

*He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”*

*<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*

*<sup>50</sup> When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup> And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. (Luke 24:44-53 NIV2011)*

### **It’s Good to See Him Go**

It can be hard to say good-bye. You don’t want to seem too eager they are leaving so it becomes a rather drawn out affair saying good-bye at the table, at the door, at the vehicle and still waving goodbye as you head down the driveway. Other times it’s legitimately because we don’t want to see them go. Even if you are not one for long, drawn-out good-byes, it doesn’t mean it is any easier for you to see those you love, care about, and enjoy having around leave. We try to ease the pain with assurances like:

“That just means we’ll be able to say hello again.”

“We’ll make sure to talk on the phone, text, stay in touch.”

“We’ll be thinking/praying for you.”

And those things are all great. You still miss them, though. Even with all the technology that connects us, nothing replaces that face-to-face physically-present-with-each-other time.

So, how can the disciples be acting that way when they see someone who they love and care about leave them? Especially when you think about the fact that before his death, when Jesus said they would see him no longer, their hearts were troubled. Even with the promise that he would rise from the dead and meet them in Galilee, they still were filled with sadness. But now, 40 days after Jesus’ resurrection, after they watch Jesus leave they return to Jerusalem with great joy. How?

Everything written about Jesus in the Old Testament must be fulfilled. Part 1 and 2—the suffering and rising from the dead—are done. Now, part 3 must happen where this Good News goes out. After reassuring the disciples, Jesus leads them a couple miles outside of Jerusalem to the vicinity of Bethany. There he lifts up his nail-marked hands, blesses them, and separates himself from his faithful friends and followers. While he is

blessing them Jesus is taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight (Acts 1:9). He's gone!

I'm sure they would miss seeing him, but this wasn't a tearful good-bye. It's good to see Jesus go! What started in the beginning of Luke's gospel with a promised baby ends with a triumphant Jesus. I can't imagine what must have been waiting for him. Think about those videos of soldiers returning home to their families. This would have been even more incredible. The shouts and cries of the angels' celebration had to have been truly amazing. The pride and joy from the Father who sent His Son as He is reunited with him again must have been incredible to see. All is fulfilled. The work is done. Everything needed to save mankind is accomplished just as was written about Jesus in Moses, the Psalms, Prophets, and the Old Testament. Jesus has returned to rule as King over all kings, powers, rulers, and authorities. He is Lord who knows all, sees all, and continues to be in control of all. Jesus opened the minds of his disciples so they would understand. How could they not return with much joy and praising God? Let heaven and earth proclaim the praises of our king, Jesus!

Are you? Are you rejoicing over Jesus' ascension—his going up? Admittedly, the celebration of Jesus' ascension isn't nearly as great or grandiose in the Christian church these days as other church festivals. Part of that might be because it's not easy to understand. Christmas is easy: our Savior is born for us. Peace on earth, good will towards men. Easter: it's easy. Christ is risen! He's risen indeed. The victory over sin, death, and the devil is won and guaranteed for us in our living Jesus. But Jesus' ascension? We get the what: Jesus goes up (ascends) and returns to the Father. But so what? What does Jesus' ascension mean for me?

It's difficult because the simple fact is, by nature, we don't like the idea of someone ruling over us. I, personally, want to be in control of my life. I want to do what I want to do. Jesus can be in control as long as he takes my advice into account and works according to my plans and timetable. Mankind doesn't like the idea of having to answer to anyone except yourself. We want to be our own bosses. The fact that Jesus is ascended and is king is not something sinful creatures want to think about in the first place.

But even for Christians, Jesus' ascension can be difficult. Unless we are not particularly fond of the individual or she has overstayed her welcome, we usually aren't celebrating when someone leaves. So, how can you celebrate especially when it can feel like Jesus has abandoned us as we face attacks from a world that grows more hostile towards Christianity? How can you celebrate when it can feel like we are left defenseless against the attacks of Satan? How can you celebrate as sin's temptations distract you and past failures continue to haunt you?

When we think of Jesus' ascension, often times we think of him "up there" while we are still stuck "down here." He got out while we still have to deal with it all. So, we already feel alone as we struggle with our many number of frustrations in life. Then, thinking about Jesus up there in heaven can accentuate this feeling of loneliness. Because you don't always feel his presence in your life. You can't always see his work. So, is Jesus actually doing anything? If he is, he's doing it for them, but what about me?

