

Luke 24:50-53 The Blessing of The Ascension Falls Ch. AM 5/28/2023

Where can joy be found?

Rejoicing is not automatically brought about by having money. Jay Gould, an American millionaire who was famous during his lifetime in the 1800s, made his money through the railroad industry and questionable business practices. He had plenty of money. When he was dying in 1892, he said: "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth." Joy is not always found where the money is.

Where can joy be found? Gladness as a way of life is not found in military successes -- Alexander the Great was one of the most successful generals in the history of the world. He conquered the whole known world in 350BC. Having done so, he was found weeping in his tent. He said, "There are no more worlds to conquer." Joy Is not always found in victory and success.

Joy is not found in rejecting Christ -- Voltaire was a very vocal unbeliever. Did he have joy? No, in the end, he wrote: "I wish I had never been born."

Where then is real joy found? -- the answer is simple, in Christ alone.

The ascension of Jesus leads to our joy, because of Jesus' blessing to us.

While blessing His disciples, Jesus went up to heaven.

Since Jesus had previously come down from heaven, and had taken on a human body and had been crucified, then the action of Jesus of rising again, and then of going up to heaven shows for the first time that a human can be in heaven. Since Jesus as a man can be in heaven with his human nature, then it logically follows that we humans could be in heaven. That leads to our joy. Since Jesus died in order to cleanse us of our sins, and to give us the same perfect righteousness that Christ has, then we understand how we could be admitted to heaven. This is how we have joy.

Dr. Robert Godfrey said, "The ascension of Christ marks the pinnacle of His earthly ministry, yet it is one of the most underappreciated aspects of His work."

The ascension was a miracle. It required the work of God. It was not explained by physical means, and it went against the normal working of gravity.

The ascension not only concludes the Gospel of Luke, but the ascension also begins the Book of Acts!

So, today we are studying part of Luke chapter 24. Let me give you an overview of Luke ch. 24. It began with Jesus' resurrection, resulting in the empty tomb and the women talking with angels. Then this chapter went on to tell of Jesus on the road talking with followers whose hearts were aflame within them while they talked with the risen Jesus. At first they did not recognize Jesus, even though He talked with them, but then later in this chapter Jesus suddenly appeared to His disciples at night, and startled them. That brings us to the close of chapter 24, which is also the close of the whole book of Luke, and it ends with Christ rising up through the sky toward heaven.

1. The hands of blessing. (v.50)

Luke saw the hands of Jesus. Later Luke wrote, describing to us as readers the hands of Jesus. Verse 50, “*Then He [Jesus] led them [the disciples] out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them.*”

What do we know about the hands of Jesus from the beginning of His ministry? That the hands of Jesus brought no food to the mouth of Jesus for 40 days, while He was tested in the wilderness. What do we know about the hands of Jesus from Good Friday? His hands were pierced and then buried. What do we know about the hands of Jesus from Easter Sunday? That His hands came alive again, and that His body and hands had a heavenly glory, that He could walk through closed doors!

On the day of ascension, where were the hands of Jesus? The hands of Jesus were being ‘*lifted up*’ = literally lifted up, to be raised, to elevate, to hoist.

Why? To bless His disciples! Jesus took the same posture as Aaron the Old Testament priest, who would lift his hands to bless God’s people. This is why pastors - at the end of our worship services – lift up our hands to speak God’s blessing.

Jesus blessed them. ‘*blessed*’ = to confer favor on, to graciously benefit, to act kindly toward, to give gracious power to persons.

Notice the hands of Jesus were not down and held together in a praying position – not praying for blessing. Instead, the hands of Jesus were up in a position of authority and power to announce the blessing, to give the blessing. Jesus was giving blessing. Jesus was not merely offering a blessing, and asking if they were interested in receiving a blessing. Jesus was giving it to them. He blessed them! Sometimes we want the blessings that we need, and sometimes we are silly or foolish and we don’t desire the blessings that we need. Either way, Jesus gave us the blessing that we needed. This is the blessing that causes joy.

