

In the Name of our risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ, Dear fellow Redeemed,

I would guess that nearly everyone here this morning over the age of 50 was glued to their television as our nation watched the first man step on to the surface of the moon. "One small step for man, a giant leap for mankind!" the astronaut said.

But nearly 2,000 years ago Jesus Christ defied the law of gravity to go way past the moon, way beyond the vast universe He created! He went beyond space and time into God's eternal heaven! Now this was truly a giant leap for mankind!

From the moment our Lord's entrance into our human flesh through the Virgin Mary, all that He did and suffered unto death was in the place of and for the sake of mankind!

When Jesus had led His disciples out as far as the city of Bethany, He "*lifted up His hands and blessed them.*" But Jesus had something in his hands that you do not see in my hands when I bless you in His name – nail prints! The nail prints held above His disciples are a reminder that His life was a life and death sacrifice for mankind!

Not only that, Luke tells us that those first disciples never saw the end of that blessing. We read in our text that "while" the Lord was blessing them "He departed from them and was being carried up into heaven!"

AND THE BLESSINGS OF HIS ASCENSION CONTINUE UPON US!

I.

Christ's ascension teaches us that our redemption from sin is finished and complete! The Hebrew Christians of the first century were being persecuted by the majority of the Jews who still looked to the law of Moses and the O.T. sacrifices for salvation. So the Hebrew Christians were tempted to avoid persecution by returning to their old Jewish religion. But in his N.T. letter to the Hebrew believers the God-inspired author wrote: "*Be fixing your eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" (Heb. 12)

When does a person "sit down"? – When his work is finished. In the O.T. the priests had to repeat the animal sacrifices for sin over and over again, because the blood of animals never really took away sin. Rather they were a continual pointing to the promised Messiah. And since the priests themselves were sinners and subject to death, what they offered had no continuing power to cleanse other sinners.

But Jesus Christ, God's holy Son, offered Himself as payment for the sins of the world. For this reason, Jesus said from the cross: "*It is finished!*" And for this reason, already in the first chapter of the letter to the Hebrews Christians, it is recorded that "*when He made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*" (Heb. 1:3) The blessing of Christ's ascension – our completed redemption from sin – continues to be preached to us so that we may believe it and be saved!

II.

The blessing of Christ's ascension into heaven continues upon us also in this way, that we may pray! Again, the writer to the suffering Hebrew Christians says in chapter 4: *"Since then we have a great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest Who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one Who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet was without sin."* In the ascended Christ we have a fellow sufferer Who has *passed through the heavens!*

Satan likes to remind us of the great distance between heaven and earth. He whispers to us: *"You are so unfit because of your many sins each day, that the holy God has no regard for your suffering and need! What makes you think that He will trouble Himself over the likes of you?"* So, we may become discouraged and prevented from praying. But Jesus commanded us to pray to His heavenly Father in HIS name, not our own.

We are not forgotten by Him Who has already suffered the full payment for our all our sins. Never can He forget the scenes of His own life and death on earth – His experiences in Nazareth, the poverty of His youth, the work in the carpenter's shed, what He endured from His own relatives and nation. Never will He forget the wilderness temptation and His agonies on the cross for us!

When our Lord ascended into heaven, He did not leave His heart or His ears or His memory on earth! Instead, He ascended into heaven just so that He might feel, hear, and respond with His power and love to all our cries. Since He is both a fellow-sufferer and the almighty King of heaven, there is no sorrow on earth that He cannot heal or remove! The blessing of His ascension continues upon us whenever we pray through Him!

III.

The disciples must have been chomping at the bit to tell others about their Savior's life, death, and resurrection! But they were not ready to do this on Easter Sunday. They needed the Holy Spirit in order to perform the work of Christ's kingdom. Jesus had told them that He must *"go away"* in order that the Holy Spirit might be sent to them. After His ascension they were to *"stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Spirit."*

So, it was only because Christ went away into heaven that *The Acts of the Apostles* ever took place or were recorded for us! Only because of Christ's ascension did the miracle of Pentecost happen! As Peter explained to the thousands who heard his sermon in Jerusalem: *"Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear."*

Because the ascended Christ sent His Holy Spirit, the apostles were reminded and of all that Jesus had taught them, and were enabled to record the New Testament Scriptures for us! By the power of Christ's Spirit, working through Christ's word, faith is created in the hearts of sinners and Christ's spiritual kingdom grows!

If not for Christ's ascension and His sending of His Spirit it would be a complete

waste of our time to gather at Convention in a few weeks. But take the time to read the CLC Convention Prospectus to see how the Spirit of Pentecost is using our humble church body to faithfully confess and defend God's Word and to spread Christ's kingdom of grace all over the world.

Remember Stephen, the martyr, whenever you are in need of strength and encouragement to confess your Savior Christ before the world. For the Book of Acts tells us that when the Jewish mob began to stone Stephen, *he "being full of the Holy Spirit, . . . gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."* Rejoice, dear Christians, for **this blessing of Christ's ascension which brought His Holy Spirit continues to move and strengthen us in the work of Christ's kingdom!**

IV.

Finally, brethren, the blessing of Christ's ascension continues upon us as we rejoice in the hope of His reappearing! When speaking about the law of gravity, we say, "What goes up must come down." But it will not be the law of gravity that brings our ascended Lord back down to us. He will come down because of His promise to His disciples in John 14:1: *"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."*

"If I go" Jesus said, "I will come again and receive YOU to Myself, that where I AM there you may be also." The disciples saw Jesus go up into heaven. No wonder they returned to Jerusalem with great joy and anticipation! They knew that He who went up would come down again for them!

Later, to further help and encourage the Church of Christ, as it travels through this world of sin, Jesus revealed Himself in the Book of Revelation. This last book of our Bibles is a revelation of Christ's ruling and returning for the sake of His believing people, so that He might bring them safely to Himself in heaven. Pay more attention to the message of our Savior in Revelation and the television news reports won't trouble you so much!

Those first disciples, whom Jesus blessed as He was lifted up and taken out of their sight, never saw the end of that blessing. Neither have we! That means that the blessing of Christ's ascension continues upon us! His hands are still lifted up in blessing upon us!

"Now to Him Who loved us and release us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and His priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever!" Amen.