

Beloved people of God,

This morning we remember that forty days after Easter, the Lord Jesus ascended to be seated at the right hand of his heavenly Father. In Acts 1:9 we read, "After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight." Generally, when non-Christians and perhaps even Christians think about the Ascension, they do so purely from their own, often, selfish perspective. A non-Christian's reasoning goes something like this. "If this Jesus could heal diseases, raise people from the dead, and even rose from the dead himself, then why didn't he not stay indefinitely?"

He could have been a "super man" for us. He could calm the storms; heal our diseases; bring our loved ones back to life, cast out demons; bring peace to the ME, Iraq, northern Syria and and stop the terrorists. He could fix our broken relationships. He could tell us how he made the universe and a hundred others things he could do for us.

Interestingly, Christians also reflect on the ascension from their position. For instance, they will reason in the following manner. First, "Isn't it great we have someone who is pleading and interceding for us on our behalf in heaven already." True! Rom 8:34 reminds us, "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." 1 John 2:1 reminds us, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

Second, "We have our own flesh in heaven, a guarantee that Christ will also take us, his members to himself" True again! We read it in John 14:2-3; "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

Jn 17:24; "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

Third, "If Jesus had not ascended, where would he live? In America? Israel? Australia perhaps? Thankfully he has ascended and now his Holy Spirit is with us as he promised." True again! Jn 14:16; "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever"

This morning I wish to look at why God the Father exalted His Son after his ascension. That's what it says in Phil 2:9-11; "Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

So two questions, "Why did the Father exalt His Son?" And, "How do we join the ascended Saviour in glory?" I like to answer by looking at John 14:1-6; in light of our Philippian 2:5-11 reading. There are the things that Jesus referred to in John 14:1-4; which the disciples and many people today simply do not fully understand. We read in Jn 14:1 that the disciples were troubled. Jesus had told them earlier in Ch 13:33; that He was leaving them and that where He was going they could not come.

The disciples are troubled because in a sense Jesus was their security blanket. They also ran to Jesus to calm the storms and heal their sick and to raise the dead. Peter even boldly suggests to Jesus that he can follow, even willing to lay down his life for Jesus, only to be told that he cannot and that he will deny the Saviour 3 times before the rooster crows that very evening [v37-38]! The disciples did not understand that before Jesus could ascend to the Father and be exalted, that his condescension and ultimate humiliation on the cross, his death and burial still needed to take place and only He could do that, and many people today do not realize that either.

Humanly speaking, that process of Jesus' exaltation had begun some thirty years earlier. God the Father exalted his Son because Jesus was the One who, although God in every way had become a man. Jesus didn't consider equality with God something to grasp. He was willing to make himself nothing, and to dwell amongst sinners! We sometimes speak about how the mighty fall. Politicians and television and sporting stars. But we cannot say that about Christ.

He didn't fall, He wasn't given a push. Rather, He willingly stepped down to be perfectly obedient to the Father, and because of their great love for us! It's something sinful man would never dream about. On the contrary, we are so much

like the first Adam, we want power, we want to be God. The disciples had the same difficulty. The foot washing incident shows that clearly in John Ch 13:1-17. Jesus on the other hand emptied himself of those attributes that only belonged to God almighty, so that He could be human. Just like us in every way, yet without sin. He was perfectly obedient, even to death on a cross. "Therefore" it says in Phil 2:9, our heavenly Father exalted him to the highest place! It is Jesus' death and his completed work of salvation that is so central to the ascension and exaltation of our Saviour. That's why the Father exalted him.

Now of course that is where we want to be, in glory with our Saviour. We want Jesus to take us to be with Him forever in glory as he promised his disciples in John 14:1-4. So how do we get where Jesus has been exalted? For us to be with the ascended Jesus in glory we need to trust and believe in Him and his completed work of salvation! That is what Jesus told his eleven remaining disciples. "Do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in God, trust also in me!" [imperatives].

How ironic – our loving Saviour, that even though Jesus himself is troubled in heart and spirit as Jesus says in 13:21, he takes time to encourage His disciples. It is the Saviour, even though the shadow of the cross looms on the horizon, who gives the comfort and instruction to his disciples. You would think it would have been appropriate for Jesus' followers to stop thinking about themselves for a moment and perhaps give some support and encouragement to Jesus.

The answer to troubled hearts is given by the Lord. "Trust in God, trust also in me." This reading links the Lord Jesus with the Father in heaven. Jesus invariably speaks the words of God, as Ch 5:19ff states, therefore he should also be trusted. It is without doubt that the disciples trusted in God. God's faithfulness throughout the ages was written on every page of Scripture. Now says, Jesus, trust also in me!

