

I.N.I.

Ascension
May 21, 2020
Acts 1:6-11

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

YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES! These were some of the last words the disciples heard their Lord and Savior speak to them before He ascended into heaven. These words were not just a **COMMAND** but a **PROMISE!** We see that from the rest of our text this evening.

We also have seen how seriously these disciples took these words to heart. A few of our last sermons were from the book of Acts and we have seen and heard the disciples boldly proclaim, even in the face of persecution, Christ crucified and risen again. They indeed were witnesses with little regard for their own physical well being.

Well today is when and where it all began. So we are going back to the past, to help explain the future that we have been hearing about these past few weeks. But we also see that these words of the past apply directly to us and our future as well.

Forty days ago we celebrated Easter. With this pandemic and the sheltering in home guidelines it seems like a lot longer ago than that. From Christ's resurrection we know that we too will someday rise from the dead. Our graves will be empty and we will be with the Lord forever. The glory and triumph of our resurrection will lead us to be active in our faith life. Since we have witnessed Christ's resurrection with eyes of faith, therefore these words of our Savior from our text this evening not only applied to the disciples of His day but they also apply to us today.

So this evening we would like to apply them to all of us. Jesus says to us,

YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES! That's a promise.

I: WE HAVE ALL THE FACTS

The Lord first fulfills that promise by filling us with the facts. But we know that they are more than just facts. Most of us know many facts about the Bible and about the life and work of Jesus. We also know the Ten Commandments. We know about Baptism and the Lord's Supper and about Christ's ministry and miracles and His Second Coming and the end of the world. But if that is all the Word of God and the life of Christ means to us; mere facts and historical data that we have learned in our minds, then there can be no life, no love, no spirit, no faith, no zeal in our hearts.

The facts that we hear and know about our own sinfulness and Jesus' perfect life, death and resurrection as our Substitute Savior are the very core of all that we are and all that we base our faith upon and it is those facts that the Holy Spirit uses to create faith in our hearts.

We confess our sins and admit that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against God in thought, word and deed. The Law does its job when it shows us our sins and condemns us, leading us to realize that we cannot save ourselves, that we are all lost and condemned creatures by nature. That none of us can be that perfect person that God demands of us and therefore we must turn away from our own works and repent of our sins.

But we also know the facts of the Gospel. We recite in the Apostles' Creed that Jesus is the God-Man, True God and True Man in one person, our Substitute, our Redeemer. He came to take our place under the Law and He kept it perfectly for us and then He was placed under God's condemnation for our sins and died on the cross as full payment for our sins. He endured God forsakenness so that we never would be. Then, as we witnessed and celebrated 40 days ago, Jesus rose again so that all of us are justified; declared righteous in God's sight and assured of a resurrection to everlasting life. So we look alone to Jesus!

All of us know these facts about ourselves and about our Savior. These are some of the most important facts we will ever learn in our life. We give both our young children as well as our adults an in-depth instruction in their confirmation so that they have the training and opportunity to get up and speak, bear witness to what God has placed into their hearts: to witness to the **FACTS** that they have learned and believe.

But as we said these teachings are more than just mere facts, because

II: WE ALSO HAVE THE POWER!

These words of our Savior's forgiving love for us have worked mightily in our hearts since we were baptized. It has convicted us of our sins and has converted us to believe in Jesus alone as our Savior. In that same power of the Gospel, worked in us by the Holy Spirit, we profess to the rest of the world, that we have no Savior, but Jesus, there is no salvation apart from the Christ.

In these New Testament times we have not been promised nor do we expect the same great, miraculous blessings of the Holy Spirit which included the ability to speak in tongues (different languages), the ability to heal the sick and to raise the dead. Those were signs that were given to prove and to confirm that what the disciples witnessed and what they taught about Jesus was true.

Today we have the proof, we have the sign, right here in His Word. We have been given what we have been promised: the blessing of the Holy Spirit who has created faith in our hearts; strengthened and kept us in that faith up till now; led us to grow in the knowledge of the grace of Christ and gives us the boldness and confidence to profess our faith. The Holy Spirit will also preserve us in that faith in Jesus through His Word till we enter death; or better put till we enter eternal life.

Satan who was defeated on Easter Sunday by the resurrection of Jesus, has so often gotten the last laugh and won the final battle by leading people astray. Peer pressure, temptations, worldly interests all will beckon to us, call us to forsake our faith in Christ and either forget these facts or not believe them to be true or not apply them to our lives. Satan by no means will give up in his attack upon us.

He knows the eternal significance of this warfare. We need to be warned of the seriousness of the battle we are in and we need to realize that **WE WILL** ultimately win the battle. **WE (YOU & I) HAVE THE POWER!** Not Satan. We have God's Word. We have His promise: **I HAVE CHOSEN YOU, CALLED YOU TO BE MINE BY MY GOSPEL, ENLIGHTENED YOU AND WILL KEEP YOU. YOU WILL SEE ME AGAIN!**

The Lord Jesus has promised: **I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU. AND IF I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME AGAIN AND RECEIVE YOU TO MYSELF; THAT WHERE I AM, THERE YOU MAY BE ALSO. AND WHERE I GO YOU KNOW, AND THE WAY YOU KNOW...FOR I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE. NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER, EXCEPT THROUGH ME.**

That promise comes from God's Word and it is that Word that must remain special in our life from this time forward. In order to survive spiritually against all of Satan's attacks we must **RESIST HIM BY REMAINING STEADFAST IN THE FAITH** which only comes about by remaining consistently, steadfastly in His Word.

Our culture has a tradition of giving going away presents. When friends or relatives move and leave town, or leave their place of work or retire, we may give them something to help in their new home, or new place of employment or in retirement. We usually give gifts to those who are leaving, but here at Christ's ascension it is the other way around. In our text it is the person who is leaving who is giving the gifts.

Jesus knew what was ahead for His followers. When He gave them that great commission to be witnesses and make disciples of all the nations, to baptize and to teach them all things, He did not leave them powerless. He gave them the gifts needed to carry out that task, and He promised them that He would be with them always!

Christ's ascension could have been a very discouraging time for the disciples, just like His death was at first. But our Lord Jesus had not forsaken them, nor has He forsaken us, He has given us and every believer a going away present, and these gifts are meant for our growth as Christians.

Christ has bodily gone back to heaven, but as Christians we know that we have not been abandoned. When Christ ascended into heaven He left us with going away presents. These gifts of His Word and Sacraments were not given just to the apostles, or the disciples of Jesus' day.

These gifts are given to all believers. Each one of us has been given unique gifts from Christ Himself. We are all able to fulfill that great commission in our own special way. But we must remember that we do not all have the same abilities. We should not become discouraged that we do not have the talents or abilities that others have been given. Instead we should realize that Christ has given each of us certain gifts, and He will use us in His own way.

Jesus has ascended, but His testimony He has left behind: His Word! And His witnesses He has called: You, me and all who believe in Him. We have the **COMMAND** from Jesus. We have **FACTS** in His Word. We also have the **POWER** from on high through His Word and we have the

PROMISE of His return.

We need to stress again how ripe our nation and the world is for this harvest. Lives have been changed and turned upside down. People have experienced sudden loss and are in confusion and frustration. The foundational belief in this world's goods and security have been shaken and in some cases crumbled. People need a message of security, peace, safety and a blessing for the future. We have it in Jesus.

May our testimony and witness for Jesus to others be to His glory today and all the days of our lives.

Amen.