

May 23, 2004
A.M. Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“The Ascension”
Luke 24:44-53 NLT

Max Lucado, tells the following story with wit and style,
(Max Lucado, A GENTLE THUNDER, p. 139, 140)

Some time ago I came upon a fellow on a trip who was carrying a Bible.

"Are you a believer?" I asked him.

"Yes," he said excitedly.

I've learned you can't be too careful.

"Virgin birth?" I asked.

"I accept it."

"Deity of Jesus?"

"No doubt."

"Death of Christ on the cross?"

"He died for all people."

Could it be that I was face to face with a Christian? Perhaps. Nonetheless,
I continued my checklist.

"Status of man."

"Sinner in need of grace."

"Definition of grace."

"God doing for man what man can't do."

"Return of Christ?"

"Imminent."

"Bible?"

"Inspired."

"The Church?"

"The Body of Christ."

I started getting excited. "Conservative or liberal?"

He was getting interested too. "Conservative."

My heart began to beat faster.

"Heritage?"

"Southern Congregationalist Holy Son of God Dispensationalist Triune
Convention."

That was mine!

"Branch?"

"Pre-millennial, post-trib, non-charismatic, King James, one-cup communion."

My eyes misted. I had only one other question.

"Is your pulpit wooden or fiberglass?"

"Fiberglass," he responded.

I withdrew my hand and stiffened my neck. "Heretic!" I said and walked away.

Sometimes we major on the minors. Yet, the other side of the coin is that we can water down the essentials of Christianity in an effort to be accepted by all.

Just before His Ascension into heaven Jesus gave instructions to His disciples:
(Luke 24:44-53 NLT)

44 Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me by Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must all come true." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand these many Scriptures.

46 And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die and rise again from the dead on the third day. 47 With my authority, take this message of repentance to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me.' 48 You are witnesses of all these things.

49 "And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven."

50 Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. 52 They worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. 53 And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God.

Jesus did not come back to Jerusalem after his resurrection to provide a spectacular show or to seek revenge on his enemies. Instead, he returned to teach his disciples. He had already instructed them while he was with them, but they had not completely understood him (see 9:45; 18:34). During his final days, he taught them again. This time, he opened their minds, so that they could understand the truth: his life, death, and resurrection all fulfilled Scripture. He taught them so they could teach others, telling what they had seen Jesus do and heard him say. They were to be Jesus' witnesses
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In v44-45 Jesus said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me by Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must all come true." Then he opened their minds to understand these many Scriptures.

(Written by Moses)
Deut 18:15-21 NLT

15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites, and you must listen to that prophet. 16 For this is what you yourselves requested of the LORD your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai. You begged that you might never again have to listen to the voice of the LORD your God or see this blazing fire for fear you would die.

17 "Then the LORD said to me, 'Fine, I will do as they have requested. 18 I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will tell that prophet what to say, and he will tell the people everything I command him. 19 I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf. 20 But any prophet who claims to give a message from another god or who falsely claims to speak for me must die.'

(Written by the prophets: His death)

Isa 53 NLT

53:1 Who has believed our message? To whom will the LORD reveal his saving power? 2 My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot, sprouting from a root in dry and sterile ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. 3 He was despised and rejected--a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised, and we did not care.

4 Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God for his own sins! 5 But he was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped, and we were healed! 6 All of us have strayed away like sheep. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the guilt and sins of us all.

7 He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. 8 From prison and trial they led him away to his death. But who among the people realized that he was dying for their sins--that he was suffering their punishment? 9 He had done no wrong, and he never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man's grave.

[His Resurrection]

10 But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him and fill him with grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have a multitude of children, many heirs. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD's plan will prosper in his hands. 11 When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of what he has experienced, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins. 12 I will give him the honors of one who is mighty and great, because he exposed himself to death. He was counted among those who were sinners. He bore the sins of many and interceded for sinners.

(Written in the Psalms: His Death)

Ps 22:1a, 7-8, 11-18 NLT

My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?

