

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. (NIV84)

Theme: Ascension: The Culmination of Jesus’ Life on earth

1. The Old Testament prophesies about it
2. The New Testament Church witnesses about it

All across the nation High School and College kids are celebrating the end of an era—their graduations. It’s typically a bitter-sweet time for graduates. Sure they are happy to be done with school (unless going to college or grad school) and they are excited to be moving on to a new chapter in their lives. But they also realize that they won’t be seeing their friends and family as often, and things are going to be different. Perhaps they will be moving away from home and be forced to find a real job and stop mooching off of their parents.

Ascension was kind also the end of an era for the disciples. And one would think that was a bitter-sweet time for them as well. But it really wasn’t. By the time Jesus ascended into heaven, 40 days after his resurrection, his disciples understood why he was going away. Jesus ascension is the culmination of his life on earth. And before he left Jesus pointed out to his disciples that that Old Testament prophesied about it so the New Testament Church could witness about it.

Before Christ left this earth, he gave his disciples a run-down on his life. He wanted to point out to them how everything happened as planned. Just as the Old Testament said it would happen. **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.** Christ came to fulfill what the Old Testament prophesied concerning him. And many of these prophecies were made hundreds and thousands of years before Jesus lived. Certainly Jesus’ birth was prophesied and fulfilled. And here Jesus mentions his life, death, and resurrection. **This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.** During his life on earth, Jesus suffered. He suffered just like you and I do. He lived in this sin-filled world, where he was rejected and laughed at. He was hungry, tired, hurt by others, and so on. Of course Jesus suffered especially during his passion. He was beaten, flogged, mocked, crowned with thorns. He was betrayed and denied. Finally on Good Friday he gave up his life and died. Isaiah was one of the many prophets who prophesied about Christ’s suffering. **Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.** But three days after he died, Jesus rose from the dead. In Genesis 3:15, Moses wrote down the first Messianic Prophecy—a prophecy about Christ crushing Satan through his resurrection. **I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.**

So here was Jesus, pointing out to the disciples how the Old Testament prophesied about him and his life. And he fulfilled all of those prophecies. From his birth, life, death, and resurrection—they were all fulfilled. There really was no doubt that they would be fulfilled. For God gave them. And Jesus fulfilled them.

And yet, we have the tendency to doubt from time to time. We wonder if it all really happened. Or if it is all some elaborate fable. Did Jesus really exist? Did he really die and rise again from the dead. The devil tries the same tactic on us that he used on Adam and Eve. Did God really say? God didn’t really say that, and if he did than that’s not what he meant. He wants us to believe that those Messianic prophecies weren’t written until after the fact. Or they

really aren't talking about Christ, but have a different fulfillment. And doubt creeps into our minds as we wonder what the truth is.

But then we read the Scriptures and we see all the numerous Messianic prophecies. We see Jesus point out again and again how he fulfilled each and every one of those prophecies. Today we see another prophecy fulfilled—the culmination of Jesus' earthly life. His ascension into heaven. From David in Psalm 68, **When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious— that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.** Jesus fulfilled yet another Old Testament prophecy. It was 40 days after Jesus rose from the dead. He stood on a mountain outside of Bethany—five miles from Jerusalem. He lifted up his hands, showing them the marks of love left by the nails from when he was crucified. As he was blessing them he began to ascend. And he was taken up to heaven by a cloud.

Christ fulfilled yet another prophecy. If Christ fulfilled this prophecy and all the other prophecies about his life, you can rest assured that he fulfills all of his prophecies. God's word is true. It contains no lie. When he promises something it will come true, and there is no reason to doubt. We know that Christ is watching over us from his heavenly throne and is always with us. We can be assured that our sins are truly forgiven and that we will live in heaven forever.

Because Christ keeps his Word which he showed by fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies, we as New Testament believers serve as witnesses to the truth.

After all that is the only way someone is going to be brought to faith. They need to hear the gospel. This is what Paul points out. **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?** We must tell others about Christ if we want them to ever believe in Christ. And if they have their doubts point them to the gospel of Christ. It is the same thing that has removed your doubts. For the Holy Spirit brings people to faith and strengthens that faith only through the gospel. Before Jesus ascended into heaven he promised his disciples to send them the Holy Spirit. This was fulfilled 10 days later on Pentecost as

he opened up the Scriptures to them. He does the same for us through the gospel in Word and Sacrament.

That is why Jesus has called on us to be witnesses of his life. After he told them how he fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies about his life, death, and resurrection he told them, **You are witnesses of these things.** And from that time on, Christians have been witnesses of Christ. Jesus said the Old Testament prophesied that **repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.** This fulfills what David says in Psalm 22, **All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him.** We are witnesses of this fulfillment. And as witnesses, it is our duty to make sure it stays this way. We may not be eye-witnesses of Christ. But the eye-witnesses wrote about him as they were carried inspired by the Holy Spirit. And their report is all we need. Christ truly did live, die, and rise for us. And now he is heaven ruling over all things. And it is our job to bear witness to this.

But we often don't bear witness. At times our lives fail to show witness to our faith. When we fail to follow God's will those around us take notice. They realize that you are not serious about your faith. Why would they ever want to be a Christian, when the Christians they know don't seem to care about Christ and his Word. And through our actions, our witnessing is hindered. Sometimes we fail to be witnesses through our words. Or lack of words. We see someone hurting and in need of comfort. But we fail to show them their Ascended Savior. We don't give them the comfort of the message of Christ and the eternal life he won for us.

Perhaps we just don't care about sharing our faith. Faith is a personal thing. And you don't like sharing your personal beliefs with others. Or perhaps your excuse is that you don't want to get involved with the personal life of someone else. Maybe you just don't see what the big deal is about Christ's Ascension. That he died and rose again is the big deal. But his ascension isn't all that important. If it were so important, you'd think more people would be here tonight. That the world would be put on hold for awhile like it does to celebrate Christmas. So why tell people about Christ's ascension if it's not that big of a deal?

Well, because it is a big deal. Christ's ascension proves who he is. He is not just a mere man—but he is our God and Savior. He is the ever living Lord—the Almighty and merciful God in heaven. Jesus is God and as God he has ultimate power. And when he ascended into heaven he took his spot at the right hand of God. And there he lives and rules over all things. He is always watching over us and protecting us. He makes sure that no real harm will ever come to us. And we long for our ascended Lord to come again. And take us to live with him in heaven forever.

So we give witness to this fact through our lives and our words. And the result is that people will be brought to faith. And they will join in worshiping their ascended Lord. That is exactly what the disciples did when after Jesus' ascended into heaven. **Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.** The Disciples weren't sad because Jesus left them. They knew he was still watching over them from his heavenly throne. So like the disciples we worship living God everyday through our words and actions. And we eagerly wait for our ascended Savior to appear once again.

You would think that Christ ascending into heaven—leaving his disciples for good would be a bitter-sweet moment for the Disciples. But we don't see the bitter at all, only the sweet. For they knew that Jesus was their Savior and God. He fulfilled all the prophecies about him. So they worshiped him with great joy, shared the message and eagerly waited till they saw him again in heaven. Amen.