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Ascension

Luke 24:44-53

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.”

⁴⁵ **Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.** ⁴⁶ **He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,** ⁴⁷ **and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.** ⁴⁸ **You are witnesses of these things.** ⁴⁹ **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.”**

⁵⁰ **When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them.** ⁵¹ **While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.** ⁵² **Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.** ⁵³ **And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.** (NIV 84)

Theme: Your Teacher is not here. But...

1. Still found in his Word
2. Still speaking through his church
3. Still ruling over his world

The followers of Jesus called him Rabbi, which is an Aramaic term for teacher. They were disciples—which means students or pupils. They followed him around wherever he went, listening to his every word. But he was more to them than just a teacher. They called him Lord, and God, and Savior. They believed he was the Messiah, the Christ—the one God promised to send to their ancestors to save them.

But Jesus left them—he ascended into heaven. He said he was going away for awhile. Now, normally you would think that this would cause much sorrow. Instead, the day of Ascension is one of rejoicing and celebration. Why? Because he is in heaven. And even though he is gone in heaven he still found in his Word, he still speaks through the Church, and he still rules over his world.

Jesus spent the final three years of his life with his disciples. He hand-picked them. They put their lives on hold and followed him. And he taught them God’s Word. He did this through a variety of ways. He

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used parables, miracles, and stories to teach them God’s Word. He even quoted what we know today as the Old Testament and pointed out how it was about him. But they didn’t understand. On Maundy Thursday, they were still confused as to what Jesus’ purpose was. Even on Easter, after they were told that he rose from the dead, they were still hiding in the upper room. Perhaps you know the feeling well. For you maybe it was in Algebra or history. Or perhaps it was a language. For me it was Latin. Any number of times when it came to Latin the teacher would be teaching something. And I thought I understood it and said I did, but I didn’t quite grasp it. Or if I did, I would shortly lose it. That’s the disciples. Again and again Jesus taught them, but it didn’t stick—they still did not understand.

But what do we read in verse 45 of our text? **He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.** At the end of his time here on earth, Jesus once again taught his disciples. He opened up their hearts and minds. He pointed out what the Scriptures said about him. And how they pointed to him and that he fulfilled them. And finally their eyes were opened. It was then that they started to grasp what he had been telling them. But Jesus’ time on earth was running out. He would soon go to his Father. He would leave to themselves. But he wouldn’t leave them alone. In the gospel from last Sunday Jesus gave the disciples comfort for when he would be gone. **I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth...I will not leave you as orphans.** Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit to be with them when he was gone. That’s a promise he reiterated in verse 49 of our text, which of course, was fulfilled 10 days later on the Day of Pentecost. **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.**

The Holy Spirit would be in their hearts ever since. He would grow their faith as they read and studied the Word. Jesus still does the same

today. You may not see him with your eyes, but you can still see him. You can see him through his Word. That is how we know Jesus. Through the Word. That is how we know about his birth, his life, his ministry, his suffer, his death, and his resurrection.

Right now Jesus is in heaven. You haven't seen him. Yet you believe in him. That's because you have seen him through the eyes of faith. You know him and believe in him. For he speaks to you through his Word. And his Holy Spirit has brought you to faith in him. So even though he is in heaven. You personally know him to be your Savior.

One of the best ways to learn something is to teach it. In order to teach something you have to know the material well enough to put the facts into your own words and you have to know more than what you teach so that you can answer some possible questions that others may have. That is what Jesus has us do—teach others the gospel—share with them the good news. And in that way he still speaks through the Church.

On multiple occasions Jesus sent his disciples out to share his Word. For instance in Luke chapter nine we read that Jesus sent out the 12 disciples. They were to go from village to village. He told them to preach the kingdom of God. He even gave them authority to drive out demons and heal diseases. In the next chapter Jesus sent out 72 of his followers. This time he sent them out two by two. He told them, **The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.**

You can think of those as training exercises. Or perhaps early field experience. Jesus was teaching them what to do when he was gone. And when he ascended he once again told them to spread the gospel. After teaching them again that he had to suffer, die, and rise he said to them in verse 45, **You are witnesses of these things.** In other words, go tell people about my suffering, death, and resurrection. Luke isn't the only one who recorded Jesus telling his disciples to spread the gospel. Take the great commission for example, spoken to the disciples between his resurrection and his ascension. **Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you**

always, to the very end of the age. Other gospel writers record other similar commissions. To spread the gospel is the purpose Jesus trained the disciples.

All of us are disciples of Christ. All of us, therefore are to spread the gospel. We all know many people who do not know Christ. We all have friends, relatives, neighbors, or associates at work. They need to know about Christ and the free forgiveness he has won for us. They need to hear the comfort of his love. And the assurance of eternal life through faith in him.

The great commission wasn't just given to the disciples. But it was given to the whole church. Every believer is to make disciples of all nations. We are to teach everything in his Word and to baptize.

Without us doing so, no one would believe. Paul makes that point in Romans 10. **How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!** It's not just pastors or other called workers who have been sent. As a Christian, you have been sent too. And so as you share the gospel the Holy Spirit will work through that gospel. It will not return to him empty. People will be brought to faith. And he will strengthen the faith of others.

And we can't help but spread the word. We consider it a great and awesome privilege. We can't wait but to tell those we know and even those we don't know about their Savior. For we want all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. And as we spread the gospel we notice something else happening too—the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith as he increases our knowledge of him.

When a teacher is gone and a sub comes in, the students may think that they think that they can get away with certain things. But they will realize that the teacher finds out about it—and no matter who the substitute teacher is, their original teacher is still in control. We find that the case with Jesus too. He is gone for awhile—but he is still in control. He still rules over the world.

This isn't explicitly found in our text. But it is found else where. Throughout Scripture we see what Christ does up in heaven. We know that he took the spot at the right hand of God. The Writer to the Hebrews tells us so in chapter 12, **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** That is the position of power and might. The spot of Christ on the throne of God is one of rule and dominion. And what does Christ do with this position of power? Paul tells us in the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians. There he says that Jesus is, **far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.** Jesus has power over all things. And therefore he uses this power to rule over the entire world. From his throne in heaven he rules over the things in heaven, on this earth, and under the earth. From his throne in heaven he watches over his entire creation.

Normally when someone says they are watching you, it is used as a threat. No one likes to be watched. Just think of the uproar that happened when everyone found out that certain government agencies were saving some data on its citizens. And God watching at us can serve as a deterrent for our sinful nature. But it also gives us comfort and encouragement. Jesus is watching over you. He knows what bothers you. He understands what ails you. He lived on this earth just like you. He knows what it's like living in this sin-filled world. He knows your needs. He knows what to do. And most importantly, he can do something about it. Christ watches over you. He guards you and protects you. He takes care of you. He keeps harm away from you. And he thwarts the devil's attacks.

Jesus is gone. He's in heaven. He ascended to heaven as he was given power over his entire creation. He may be gone. But he hasn't left us alone. For he still found in his Word which is spoken by his children. And he watches over us from his throne in heaven. And soon he will return in the same way he left—in the clouds. And he will take us to live with him in heaven forever. Amen.