

The Farewell Meeting On The Mount Called Olivet, And Christ's Ascension.

Text: Acts 1:1-11

1) The farewell meeting

Suggested Hymns:

2) Christ's ascension

112, 111, 279, 210, 113

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Acts 1:1–11, ¹ *The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,* ² *until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen,* ³ *to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*

⁴ *And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; ⁵ for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

⁶ *Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. ⁸ But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

⁹ *Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, ¹¹ who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

On Thursday was the anniversary of our Lord's glorious ascension into heaven. On this day, the fortieth day after His resurrection from the dead, Jesus performed this last act of His great work for us, and ascended into heaven from the mount called Olivet¹ in the presence of His disciples.

Christ's ascension was the last act of His great work for us. For why did Christ ascend into heaven? Was it merely for His own benefit? Many Christians think so. When they hear of Christ's ascension, they think that He did this for Himself, that in His ascension He merely returned to heaven, and resumed the throne of glory which He had left when He came into this world, and became man in the incarnation.

And it is true that in His ascension Christ returned to heaven in triumph, and that He was received into the realms of glory with shouts of joy by all the angels in heaven. The Psalmist therefore says in Psalm 47:5, ***God has gone up with a shout, The LORD with the sound of a trumpet.***

But we are mistaken if we think that Christ ascended into heaven for His own benefit only. Christ is our Saviour in everything which He did. He did everything for us. As for us He died and rose from the dead, so He ascended into heaven for us. And what benefit do we derive from His ascension?

By His ascension we are made sure of heaven. In His ascension Jesus opened the gates of heaven for us that we might enter. He went to heaven to prepare for us a dwelling-place there. He is there waiting for us, expecting us, and we can be sure of it that we shall enter heaven; for He has given us the promise that we shall be where He is.

Think of it, my friends, how would we feel about it if Jesus had not ascended into heaven, if merely He had ceased to appear before His disciples after His resurrection? Would we be sure of heaven? No; there would always be something doubtful about it because we would not know what became of our divine Saviour, whether He is in heaven or not. His ascension, therefore, was the last act in His great work for us to make us sure of heaven.

And the place is significant from which Jesus ascended into heaven. He ascended from the mount called Olivet. Why did He select for His ascension the

very place where His last suffering began in the night in which He was betrayed, and where in a terrible struggle He consented to drink the bitter cup, and where He was taken captive and led away to be condemned to death that He might atone for the sins of the whole world?

Doubtless, because He meant to show that there is a connection between His suffering and His ascension, that the great work which He began in His last suffering is ended in His ascension, and that thereby He gloriously accomplishes His great redemptive work.

Here upon the mount called Olivet was the last meeting which He had with His disciples immediately before His ascension.

Let us consider *The Farewell Meeting On The mount called Olivet, And Christ's Ascension*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Farewell Meeting

The author of the book of the Acts is St. Luke, who was a doctor. He accompanied St. Paul in his travels, and was intimately acquainted with Mary, the mother of Jesus. Referring to his Gospel, he says, *¹The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ²until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, ³to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days.*

Here St. Luke tells us who the people were that took part in the farewell meeting on the mount called Olivet. There was the Lord Jesus, who had shown Himself alive after His passion. He had been crucified on Mount Calvary, had been put to death, and had been buried in a new rock-hewn grave. But death had not been able to hold Him. Here He was in the glorious body of His resurrection which His enemies were no longer permitted to see and abuse.

And there were the Apostles whom He had chosen, who had been with Him for three years, and had heard what He said, and had seen what He did. They were eleven in number.

What thoughts must have come into their minds when their Master led them out to the place where they had so shamefully deserted Him in the night in which He was betrayed!

But now they clung to Him; they were grouped around Him whom they had seen for forty days after His resurrection, though He never remained with them as He did before His suffering and death, but only appeared, spoke, and then vanished out of their sight. But here they were with Him again full of anticipation to know why He had taken them out to the mount called Olivet.

And St. Luke not only tells us who the people were that took part in the farewell meeting on the mount called Olivet, but he also mentions the things that were said in this meeting. Referring to the Lord Jesus, he says, *speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* ⁴ *And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; ⁵ for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.*

In this farewell meeting on the mount called Olivet, Christ gave His final instructions to His disciples. He had spoken to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God all along. He had spoken a great deal in parables before His suffering and death. He had spoken to them after His resurrection, had given them the power to forgive sins, had instituted the ministerial office, had instituted the holy sacrament of Baptism.

But now He intimated that He would leave them, commanding them that they should not depart from Jerusalem for the next days, and promising them that they would be baptised with a greater baptism than the baptism of John, who baptised merely with water, but that they would be baptised with the Holy Spirit in a few days.