Everyone who sees me mocks me.

They sneer and shake their heads, saying,

"Is this the one who relies on the LORD?"

Then let the LORD save him!

If the LORD loves him so much,
let the LORD rescue him!"
Do not stay so far from me,
for trouble is near,
and no one else can help me.
My enemies surround me like a herd of bulls;
... Like roaring lions attacking their prey,
they come at me with open mouths.
My life is poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.

My heart is like wax, melting within me.
My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay.
My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.
You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead.

My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs;
an evil gang closes in on me.
They have pierced my hands and feet.
I can count every bone in my body.

My enemies stare at me and gloat.
They divide my clothes among themselves
and throw dice for my garments.

(Written in the Psalms: His Resurrection)

Ps 16:9-11 NLT

9 No wonder my heart is filled with joy,
and my mouth shouts his praises!
My body rests in safety.
10 For you will not leave my soul among the dead
or allow your godly one to rot in the grave.
11 You will show me the way of life,
granting me the joy of your presence
and the pleasures of living with you forever.

There was a story I once heard of a small new England town which had a tall steeple in the middle of it. The stranger to town noticed that the steeple was boarded up with plywood. He finally had to ask why. A local told him that the steeple had a stained glass window which depicted the eye of God. You know, like the one on the dollar bill, one eye, signifying the all knowing, always watching God. It turned out the village folk did not like that eye. It made them nervous, it watching them everyday, all day, 24/7. And so the church finally agreed to board it up. Rev. Greg Rickel

Many today want to close their mind to what the Bible teaches and to what God requires of us.

In an effort to have unity and to not make waves churches have watered down the truth of God's Word.

The wrong way to achieve unity in the church is to try and appeal to everyone. The church humor magazine "The Door" facetiously announced these newly formed churches seeking to do just that:

Potluck Assembly
Little Bit O'Bible Church
Church of the Big P.A.
The Short-Term Pastor Center
Theology-Free Church
The Inaccurate Heart of Mary Catholic Church
Seldom United Church
Bill Gates' Memorial Geek Orthodox
New Wife Fellowship
Church of the Perpetual Building Program
Comfortable Pew Family Center
Clean Bathroom Bible Temple
Better Than the Rest Believer's Fellowship
Legalist Bondage Assembly
The Church Where the Pastor's Family Runs Everything
The Two-Or-More-But-Sometimes-Less-Depending-On-Who-Shows-Up Bible Church
Feelgood Fellowship
Twist-and-Shout Revival Center
(John Green, "Newly formed churches," The Door, March-April 2000, p. 15.)

Ray C. Stedman, in his sermon: "One Body" writes:
"We are being presented today with many different Jesuses. There is the Jesus of Jesus Christ Superstar (how I wonder who you are!), and the Jesus of Godspell, and various other presentations -- the Jesus of the Mormons, the Jesus of the cults, the Jesus of humanism. It is no wonder that people are confused sometimes as to which is the real one. You want to ask, "Will the real Jesus please stand up?" That real Jesus is the Jesus presented by the apostolic writers. They knew him. They were chosen by him to be eyewitnesses who would convey to us the Jesus who really is. It is so important that we grasp this great fact. There is only one historic Jesus, and any deviation from the Jesus of the apostles is an impostor."

In our text Jesus opened the minds of His followers to understand the Scriptures and what they had to say about Him. First ...

1. The Cross

V46a "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die..."
(see Scriptures above). John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (NIV). The Cross opens the door for anyone to have a relationship with God, to enter into a life with

God, and to have the life of God. It was written long ago and has been God's plan since the fall of man that God would come to this earth in human form and live, suffer, and die to take the punishment and penalty for man's sin. On the Cross Jesus was your and my substitute. On the Cross Jesus died because of our sins.

2. The Resurrection

V46b "it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die and rise again from the dead on the third day.

The Magazine "Christianity Today" has an anonymous advice columnist who goes by the name Eutychus. A lay person wrote in rather distraught about their pastor's Easter sermon:

Dear Eutychus: (the letter begins)

Our preacher said, On Easter, that Jesus just swooned on the cross and the disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think?