Jesus is the pinnacle of God's trustworthiness. If God could be trusted, then you had better believe Jesus is not going to leave things half undone now. And to trust and believe in the Lord Jesus congregation is more than just trusting about Him. The Greek text uses the word 'into' rather than just 'in.' It has this idea of embracing and making Him your own. Far too many people believe about God, perhaps even about Jesus, but they do not trust and believe 'into' him. Trusting 'into' Jesus is more than an intellectual knowledge, but a true heart acceptance.

Trust also in me! Believe and trust what I am going to do for you! Jesus is going to his Father's house where there are many rooms, and he is going there to prepare a place for them and us. When Jesus says that there are many rooms in my Father's house he means exactly that. He is not describing how lavish they are, but rather that there is ample room for all Jesus' followers to join him in his Father's home.

There is ample room for all who believe and trust in Him as Saviour, including you and me! And with respect, many Christians have a wrong understanding of these verses sometimes. Sometimes we have this picture of Jesus hammering away in heaven, placing another chandelier in the hall way, finishing the patterned skirting board, the marble floor, for nothing but the best will do. And once he has finished another room, he calls up another one of his children.

Allow me to suggest another understanding. Sure, Jesus is going to prepare a place for them. However, the words "I am going there to prepare a place for you," presuppose that the rooms are already there. In the context of John's theology, it is Jesus 'going' itself, via the cross, his death, his burial and his resurrection that prepares the place for Jesus disciples. We need to remember that John 14 is pre-cross. The text doesn't allow us to just jump from John 14 to heaven.

It may be appropriate to quote the words, "do not let your hearts be troubled" at Christian funerals, but first, these words are to be applied in a way that they will help us understand that we need to trust in the work of the Saviour on the cross and beyond. Because it is that awful cross that comes between John 14 and Phil 2! Before we can claim comfort from John 14 and going to heaven the cross needs to be dealt with. And it is only when we trust in that completed work of Jesus on the cross that we can go from here to the dwelling place of our Father in heaven and where our exalted Saviour is.

Far too many people think they can get to heaven without even believing a word about the cross and what Jesus has done. Far too often we hear people talked into heaven at funeral services without Jesus or his work on the cross even being mentioned. But without the cross, Jesus' work would be undone and then the Father would not have exalted him. The Father's desire was that sinners be saved, and it was only possible by Jesus going to the cross and dying for sinners – and that is why the Father exalted him! That was the Father's plan of redemption. That is why the heavenly Father will cause all knees to bow and all tongues to confess that Jesus is Lord to his glory!

In John 14:3, Jesus tells his disciples that He is 'coming back' and taking them to be where He is. In this context the primary reference is to Jesus' second coming at the end of the age. That final day, when all those who trust in him for their salvation, will be taken by him to be with him forever. The Scriptures tell us that He will come back on the clouds in triumph [1 Thess 4:17ff cf Acts 1].

But how do we know we will be with him in glory? How can we know that we will gladly bow the knee and confess him as Lord and King and not with great fear and trembling? Jesus gives the answer in v4. "You know the way to the place where I am going." Sadly, the disciples were taught by the Lord Jesus for three years and still did not understand the way to the Father. Thomas said to him, "Lord we don't know where you are going, how can we know the way?" (v5). Well, the disciples probably did know the way, but they needed to be reminded.

In v6 Jesus becomes very specific "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me!" Peter thought he could do it by works. He even foolishly said he would lay down his life, but then when the rubber hit the road he denied the Saviour three times. Many people are still going down that dead end road of works and they too will fail. The answer to how we get to our ascended, exalted Saviour is to trust in him! To trust in his 'going' to the cross and beyond.

And if we trust that brothers and sisters, then there is no reason to be troubled in heart. Then we can already enjoy a peace that passes all understanding. We can already be assured, that we will be raised with him and glorified and exalted with him! Our heavenly Father exalted the ascended Christ because he gave his life for sinners! Our exaltation is dependant on us purely trusting in the Saviour's work. It is my prayer that no one here is taking comfort in John 14:1-6, without trusting in the completed work of Christ on the cross.

Today, we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Why is it that we celebrate about this Supper? The completed work of Jesus Christ.

That includes his death and resurrection from the dead for our forgiveness and justification which is the key to our exaltation to be with the Saviour in glory! As we feel and taste the bread and wine we remember what Jesus has done, and we will keep doing it until he comes to take us into glory. That is also why this sacrament is only for true believers. If you only believe in God and don't want to know about Jesus, please don't come to the supper.

It's meaningless for you to come. More than that, you would be eating and drinking judgment on ourselves and that is the last thing we would want. Rather, trust in God! Trust also in Jesus! You Do? Praise God that through his Holy Spirit he has brought you to that point. Come to the table and rejoice at your salvation, now and forever more! That is what gives God the glory! Amen.