This passage about the blessing of Jesus is a fitting conclusion to the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of Luke had told of how Jesus came on earth to bless and not to curse. Jesus came in love, and not in anger. Jesus even went away in love. While Jesus left the disciples, Jesus was in the very act of blessing them.

The message is clear – the Savior’s hands provide blessings. Jesus gave blessings while in the very time of His agony on the cross. Jesus also gave blessings when He rose again, He gave blessings as He gathered His people around Him, and He gave blessings even in the way He departed from this world. He departed with His hands lifted up in blessings to us. Jesus had the hands of blessing.

2. The lasting impression. (v.51)

(v.51), “*While He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.*”

Have we ever wondered - what was the last thing Jesus did before going to heaven? We know from this verse what it was! We know that this was the last thing that Jesus did, because He was not even touching earth anymore when He did this – the feet of Jesus were up off the ground, going up higher into the air, leaving earth, and going out of sight. What was the last thing Jesus did then, mid-air?

The last thing Jesus did while going toward heaven, was to bless His people.
Jesus parted from them. Jesus was carried up into heaven.

Why? Why not stay on earth? We need Jesus here right about now!

And why after 40 days? Why not go up immediately after His resurrection, on Easter Sunday morning?

The answer is that Jesus wanted to teach them and bless them.

In Acts 1:11 we are told that Jesus will return from heaven to earth just as He left! What does that mean? It means at least these 2 things about how Jesus left will be true about how Jesus returns. 1) He left by ascending through the sky on the way up to heaven, and descending from the sky on His way down from heaven upon His return. 2) while He left, He was blessing them on the way up, so we know what Jesus will be doing as He returns from heaven to earth – He will be blessing us. And what is even better, is that Jesus blesses us now, while he is in Heaven. Jesus will come on the Last Day with judgment for the wicked and blessing for His people!

3. The response of worship and joy. (v.52-53)

Verse 52, “[*The disciples*] worshipped [Jesus] and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”

This is the first time in the gospel of Luke, that the disciples worshipped Jesus. Why worship now? And furthermore, Jesus had left them, and yet they had great joy. Why joy now?

Whenever we say good-bye to a loved one, on that day, we have a response of sadness. How is it that in verse 52, the disciples had a positive reaction to Jesus going away? How did they have a positive response to the ascension in two ways 1) by worshipping Jesus, and then 2) after He left, for the disciples experience great joy? Joy on this day? Not just joy, but Luke reports in verse 52 that the disciples had great joy. This seems surprising, and requires an explanation!

Are you understanding the surprise here? If the disciples of Jesus, on that day of saying good-bye to their beloved master Jesus, were expected to have a great anything, they could be expected to have great sadness! But instead of a negative response of sadness, they have a positive response of joy. Not just some mild joy, but a response of great joy. Greek word MEGA. Abundance of joy. How did they have so much joy at the ascension? The answer? Understanding! That is the answer. Understanding. Now they were finally enabled to understand clearly about Jesus ascending to heaven to prepare for us to go to heaven. Jesus

had come down from heaven to bless, and Jesus had gone back to heaven blessing and when He arrived in Heaven, Jesus would bless more, and he will come back again to bless still more.

Listen to the words of Jesus to them in John 16:16-22, “*A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me.*”¹⁷ So some of His disciples said to one another, “*What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father?’*”¹⁸ So they were saying, “*What does He mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.*” … *you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.*”

The Christian is the person who has discovered the secret. The secret is Christ. When we know and understand Jesus, we have joy in the Lord, whether we can see Him or we cannot see Him, he is ours.

