

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Acts 1:9-11.

Because the disciples were still looking for a political kingdom they said, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?" Christ simply set aside their question as being irrelevant. They wanted earthly dominion and He wanted them to have a spiritual dynamic. So, He spoke to them about the power which He considered invaluable.

Nothing so awakens man's ambition as power. It is sweeter to him than bread to the hungry, sunrise to the benighted, or home to the wanderer. The greatest need of Christians today is power from God. It is good to have beautiful church buildings, thorough organizations, cultured people and talented members, but it is better to have the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our services.

Christ directed the attention of the early Christians to the fact that it was only through power from on high that they would be able to render acceptable service. His promise, "Ye shall receive power," is as applicable to us as it was to the apostles. The person of power is the Holy Spirit. Those who have wrought wonderful things for the Lord and for the salvation of souls have been the ones who have received the power of the Holy Spirit upon them. He is the only One Who gives us power to do exploits for God, to overcome Satan, and to lead the lost to Christ. You cannot separate the Holy Spirit and power. His power comes to us through obedient waiting, humble self-emptying, earnest praying and whole-hearted willingness.

The purpose of this power is very clear and definite, namely, "Ye shall be My witnesses." How wonderful that the Lord asks us to be His representatives! Thrilling as it is to be identified with some great idea, it is more thrilling to tell of Christ's love and to bear witness to His truth. It is not only our privilege to know Christ, but also to make Him known.

What is a witness? One who has seen something, who has heard something, who has experienced something, and who is willing to tell what he knows. A witness for Christ is one who tells another what he knows about the Saviour with a view to winning him to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Christian witnessing is of two kinds--that of the life and that of the lips. The life speaks even when the lips are silent. What we are is far more important than anything we can ever say or do. Actions speak louder than words. Example is better than precept. Orthodox believing should be supported by orthodox behaving. The life transformed by the power of God and beautified by the grace of God is Christianity's supreme logic. Nothing can withstand the witness of a godly life. There is no witnessing quite like that of the life. There is also the witness of the lips. The life should shine and the lips should speak for Christ.

We have here Christ's last commitment to His disciples. It was intended for all His followers, and not just the apostles. They are to take up His cause and to carry on for Him.

I. How Much That Commitment Involved.

1. The future of His cause.

This was dearer to Him than His very life; now He lays it into their hands and charges them to carry on for Him; He is about to go away.

2. The souls of all men.

He had no other plan whereby to reach the lost. If they should fail Him, what

would be the effect on all men?

3. The eternal reward of each disciple.
They were saved by His grace, but they would be rewarded for their faithfulness in their service to Him.

II. How Much That Commitment Implied.

1. Great honor.
To be partners with Christ was greater honor than to be sent as an ambassador to any country.
2. Great privilege.
3. Great confidence.
He was willing to stake the outcome of all that He had begun upon the confidence He had in these fickle men. Have we been true to Him? Has He had occasion to be disappointed in us?
4. Great responsibility.
It is enough to make us tremble. We are charged with a heavenly command. We are stewards of His grace. We must not default.

III. How Much That Commitment Requires.

1. A personal experience.
How can we bear witness unless we know something? We do not have a theory to support, nor an argument to make, but we do have an experience to tell.
2. A faithfulness in telling what we know.
3. A moral consistency.
We must live as we talk and as we pray. The life and the testimony must speak the same language.
4. A real courage.
Being true to convictions is a test of love and loyalty.

When Christ had finished with this wonderful statement, He departed visibly from His disciples and went back to heaven in His resurrection body. His ascension is a fact which is mentioned at least thirty-three times in the New Testament. "And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." Luke 24:51. "And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Acts 1:9. "Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." Ephesians 4:8. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Colossians 3:1.

The purpose of Christ's ascension was threefold:--

1. To be our Forerunner.
"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." Hebrews 6:19-20.
2. To prepare a place for us.
"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." John 14:2.
3. To intercede for us.
"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:14-16.

From verse eleven and kindred passages we learn that Jesus Christ will return to this earth. He will come personally, bodily, visibly, gloriously and suddenly. He will come to take His own to be with Him, and to reward them. As to the time of His coming, it has not been revealed; it may occur at any time; it will occur when many do not expect it.