Sincerely, Bewildered

Dear Bewildered:

Beat your preacher with a cat-of-nine-tails using 39 heavy strokes, nail him to a cross, hang him in the sun for 6 hours; run a spear through his heart; embalm him; put him in an airless tomb for 36 hours and see what happens.

Sincerely, Eutychus

Rom 4:25 NLT

He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised from the dead to make us right with God.

By accepting Jesus we accept God's plan for the forgiveness of our sin. Through the Cross God did something about the sin that separates man from God. Through the resurrection we who believe are made right with God. Through the Resurrection Jesus has the right to give us eternal life. Not only does He have the authority to give eternal life, but by that same authority He commands us and gives us authority to take that message to others.

V47 With my authority, take this message of repentance to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me.'

3. The Ascension

v50-53 "Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. 52 They worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. 53 And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God."

Thursday was Ascension Day, the event we read about here in Luke 24: 51. Jesus blessed His disciples, left them and was taken up to heaven. It happened 40 days after His

resurrection from the dead (Easter). 10 days after that, which will be next Sunday, the promise Jesus made in v49 was fulfilled, the promise to send the Holy Spirit.

In the church we spend surprisingly little time on the events of Jesus' life following the resurrection, particularly the Ascension. The ascension was that time when Jesus visibly departed from his disciples and came into the presence of God the Father. It represented the culmination of his earthly ministry. The ascension was the day of transition. When the Jesus of the earth became the Jesus of heaven. Interestingly, on no less than four occasions our Lord had foretold this event to the disciples.

You might suspect the story of the ascension to be a rather sad one. Jesus was now going away, never to be seen on earth by the disciples again. You would suspect that they would be sad and had returned to Jerusalem with a heavy heart. How astonishingly then are the words in the Gospel of Luke: (Jesus) left them and was taken up to heaven. They worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God."

Can there be any more powerful an experience in life than having to depart from somebody you love. You have seen many news stories lately of young soldiers boarding boats and planes leaving behind their spouses, the agony that those two young people experienced written all over their faces. With tears in their eyes they embrace and give a parting farewell. I suppose the hardest thing in the world is to say goodbye to somebody you love. Yet the disciples said their farewell and were filled with great joy. Why?

The answer is in the promise of v49 "And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven." His departure in the physical sense would open the door for His presence in the spiritual sense. Where as in the physical He was limited to whom He could be with and when He could be with them, by the Holy Spirit He could be with them at all times. Furthermore the Holy Spirit would fill them with power from heaven. Power to live for Jesus, power to live like Jesus, and power to be witnesses to others about Jesus.

By the Cross Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, by His Resurrection He confirmed that all who turn to Him would have their sins forgiven, would be reconciled to God and the gates to heaven would be open so that we can know God forever. In the Ascension Jesus is in heaven. He entered heaven to prepare a place for us and is keeping the gates open for all to have eternal life, and gives the Holy Spirit as a first deposit of that eternal life, since eternal life means knowing God now and forever. And the Holy Spirit gives us power to live for Jesus.

Imagine having God with you, in you at all times. This is exactly what is promised to all who will turn to Jesus and commit their life to be controlled by Him.

An unknown author has written: "Longfellow could take a worthless piece of paper, write a poem on it, and instantly make it worth thousands of dollars -- and it's called genius.

Rockefeller could sign his name to a piece of paper and make it worth millions of dollars -- and it's called riches. A mechanic can take material worth only five dollars and make it worth five hundred -- and it's called skill. An artist can take a fifty-cent piece of canvas, paint a picture on it, and make it worth thousands of dollars -- and it's called art. Jesus Christ can take a worthless, sinful life, wash it in His blood, put His Spirit in it, and make it valuable to God -- and that's called sanctification. The Lord is in the business of taking rough, raw material and using it -- transforming men by His power to be the extension of His work in the world."