

I.N.I.

Ascension
May 5, 2016
Eph. 1:15-23

In Christ Jesus, our Ascended and ever ruling Lord and Savior, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Celebrate the Ascension? Why would we celebrate Christ's leaving this earth with His visible presence? Why were the disciples so filled with joy after Jesus ascended on high?

The answer to that question is because the disciples knew what their Ascended Lord had done and would still be doing for them. He would send the Holy Spirit in a special outpouring upon them. He would prepare a glorious home for them and He would rule this world for their eternal good.

How are we so assured of all of this? Because we know---

THE REST OF THE ASCENSION STORY!

Our text this evening is really a prayer by Paul for the Ephesian Christians. In the original Greek these 9 verses form one long, long sentence. Each verse building upon the preceding one, adding to the grandeur and glory of this prayer. Even as Paul prayed this prayer for the Christians of his time, we also pray it today. And in this prayer which is

THE REST OF THE ASCENSION STORY, Paul tells us:

I: OUR ASCENDED LORD HELPS HIS BELIEVERS GROW IN FAITH.

We read verses 16-17: **I DO NOT CEASE TO GIVE THANKS FOR YOU, MAKING MENTION OF YOU IN MY PRAYERS: THAT THE GOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE FATHER OF GLORY, MAY GIVE TO YOU THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM.**

Paul is grateful for what God has done for these Christians. He is grateful for where they now stand in their faith, but he does not want their faith in Christ and their Christian life to become stagnant. So he asks for the "**SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION.**"

By the time Paul wrote these words the Holy Spirit had already been sent with His special outpouring of gifts on Pentecost and it was only because of the Holy Spirit that these people to whom Paul wrote were believers. The Holy Spirit had used the Gospel message to bring them to faith in the ascended Jesus as their Lord and Savior. But Paul is now asking that the Holy Spirit would continue to teach, instruct and guide them along the way to eternal life as they grew in faith.

The Holy Spirit is the source of true wisdom and the revealer of truth. He reveals through the Word: Who God is and what He has done for us sinners. The Ephesian Christians no doubt had the Old Testament Scriptures and now they have this inspired letter of the Apostle. Perhaps they were familiar with or had copies of other inspired writings of the Apostle Paul. Paul is praying that they continue to dig deep into that revealed Word of **WISDOM** and **KNOWLEDGE**.

These Ephesians already knew the Triune God and their Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul's prayer is that they know Him even better. The Greek word for **KNOWLEDGE** literally means "to know thoroughly." The better we know God and His love for us, the more confident and content we will be. The better we know all that our Savior has done for us, and is still doing for us as our Ascended Lord, the greater peace, joy and contentment we will have in our daily lives. The better we know our God and His will for our lives, the more we will understand and strive with the Spirit's help to live God-pleasing lives.

So that is our prayer on this Ascension Day as well. **LORD, GIVE US THE HOLY SPIRIT AND STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH.** Move us to want to sink ourselves deeper and deeper into Your Word, for then and only then can we come to know You better and better. Your Word alone is our source of Wisdom and Knowledge. As we learn to know You better we will be more spiritually mature, more content, more at peace, more confident. As the Spirit helps us to better understand our Father's love for us sinners, the more we will reach out to other sinners with His love and share our Savior with them. The more we grow in the grace and knowledge of God's Word the more we can be **MORE THAN CONQUERORS** over the trials and problems of life and **DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS US.**

We read vs. 18 **THE EYES OF YOUR UNDERSTANDING BEING ENLIGHTENED:**

THAT YOU MAY KNOW WHAT IS THE HOPE OF HIS CALLING, WHAT ARE THE RICHES OF THE GLORY OF HIS INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS.

The **HOPE** of God's calling is certain, not shaky. It is confidence based on the promises of God. It is the sure knowledge that one day we will be in full possession of something we do not yet have but which God has promised to us: **EVERLASTING LIFE IN HEAVEN.**

God didn't leave our salvation to chance or fate or luck. He graciously took care of every single detail. He had His eternal Son become one of us through the incarnation and placed under the law. He had Jesus live the perfect life of love for us and die on the cross to pay for all of our sins. Jesus came forth from the tomb alive as He promised He would and descended into hell to proclaim His victory. Our Lord who died for us now lives for us. On the 40th day after His resurrection this same Jesus ascended on high, His work completed. He has reconciled the world of sinners with His Heavenly Father.

