nor is He indulgent. He simply is grace incarnate, grace in the flesh, the victor over death, our champion, and our hero.

Forty-three days after it was finished, He lifted up His pierced hands and blessed them. And while He was blessing them, He rose into the air and was engulfed by a cloud so that they could behold Him no more with their eyes. Among the appearances of our risen Lord in those forty days, this was distinct. As at *the other times*, He apparently came forth suddenly from the invisible world.

But He did not, as on former occasions, suddenly vanish from sight, as if He might shortly return as He had done before. This time He withdrew in a different way; as they watched He rose up into the air. In that way, He indicated that He was no longer with them and therefore those occasional and supernatural appearances, vouchsafed to them since the resurrection, were now at an end.

Yet they were not sad, for we read, "And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

They knew that this was not the "little while" he had spoken of before the cross, nor the little while since the resurrection. They knew that though their eyes might not see Him, they would now enjoy His blessed presence forever. For His ascension was not simply the physical movement from earth to heaven; rather, His *ascension* indicated a change of state. His humiliation was over. No longer does He deny Himself, as a man, His divine rights and powers. He is still a man, still one of us, but now, as a man, He fully exercises all His divine attributes. Even as the flames of hell have lost all claim to us, so also can they no longer roast Him. He is no more confined, as a man, by physical space, or subject to hunger or pain. He, as a man, is glorified, and thus opens up heaven for all humanity and will come again to carry all those who believe to Himself.

That is why the apostles have great joy. They have the Christ in His sacramental presence. In His sacramental presence we have Him closer than they had Him in His humiliation. They had the Scriptures opened to them and the gift and promise of the Father in the Holy Spirit. We have the same. The ascended Christ is with us always, in the baptizing, in the teaching, and in the breaking of the bread. He is present to the end of time, just as recorded by St. Matthew, in the apostolic ministry.

Thus, do they naturally go to the temple, to church, to continue the work of Moses and Jesus, to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name in the shadow of the torn veil. There they point to the mercy seat, no longer hovering over the ark but now in the risen body and blood of Christ, given to His children to eat and to drink. The temple divisions between male and female, Jew and Gentile, have been torn in two. The temple guards have been rendered silent.

Consider this, my dear brothers and sisters:

Now Jesus lives and is for us in His foreknowing of each of us before the foundation of the world, in His knitting each of us together in our mother's womb, in His washing and regeneration of us as He claims us as children of the same Heavenly Father and indwells us with His Holy Spirit, in His body and blood, given and shed for us and received in His precious gift of Holy Communion. He has won us back from sin, death and the devil. Victory for us!

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide with you to life everlasting. Amen!

Adapted from Thy Kingdom Come by David H. Petersen, 2012, Emmanuel Press, Ft. Wayne