Verse 53 – “*…and [the disciples] were continually in the temple blessing God.*” Luke tells us that the believers were in the temple. How beautiful that the Gospel of Luke ends with the worshippers in the temple praising God! So, Luke beautifully ended his book, where he began his book. Luke began his Gospel account in the temple in chapter 1. In the temple was the priest named Zechariah, and it was there in the temple that Zechariah received news that he would have a son – and that son would be John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets. And it was John the Baptist who would pave the way for the arrival of Jesus. So today, we fast-forward from the beginning of the Gospel of Luke to the very end of the Gospel of Luke, and we find that Luke now returns us back to the temple again. Start in the temple, end in the temple. Here, the disciples are in the temple doing what? Well, they are blessing God. The same word from verses 50 and 51 of Jesus blessing them. Jesus’ blessing to us enables us to bless back!

A lot has happened in the Gospel of Luke, from its beginning to its end! A lot has transpired between that day of the priest Zechariah in the temple and the day of the disciples in the temple. The temple service had taken on a whole new meaning with the arrival of God’s Son Jesus. The song of Moses had become the song of the Lamb. Now that Christ had come, whenever temple worshippers read Isaiah’s prophecies of the suffering servant, they would understand how Isaiah pointed to Christ. Jesus was the suffering servant and Jesus had actually become the temple! Jesus was Himself the temple itself, the priest Himself, and the sacrifice Himself. Because of Jesus, and the work of Jesus, worship in the temple has changed, and we ourselves have become the temple. The coming of Jesus fulfilled everything promised in the OT. The coming of Jesus changed everything about how we relate to God in His Temple. The transition had already taken place! Think of what we read here! No longer did these worshippers in the last verse,

Luke 24:53, approach God and worship God by bringing bloody sacrifices of lambs into the temple, but instead through the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Do we have joy? Yes, we have joy in Christ! We have great joy! Our great joy is the blessing. Our great joy is Jesus Himself. Our joy is why Jesus came! Our great joy is why Jesus ascended. It is why He lifted His hands and blessed us. It is why He Himself was lifted up into heaven. We are continually in Christ, continually in worship services praising Him, and blessing God, and rejoicing!

Westminster Larger Catechism question and answer Q. 53. How was Christ exalted in His ascension? A. Christ was exalted in His ascension, in that having after His resurrection often appeared unto and conversed with His apostles, speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and giving them commission to preach the gospel to all nations, forty days after His resurrection, He, in our nature, and as our head, triumphing over enemies, visibly went up into the highest heavens, there to receive gifts for men, to raise up our affections thither, and to prepare a place for us, where Himself is, and shall continue till His second coming at the end of the world.

Let me do read one more. From another catechism called the Heidelberg Catechism, published 80 years prior, in Heidelberg, Germany, Question 49. How does Christ's ascension into heaven benefit us? A. First, He is our Advocate in heaven before His Father. Second, we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, our Head, will also take us, His members, up to Himself. Third, He sends us His Spirit as a counter-pledge, by whose power we seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, and not the things that are on earth.

And so we worship! We have share in the disciples' response of great joy, because Jesus pleads for us, because Jesus is in heaven, giving us certainty that we are going there, and because we have the Spirit of Christ to guarantee it. We have joy because we seek Christ, and our minds are on heavenly things. We have joy because we are souls who live continually in the temple, as it were, for we are continually in Christ by faith - blessing God and praising God, and giving expression to the great joy. We are a people truly blessed by the Ascended Lord Jesus Christ!

SI - As a third-century man was anticipating death, he penned these last words to a friend: "It's a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their

souls. They have overcome the world. These people are the Christians--and I am one of them."

The blessing of Christ will never end. To top it off, He will return.

Conclusion:

Because Jesus ascended, and you understand that means He has blessed us and is blessing us, then remember that the joy of believers will never end.

Why? Because where Jesus goes, we go. Since Jesus went to heaven, we the assurance that when He comes back for us, we will go to heaven also.

Until Jesus comes again, we take the place of disciples of Jesus, that is, that we are continually in the temple, who is Christ. We are continually in Christ by faith.

We continually worship God and bless the God who has blessed us.

We have not just joy, but great joy.

John 15:11, "*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*"