This **HOPE** also includes **THE RICHES OF THE GLORY OF HIS INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS.** Heaven is an inheritance, a pure gift! Our heavenly Father gives this gift of everlasting life in heaven to us, His children through faith in Jesus Christ. And what a glorious inheritance it is! The old order of things will pass away, and **THERE SHALL BE NO MORE DEATH, NOR SORROW, NOR CRYING; AND THERE SHALL BE NO MORE PAIN.** We will no longer have to fight against Satan and this world's temptations. We will no longer have a sinful flesh to carry around and battle with. We will be perfect, forever, just like Christ. That is our **HOPE, our CONFIDENCE, OUR ASSURANCE!**

II: OUR ASCENDED LORD USES HIS POWER ON BEHALF OF HIS CHURCH.

We read verses 19-20: **AND WHAT IS THE EXCEEDING GREATNESS OF HIS POWER TOWARD US WHO BELIEVE, ACCORDING TO THE WORKING OF HIS MIGHTY POWER WHICH HE WORKED IN CHRIST WHEN HE RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD AND SEATED HIM AT HIS RIGHT HAND IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES.**

Our hope of a glorious inheritance in heaven is secure, because of the **EXCEEDING GREATNESS OF HIS POWER.** God's power is not only seen in His creation, where He spoke the Word and things were there immediately. His power is also seen in the resurrection of Jesus and in our being brought to faith. That anyone is a believer is a miracle, a work of God's almighty power upon spiritually dead hearts. Paul writes in chapter 2: **AND YOU HE MADE ALIVE, WHO WERE DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS...BUT GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY, BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT LOVE WITH WHICH HE LOVED US, EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN TRESPASSES, MADE US ALIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST (BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED), AND RAISED US UP TOGETHER, AND MADE US SIT TOGETHER IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST JESUS.** That our spiritually dead hearts are **MADE ALIVE IN CHRIST** is a miracle of regeneration, a miracle of God's almighty power.

That Jesus' cold dead body came back to life is a miracle of the resurrection, a work of God's almighty power. God's almighty power took our spiritually dead hearts and created a living faith in them and it is still at work in your heart and mine through His Word.

He unleashes that power when He strengthens our faith through the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacraments.

He unleashes that power when we grow in understanding His will through the study of His Word.

He unleashes that power when He helps us to do His will, difficult as that may be.

He unleashes that power when He strengthens us in times of temptation and gives us courage to bear up under suffering and persecution.

He unleashes that power when He empowers us to share the Gospel with others and gives us strength to stand up under crushing physical and emotional burdens.

May we all see Him ruling in our lives for our good. Jesus has ascended to the right hand of God. We know, of course, that "the right hand of God" is not a place, but an expression for the position of power and authority. Jesus' ascension means that Jesus now rules all things in heaven and on earth. Paul states it this way: **FAR ABOVE ALL PRINCIPALITY AND POWER AND MIGHT AND DOMINION, AND EVERY NAME THAT IS NAMED, NOT ONLY IN THIS AGE BUT ALSO IN THAT WHICH IS TO COME. AND HE PUT ALL THINGS UNDER HIS FEET.** Jesus has **ALL POWER IN HEAVEN AND EARTH.** He who was beaten, condemned and

crucified is now Ruler over all things. He rules over the evil spiritual kingdom of Satan as well as the evil kingdoms of this world. He rules over the angels and all of nature; the whole world. And Paul tells us that He rules for our eternal good.

We read, **AND GAVE HIM TO BE HEAD OVER ALL THINGS TO THE CHURCH, WHICH IS HIS BODY, THE FULLNESS OF HIM WHO FILLS ALL IN ALL.** Jesus uses His power and authority on behalf of His Church. He protects us from our enemies. He daily adds to His Church by causing the Gospel to be spread and shared throughout the world and by sending the Holy Spirit to bring souls to faith through that Gospel. He provides pastors and teachers to teach and preach and to shepherd His sheep and He leads them as He wills and where He wills.

We, you and I as believers, and all other believers are His body. This is by pure grace. It is not out of necessity, as though Jesus needed a spiritual body. Rather, we are His body because in His love He chose us to be so, to share in His glorious work of spreading His Word. We do not deserve such an honor.

Did you catch Paul's play on words? He says we, the Church of believers, are **THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST**, but Christ is the One **WHO FILLS ALL IN ALL**. The Church--all believers--fills out Christ, but Christ fills everything.

So what is the rest of the story of Jesus' ascension? Jesus, by ascending, has sent the Holy Spirit upon us through His Word. He has filled us with the **SURE** and **CERTAIN HOPE** of everlasting life. He fills all things, rules all things, controls all of history for the welfare of His Church. We see that everyday in our individual lives and in the life of our congregation as God showers His grace upon us. What great comfort and confidence that gives to every one of us as we await our Savior's return when He will take us to be with Him throughout all eternity.

Yes, let us celebrate Jesus' Ascension!

Amen.