Did the Apostles gather from these words that Christ meant to leave them? Most likely they did; for this promise of the Holy Spirit surely reminded them of Christ's words, *It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.*²

However, not Christ alone spoke at this meeting, the Apostles also had something to say. We read, ⁶ *Therefore, when they had come together, they*

asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

This is not surprising. They wanted to know if the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them meant that the worldly kingdom would be restored to Israel, so that again the Israelites would be an independent people and a great nation, as they had been formerly in the days of David and Solomon.

Often Christ had told them that the kingdom of God is something which is within them, that the kingdom which He came to bring is not a worldly, but a spiritual kingdom! But as often as He spoke of such things, we are told that they were hidden to them, and they did not understand them. So firmly was the thought entrenched in their minds that the Messiah must restore the worldly kingdom to Israel.

But even now, the Lord has patience with them. He does not reprove them for their weakness. *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. ⁸ But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

So Christ does not answer their foolish question, but again promises them the Holy Spirit, and tells them that the Holy Spirit's coming will have a most wonderful effect upon them, that He will enlighten their understanding and fill them with courage, so that they will be His witnesses and testify before all people as to what they had heard and seen. Such are the things that were spoken at this farewell meeting on the mount called Olivet.

2. Christ's Ascension.

And the meeting ended with Christ's ascension into heaven. This is the second part of our meditation.

We are told ⁹ *Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.* Here we have a plain description of Christ's ascension. "*He was taken up.*" He rose upwards from the place where He stood, and went up always higher and higher. And this was done "*while they watched.*"

All the Apostles were eye-witnesses of this wonderful phenomenon. They saw it with their own eyes, and afterwards, when they went out into the world to

preach the Gospel, they testified before the world how they had seen Him ascending into heaven.

This places the fact of Christ's ascension beyond the shadow of a doubt. For how could any deception have been played upon all these disciples at the same time, and where could we look for more trustworthy witnesses? Even if only one or two of them had seen Christ ascending into heaven, we would not doubt their testimony. But now the eleven, every one of them, saw Him ascending into heaven.

Who, then, can deny the fact of Christ's ascension? Anyone who denies Christ's ascension must brand all the holy Apostles as liars and deceivers, and deny the divine inspiration of the Bible. For had not the Prophets promised in the Old Testament that Christ would ascend into heaven, and had not Christ Himself said time and again that He would ascend into heaven? Christ's ascension is one of the fundamental articles of the Christian religion, and the person who denies His ascension thereby renounces Christianity.

And we must note that Luke says, *a cloud received Him out of their sight*. This is to be taken in connection with Mark's account, as we read in Mark 16:19, *He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God*.

Jesus did not ascend so high that He grew smaller and smaller, like a speck in the blue sky, until the speck became so small that it could not be seen anymore. No; He rose only to a certain height where He was clearly visible to the astonished disciples. Then a cloud came, and He disappeared in that cloud.

And now He sat at the right hand of God, which is not to be taken literally, but figuratively, for God is a spirit. The right hand means a position of power and authority.

What the Bible teaches us is, that the human nature of Christ was exalted to divine glory and majesty, so that ever since His ascension the man Jesus is in every respect the same as the God Jesus. As God is invisible and does not show Himself upon this earth in any visible form, so Christ no more appears on earth as He did in those forty days after His resurrection.

As God is omnipresent, so is Christ's human body present everywhere according to the promise which He gave immediately before His ascension, "**Lo,**

I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”³ Is He not present with us, and do we not receive His true body and blood in the Lord’s Supper?

And there is a special significance to Christ’s ascension. We read, ¹⁰ *And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, ¹¹ who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”*

What, then, does Christ’s ascension into heaven signify to us? What are we to expect after His ascension into heaven? We are to expect His return from heaven. Christ’s last great manifestation on this earth was His visible departure into heaven, and His next great manifestation on this earth will be His return in a visible shape and form from heaven.

He will return on the Last Day. He will return in like manner as He was seen going into heaven. He will return in glory and majesty. He will return to judge the living and the dead. He will return as surely as He went into heaven.

A glorious day it will be when Christ returns! Then we shall see our dear Saviour face to face, and He will take us into heaven. He will reward us most abundantly for all the sufferings of this present time; He will wipe all the tears from our eyes; He will let us taste of those things which *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*⁴

He will welcome us and say, *‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’*⁵ Let us watch, let us pray, for that glorious day to come that we may be with our dear Lord forever! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Acts 1:12

² John 16:7

³ Matthew 28:20

⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:9

⁵ Matthew 25:34