As you look at the divisions in this country and the divisions in your own family, as you see the pain in this world and the pain in your own life or the life of your loved ones, as you look at the uncertain future and Jesus' promise that things are only going to get worse as the End of all approaches, we legitimately and rightly pray: "Come, Lord Jesus, come. And come back soon!" And that's good and God-pleasing. But until he returns, what are you doing? Are you like the disciples and their initial reaction staring up in the clouds waiting for him to show up again (Acts 1:11)? Are you left staring in the clouds waiting for the financial statement to be more agreeable before being confident in plans for our ministry? Are you waiting for another sign that this is the opportune moment to share the Good News with that friend or family member who hasn't been here in quite some time? Are you staring up in the clouds neglecting to see the hurting, the struggling, the need for love of those around you? Are you staring up in the clouds waiting for someone else to volunteer sure that you don't have the right gifts or talents?

Men and women, boys, girls, people of Valentine, why do you sit here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. Jesus has not left you defenseless, hopeless, or abandoned to face this world alone. He did not leave because he wants to be rid of us, rid of this world, rid of this flesh and blood. He's ascended for you!

It's good to see Jesus go. The Word, true God from the beginning, once was confined to the space of his teenage mother's womb. Now our ascended Jesus is present everywhere. No space or single location can contain him. But he's not some spiritual being floating through the heavens. He still has those nail-marked hands. He still has your flesh and blood. He's really here and really present. His divinity—being true God—and humanity—being true man—cannot be divided.

It's good to see him go because while on earth Jesus allowed himself to be limited by his flesh and blood. He was abused and beaten, stricken and pierced. Now those nail-marked hands remind us that it was a very real sacrifice on that cross that has made you at one with the Father. It assures us that his blood has washed away your every sin. And that same ascended Jesus has returned so we have confidence to approach God's throne knowing our prayers will be heard and trusting God answers.

Yes, while here Satan pierces his heel on that cross. But our Risen and Ascended Lord fulfilled all Scripture. Satan's head has been crushed. Jesus has destroyed the devil's work for you. One little word can fell him (*A Mighty Fortress is Our God*).

The head once crowned with thorns now is crowned with glory. He sits at God's right hand far above all rule and authority with all things under his feet and head over everything for the church. But don't think of it that he's glued to a seat. He's there filling everything in every way. He's here in the flesh and blood speaking through a pastor's mouth as he speaks God's Word. You hear Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven." He was there in the flesh-and-blood baptizing you into His own name, into his perfect life, his innocent death, his resurrection from the dead giving you life in him. He's there at the communion table giving you his flesh-and-blood for the forgiveness of your sins. He's there with lifted hands giving you the Lord's blessing, placing on you the Lord's promise that he will not turn his face on you but will bless, keep, and give you peace.

While he walked our earth, the Son of Man did not have a place to lay his head (Luke 9:58). Now that he has returned to the Father, he's gone to prepare a place for you. Because Jesus is ascended, we know where we will be one day. That risen Jesus in the flesh with a glorious body assures you that one day you too will be raised and given a glorious, physical body. No, we can no longer see Jesus with our own two eyes as you see me here. But we live by faith, not by sight. One day the covering will be pulled back and you will see clearly. With your own two eyes you will see your Redeemer, your Risen and Ascended Lord, lives.

Until then Jesus promises: "I will be with you always." And just as he fulfilled all that was written in Moses, the Prophets, and Psalms, so we are sure he fulfills this promise too. He's never too busy to answer when you call. He won't be interrupted by text messages or other phone calls. You cannot overstay your welcome with him. He never tires of you calling out to him. He's with you right now. He'll be there this afternoon. He's there as you put your head down to sleep tonight. He'll still be there tomorrow showering you with his love again.

It's good to see Jesus go because he sends power from on high to do the work he calls us to do. Get your head out of the clouds: "**To each of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it**" (Ephesians 4:7). Let none hear you idly saying there is nothing I can do (*Hark! The Voice of Jesus Crying*). No, not all of us are pastors or teachers, evangelists or apostles. At the same time, the one who fills the entire universe has given you his grace, his love, and that grace is sufficient for you. Share that preaching of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus' name at home with your dearly beloved spouse. Share it with your friends and family. Share it in our community and through your life. Support that preaching with your offerings and your prayers. This work is never in vain. It's good to see Jesus go because he went for you. Amen.